TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

An Evaluation of the Impact of Assessment and Audit on the Quality of Teaching and Learning in the Scottish Universities

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ABSTRACT

During the 1990s, expansion of the higher education sector was accompanied by increasing government interest in the issues of quality and standards in learning and teaching. The establishment of the Funding Councils in the UK led to the systematic assessment of quality in teaching, and in research, and to the linking of funding, based on these assessment outcomes. The Teaching Quality Assessments (TQA) were intended to be mission-sensitive, however, from the first rounds, it became apparent that the outcomes were following an historic pattern, with the established universities achieving greater success than their newer counterparts.

This study explores the concepts of quality, and quality assurance of learning and teaching, in higher education. Utilising data from interviews with senior personnel in the thirteen Scottish universities, we explore the perceived impact of the Teaching Quality Assessments, over the period 1993 to 1998, and the extent to which these may have resulted in quality enhancement.

We analyse the factors, which may have influenced the TQA results in Scotland, and find a strong relationship between age of institution and research reputation, as measured by the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), on the achievement of high scores in the TQA exercise. Additional factors, found to be influential on the outcomes of TQA, were the entry qualifications of students and the amounts which institutions spent on library resources. The relationship between TQA and RAE results, when disaggregated into individual cognate areas, nonetheless showed considerable variation, suggesting that, in some academic disciplines, high TQA scores did not depend on high RAE scores.

From our interviews, we find that the demands of the RAE are perceived to have had a negative impact on the value in which teaching, as a key activity in higher education, is held. The differential levels of reward, both institutionally and individually, appear to be a major factor in creating tensions between these two

activities, with research activity being perceived as the key determinant in academic promotions.

We argue that the Teaching Quality Assessment exercise has failed to have the impact which the Funding Councils had hoped, in bringing about enhancement of quality in teaching and learning. Instead, this approach may have encouraged conformity and compliance, rather than innovation and development. For higher education institutions, seeking real quality enhancement, we propose that a Total Quality Management (TQM) approach has much to offer.

TQM relies on the creation of a culture of quality, to which every member of staff is committed. It is a culture in which innovation and development are encouraged and is an approach which sits well in a collegiate environment, such as that found in a higher education institution.

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GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

BSI	British Standards Institute
CNAA	Council for National Academic Awards
HE	Higher Education
HEFC	Higher Education Funding Councils
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Council
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
IiP	Investors in People
ILT	Institute of Learning and Teaching
PI	Performance Indicator
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
RAE	Research Assessment Exercise
SHEFC	Scottish Higher Education Funding Council
TQA	Teaching Quality Assessment
TQM	Total Quality Management
UFC	University Funding Council
UGC	University Grants Committee

CHAPTER ONE : INTRODUCTION

During the 1990s, as the higher education sector in the UK continued to expand, institutions came under increasing competitive pressures. New universities had been created; new programmes of study developed; and access widened to include previously disadvantaged sections of the population. These changes were accompanied by explicit demands from the Government for clear mechanisms of quality assessment, robust quality control procedures and the encouragement of continuing quality enhancement.

This raised questions of how quality can be instilled within an organisation as a whole? How can an organisation instil a corporate desire to be the best; to offer the highest quality standards and to seek continuous improvement? In 1990, while taking a group of students on a visit to a computer manufacturer's plant, I had my first exposure to the concept of Total Quality Management (TQM). Each workstation in the factory displayed a notice which asked 'who is my customer?' The answer was always the next person, or workstation, to benefit from the activity being carried out in that particular part of the process. The question was apparently simple but the philosophy behind it - that in order to survive in an increasingly competitive marketplace, everyone in the organisation had an equally important part to play - was fairly radical. It required a change in corporate culture and individual attitudes.

This thesis is about how quality has, and can be, conceptualised in a higher education context; what measures have been taken to assess and enhance quality; what problems have been encountered in this context; and the approaches which might be taken in the future. We argue that higher education institutions can learn from industrial and commercial organisations. By adapting aspects of the TQM philosophy to fit their own needs, higher education institutions will be better able to manage the process of quality within their institutions, and maintain and enhance the sense of collegiality, which has historically been a major feature of this sector.

Until 1992, higher education was provided by a range of institutions, including universities, polytechnics, so-called 'central institutions' and further education colleges. Those polytechnics and central institutions, which offered degree-level programmes, did not have full autonomy when it came to awarding degree qualifications. Quality was carefully scrutinised and controlled by the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA). Strict guidelines existed for the validation of new programmes and the periodic monitoring and review of existing ones. Both of these exercises required considerable self-assessment by the individuals and departments concerned and the provision of comprehensive supporting documentary evidence. All of this evidence was then subject to rigorous internal, and external, scrutiny before agreement to commence or continue a programme might be reached.

This was a model based on the principles of quality control, where only the final outputs of a process are examined and those not up to standard rejected. It did not encourage quality enhancement and was far removed from the ethos of continuous quality improvement that TQM calls for. The existing university sector, on the other hand, had considerable autonomy when it came to programme validation and review. Although subject to periodic institutional peer review, the notion of academic freedom was held in high regard, supported by the presumption that a high calibre staff would produce high quality programmes. External verification of quality was provided via the system of external examining, whereby academic experts in the subject, from other universities, would scrutinise examination papers and examples of students' work, in order to ensure that standards were set at an appropriate level, according to their own experience in the field. Again, this model depended on the scrutiny of outputs and did not concern itself with process, or enhancement.

The Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act of 1992 brought about the abolition of the formal division, known as the 'binary line', between universities and central institutions, or polytechnics. This led the way to the creation of five 'new' universities in Scotland – Abertay Dundee, Glasgow Caledonian, Napier, Paisley and Robert Gordon - bringing the total number of Scottish universities to thirteen. An expansion in the number of higher education places followed, in

line with the Government's plan to see the percentage of school leavers, progressing from school to tertiary level education, rise to almost 1 in 3. This meant that university education ceased to be solely the privilege of an elite minority. With the rise of mass higher education, increasing student numbers and a widening of the market of potential students, came a consequent desire to ensure that standards of teaching and learning did not fall below certain thresholds. New 'buzzwords' began to enter the academic vocabulary. Many of the new concepts had previously been found only in industrial and commercial sectors. However, by the early 1990s, quality control, audit, assessment and enhancement had become key concepts in a new academic debate on higher education (Frazer 1992; Morris 1995).

Within this context, a number of writers examined the applicability of business management practices, including badges of achievement such as Total Quality Management, the British and International Standards - BS5750 and ISO9000, and Investors in People to higher education (Storey and Doherty 1993; Lewis and Smith 1994; Green 1995). Indeed a number of these measures were adopted by Scottish higher education institutions (see Chapter 7). However the implementation of quality-oriented business management practices was not without difficulty (Pollock and Sutcliffe 1992), with a number of writers stating their *a priori* objections to the adoption of market-led approaches in the higher education sector (Sayed 1993). Proponents of these systems of assessment and audit, however, welcomed the opportunity the new focus on quality in higher education provision created. In part, this was driven by a belief that such measures would help in reasserting the role of teaching as one of the most valuable, and valued, activities within a university.

The 1992 Act established a non-governmental agency, the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC), as a channel for the assessment of both teaching and research quality, with the authority to allocate funding to Scotland's higher education institutions (HEIs). Similar bodies were created in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. This institutional link between the quality assessment and funding functions of these bodies underscored the importance of quality assurance and enhancement in HE.

While the style of Teaching Quality Assessments (TQAs) varied between the UK Funding Councils, they encompassed common elements of institutional or departmental self-assessment, the production of a self-assessment document and a visit by a team of academic peers. In Scotland, assessments were organised by 'cognate area', which meant that all teaching provision within a subject discipline, like mathematics or sociology, in all Higher Education Institutions, was examined within a short time period and a report on overall provision in that cognate area produced by the assessors. The majority of the assessors were nominated by the Scottish higher education institutions themselves, however SHEFC also included a significant proportion - 23% in session 1995-96 - from institutions outside of Scotland, in order to bring a degree of independence into the process (SHEFC 1997).

Self-assessment required institutions to examine the quality of their current teaching provision, and the means by which they monitored that quality, and to produce a document based on their own evaluation of that provision. A subsequent external quality assessment visit was then carried out, by academic and industrial practitioners, and the final published reports highlighted the strengths, and weaknesses, of teaching and learning, in each cognate area.

In parallel to this, the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) quality audits, while primarily focusing on institutional systems and procedures for quality assurance, also touched on their application to the areas of teaching and learning (HEQC 1994b). Some Scottish HE institutions responded to these audits and assessments with a variety of measures aimed at addressing problems relating to their teaching and learning provision. Some HEIs made changes to their internal quality assurance procedures, and in some cases, established committees and departments, dedicated to the enhancement of teaching and learning quality.

At a departmental level, academic staff were being encouraged to monitor student assessment performance, in terms of mean marks, standard deviations and failure rates, and take cognisance of student evaluation questionnaire results on teaching performance. Attendance at workshops on teaching and learning, and continuing staff development in this area, was being encouraged and, in

some cases, being considered as mandatory for all staff with a teaching commitment.

In analysing these events, the question arises as to how much of these changes were as a *direct* result of the SHEFC Teaching Quality Assessments and HEQC Quality Audits. From a public policy standpoint, it is also important to examine to what degree government initiatives encouraged the adoption of existing working practices in other 'businesses', such as the application of the principles of Total Quality Management. Equally, if these initiatives had beneficial effects, it is important to know whether these were short-term responses to the formal audit and assessment process and whether they will survive, and further develop, in the longer term.

This thesis discusses the issue of appropriate quality management, in the Scottish universities, through an examination of the impact of the Teaching Quality Assessments, during the period 1993 to 1998. The thesis is developed over eight chapters. In Chapter Two, we outline the scope of this study, and the research methodology employed, in greater detail. We discuss the factors which influenced the choice of higher education institution to be included, and the reasons for excluding others. We describe our selection of certain research approaches, such as the reasons for choosing to gather data by means of interviews with individuals from an elite group, and the utilisation of a semi-structured format, with open-ended questions. We further discuss our use of quantitative analyses in the context of the outcomes of Teaching Quality Assessment, the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and other published indicators of quality, and our assumption of a compatibility and cross-fertilisation between qualitative and quantitative approaches.

In Chapter Three, we address conceptual issues relating to quality, assessment and control. We explore various definitions of quality and examine the possibility of measurement via performance indicators (PIs). We also examine the definitions of quality audit, assessment and control, utilised by the Government agencies, HEQC and SHEFC, and discuss the extent to which the various audits and assessments of quality, both in teaching and research,

represent the Government's intention to exercise greater control over the higher education sector, which may not necessarily be compatible with traditional concepts of academic freedom. This leads us to address issues of transparency, accountability and autonomy in the context of quality initiatives. We note that PIs are often utilised in a simplistic fashion to make inter-institutional comparisons and that the funding councils' aim of creating quality assurance procedures, which would be mission-sensitive, has not been achieved.

In Chapter Four, we examine some of the changes, which took place in the Scottish higher education sector following the introduction of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act of 1992. We further explore the remits of the HEQC and SHEFC with regard to quality audit and assessment, and examine the process by which these initiatives were carried out. HEQC and SHEFC's own reports stress the effectiveness of audit and assessment, based on experience across a number of institutions. Yet, questions must be raised as to the factors which may have influenced Teaching Quality Assessment scores in Scotland. The apparent link between high TQA and RAE scores leads us to a statistical analysis, which examines the relationship between TQA and RAE ratings for different cognate areas. We also examine other factors which may have an influence on the TQA score, such as student entry pointage, staff-student ratios and the amount spent on library resources. This analysis highlights strong correlations between institutional scores for research and teaching quality, with student entry pointage and library spend also being influential factors on TQA scores. When disaggregated down to individual cognate areas, however, much more variation was found in the relationship between teaching and research ratings. This leads us to question the values, which the assessors bring to the process of quality assessment, and the extent to which the TQA mechanism can be seen as objective and value-free.

In Chapter Five, we utilise elite interview data to explore the impact of TQA on the Scottish universities. In this context, we address three key issues. Firstly, we examine the ways in which the institutions manage quality in teaching and learning, and the TQA process in particular. We explore committee structures, loci of responsibility and dissemination of good practice. Secondly, we examine

the extent to which TQA reports have influenced the staff development policy within institutions, as evidenced by the creation of specialist educational development units, the review of learning and teaching activity as part of staff appraisal or the consideration of Investors in People accreditation. Finally, we explore the extent to which learning and teaching staff development has been encouraged through induction programmes, continuing professional development or the award of postgraduate qualifications. We note that the TQA reports were not considered to have influenced staff development policy, nor to have led to widespread dissemination of good practice within the Scottish universities. However, there was a perceived benefit for those who had taken part in the TQAs, as assessors, and dissemination on a more limited basis was acknowledged as having resulted from such participation in the process.

In Chapter Six, we discuss whether the TQAs have been successful in raising the profile of learning and teaching as an activity within higher education institutions. Relying again on elite interview data, we explore the extent to which teaching, as compared to research, is perceived as a valued activity, and examine which forms of rewards and recognition - both individually and institutionally - are available for excellence in these areas. We note the difficulties inherent in an evaluation of teaching quality, which may be seen as largely subjective, compared to the 'harder', more quantitative-based evaluation of research output and funding, as well as the tentative nature of any link between excellence in research, and excellence in teaching. In this respect, we acknowledge a widely held view that the rewards available for excellence in research are much greater than those for excellence in teaching and that this has, as a result, created tensions within the Scottish HE sector.

Looking at alternative approaches to quality management in higher education, Chapter Seven examines the philosophy of Total Quality Management and explores the implementation of TQM in a higher education context. We start with a discussion of the work of leading quality 'gurus' and consider the pre-requisites for successful implementation of TQM in universities, in particular the need to clearly identify 'customers' and objectives. Again, utilising elite interview data, we examine the extent to which the TQM approach, and/or the

more standardised approach of BS5750/ISO9000, have been implemented in the Scottish universities, with particular regard to teaching and learning activities. We note that the language of quality management may have created barriers to the successful implementation of TQM strategies, and highlight some serious misunderstandings of the concept, which appear to exist among senior HE personnel.

In Chapter Eight, we consider the changes which have taken place in the higher education sector over the past decade, and the challenges these have posed to higher education managers and academic staff. This is followed by an exploration of three conditions for successful implementation of a TQM approach to quality management, namely management leadership, workforce commitment and culture change.

Finally, in Chapter Nine, we draw conclusions from our review of the experience of the Teaching Quality Assessments in Scotland, over the period 1993 to 1998, and draw lessons for the future. We examine the current proposals for reform of the teaching quality assessment process, created by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), with a view to exploring the key differences between the old and the new approaches. We conclude that the implementation of Total Quality Management in higher education institutions may have been hampered by a misunderstanding of the basic principles, and confusion with the more standards-oriented approaches, which encourage compliance rather than enhancement of quality.

While the establishment of the Institute for Learning and Teaching may go some way to raising the profile of teaching, and the increasing adoption of Investors in People may indicate more serious attention being given to the issue of staff development, new quality assurance initiatives, such as *benchmarking*, indicate a further move away from a TQM approach to one which is based on 'standards'. Such an approach is likely to perpetuate the gulf in teaching quality assessments between the old and the new universities, as the latter struggle to meet quality standards in individual subject areas, which are not congruous with their institutional missions or course aims. The extent to which these new quality

assurance initiatives can stimulate an improvement in the quality of learning and teaching in the higher education sector remains in doubt.

CHAPTER TWO : SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

(a) Scope

This thesis focuses on the impact of the Teaching Quality Assessments on the process of managing quality in teaching and learning, during the period 1993 to 1998, and the perceived value given to teaching as an activity, compared to research, in the Scottish universities. While the literature on quality and quality assurance is drawn from throughout the United Kingdom, and further afield, our analysis relies heavily on elite interviews. These interviews were conducted in all thirteen Scottish universities and hence exclusively relate to the Scottish experience. The extent to which the results can be applied to other parts of the UK is for others to judge. However, independent studies can be found which support the findings, particularly as they relate to rewards and recognition of teaching (Court 1998).

Our focus on Scotland is justified on the basis of the unique nature of Scottish higher education, where students take four years to achieve an Honours degree, compared to three in England and Wales. Furthermore, the Teaching Quality Assessments, which were carried out by the funding councils on behalf of the Government, treated Scotland as a separate administrative unit and allowed some variation in the assessment mechanisms between Scotland and the rest of the UK. The remit of this analysis is, therefore, specifically limited to the experience and opinions of key personnel on the ways in which the TQAs impacted on the Scottish universities and whether alternative approaches to quality enhancement might meet with more success.

Scotland has a long tradition of higher education. With Oxford and Cambridge established as the first two universities in the UK, in 1096 and 1209 respectively, the universities of St Andrews, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Edinburgh were next to be created, in the 15th and 16th centuries (O'Leary and Cannon, 1995). These six remained the only universities in the UK for the next three hundred years and are usually referred to as the 'ancient' universities. Indeed, up until the turn of the century, with four universities, Scotland appeared to have a disproportionate

level of higher education provision, in relation to the size of its population, compared to the UK as a whole (Drennan, 1999a).

During the 1960s, four 'modern' universities were given their Royal Charters - Strathclyde, Heriot-Watt, Dundee and Stirling. All but Stirling had a much longer pedigree than these dates imply. Strathclyde could trace its roots back to 1796; Dundee to 1882, when it formed part of St Andrews University; and Heriot-Watt to 1921. These universities helped to cater for the expansion in demand for higher education in the 1960s and 1970s.

However, these were not the sole higher education institutions, with degree-awarding powers. Prior to 1992, the CNAA had granted several central institutions and polytechnics the right to award both undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications. Post 1992, however, not all such institutions were permitted by the Act to become 'universities'. With the formation of five 'new' universities from 1992 (referred to in this study as 'post-1992' institutions) the total number of universities in Scotland reached thirteen. The new universities included Glasgow Caledonian, formed out of a merger between Glasgow Polytechnic and Queen's College, Glasgow; Napier, formerly known as Napier Polytechnic; Paisley, formed from a merger between Paisley College and Craigie College of Education, in Ayr; Robert Gordon, formerly the Robert Gordon Institute, and Abertay Dundee, which was the last to gain its charter, in 1994, and was previously Dundee Institute of Technology.

ANCIENT	MODERN	POST-1992
Aberdeen (1495)	Dundee (1967)	Abertay Dundee (1994)
Edinburgh (1583)	Heriot-Watt (1966)	Glasgow Caledonian (1992)
Glasgow (1451)	Stirling (1967)	Napier (1992)
St Andrews (1411)	Strathclyde (1964)	Paisley (1992)
		Robert Gordon (1992)

Table 1 : Classification of Scottish Universities and Dates of Royal Charters

Although there are other higher education institutions in Scotland, which have degree awarding powers, and are subject to Teaching Quality Assessment, they tend to have a single disciplinary focus e.g. on teacher training, agriculture, textiles or art and design. By contrast, the thirteen institutions with the title *university*, each encompass a wide range of academic disciplines in arts and humanities, social sciences, business, science and technology, medical and health studies. Although the universities vary considerably in terms of size, as measured by student numbers, their similar multi-disciplinary bases allowed comparison of both TQA and RAE results across a broad range of subjects.

(b) Factors affecting choice of methodology

The methodology selected for any research project must be appropriate to the goals of the research. As this thesis utilises a number of different approaches, we intend to discuss these in some detail. At the preliminary stage, the aims and objectives of the research had to be clearly determined and the value in adopting one, or more, research methodologies had to be assessed (Cohen and Mannion, 1994). The first step, in developing a doctoral research proposal, involves a search of the existing literature. For this thesis, extensive use was made of the International ERIC database, which allowed searches of the literature to take place speedily, utilising appropriate key words such as 'quality assurance', 'quality management' and 'higher education'. Such a database is, however, only a limited tool that can point the researcher in the direction of resources, such as books and journal papers, which may warrant further investigation. Initial information on quality assurance and audit was also derived from official documents published by SHEFC and HEQC. These reports not only provided information on the processes of assessment and audit (SHEFC 1993, HEQC 1994a) but also on the manner in which these exercises had been carried out and the lessons which were being learned (SHEFC 1997, SHEFC 1998, HEQC 1994b).

An extensive literature exists in the area of quality in higher education. Most of these contributions were published during the 1990s, when the concepts and practice of quality assurance and quality management were beginning to gain prominence in the higher education sector. While academic journals such as the

Higher Education Review, *Higher Education Policy* and the *Higher Education Quarterly* contained many contributions to this debate, specialist journals such as *Quality Assurance in Education* and, to a lesser degree, *Quality in Higher Education*, also served as major references for this work. In addition, *The Times Higher Education Supplement* supplied up-to-date information on proposed changes to the quality assessment processes, as well as commentary by key writers on current issues.

Influential authors, in the area of quality in higher education include Diana Green and Lee Harvey, whose writing - both together and individually - has addressed the key issues of how we can define quality in higher education. The conflict between institutional autonomy, and Government control over what happens in HEIs, has been questioned by Lewis Elton, who has also commented on the impact of the TQAs and RAE on teaching quality. Ron Barnett, meanwhile, has tackled fundamental questions, such as the purpose of higher education and the value of performance indicators in judgements on quality. These, and other writers, contribute to a continuing debate on the nature of quality in higher education, and on how this might be assessed and improved. Because of the continuing nature of this debate, we have chosen not to create a separate review of the literature, within the thesis, but to integrate the authors' work, as appropriate, throughout.

While the literature search identified the principal contributions to the debate on the concept of quality in higher education and the nature of the assessment process, it became clear that few authors had examined the impact of the Government's TQA initiatives in practice. In particular, little had been written about the perceived impact of TQA on teaching quality and the value accorded to such activity. In order to address this, primary data collection was necessary. By gaining an understanding of the ways in which quality is conceptualised, and the influence that this has on quality management, and by evaluating past experiences of TQA, we seek to inform public policy by suggesting potential future avenues towards achievement of quality enhancement.

Before we made our choice of research methodology, it was necessary to gain sufficient understanding of the background and development of the debate, in order to consider what questions might remain unanswered (Saran, 1988). A prior analysis of secondary sources and archive material was undertaken, and the research questions were then framed. Research methodologies can be broadly divided into quantitative and qualitative approaches. In a quantitative approach, the researcher seeks to analyse data which is presented in a numerical form. A qualitative approach, on the other hand, is one which reflects thoughts and opinions. Moyser (1988) highlights an apparent dilemma between the attractions offered by a qualitatively rich array of personal insights into a particular problem, as might arise from some of the less structured methodologies, against the rigour and case comparability of more statistical methods. This thesis sought the opinions of key personnel in the Scottish universities, on a range of questions relating to quality management and quality enhancement. This search for personal, subjective views made a quantitative approach inappropriate. Hence, for the core of the thesis, a qualitative means of data collection was adopted.

Once the decision was taken for a qualitative approach, the method of data collection was a choice between self-administered questionnaires, or interviews. Cohen and Mannion (1994) argue that a questionnaire is advantageous in many research contexts. It is anonymous and therefore can encourage greater honesty of response. Moreover, questionnaires can be more economical in terms of time and money. By standardising the range of responses, questionnaires facilitate the comparison of views held by different individuals or across different groups. These basic comparisons, moreover, can be extended to the use of quantitative methods whereby interview responses are treated as quasi-numerical data of nominal or ordinal rank. In the context of policy analysis, questionnaire surveys present the preferred tool of investigation, where information is collected from a substantial number of subjects; where responses can be easily standardised; and where a comparison of group or sub-group responses is desired.

The standardisation, which underlies the drafting and, inevitably, the analysis of questionnaires is predicated on the researcher's knowledge of, and certainty about, the range of feasible responses. In other words, only where the researcher

believes that she can reasonably predict a range of useful responses, as well as a range of topics into which to enquire, can a questionnaire be confidently administered.

One response to the problem of providing a reasonably adequate prediction of responses is the inclusion of open-ended questions. Both the availability and utility of open-ended responses, however, is limited. Thus, if a questionnaire relies too heavily on open-ended questions, there is a possibility that the survey itself may collapse, in the sense that respondents are too free to interpret the questions posted and the answers sought. In such a case, a comparison of responses may become impossible, or alternatively may only be feasible in the context of 'less relevant' or 'less important' issues. If, by contrast, a survey places open-ended questions firmly within the context of structured questions, open-ended questions may elicit a limited response.

Where questionnaires are used to elicit information from a small group of elites or policy leaders, there exists a dual danger. Firstly, in dealing with individuals with highly developed and perhaps differing views, the standardisation implicit in the drafting of the questionnaire can make that group of individuals appear more homogeneous than it actually is. In other words, by probing for a predictable, limited range of responses, detailed and nuanced viewpoints may be overlooked, leading to an overly general or spurious interpretation of responses. Secondly, and more practically, in applying questionnaires to a small group of respondents, there is a very real danger that low response rates will greatly bias any findings. Thus, where the researcher has identified a relatively small and articulate group of subjects, the survey method may fail to provide adequate information where the percentage of questionnaire returns is low, where the form has been filled in hastily and without careful thought to the answers, and where questions are subject to non-conventional interpretations.

The principal purpose of an interview is to gather information on what an individual knows, likes or thinks. However, it can also be used to test hypotheses, or suggest new ones, and to go deeper into the motivations of respondents and their reasons for their responses (Cohen and Mannion, 1994).

The opportunity to go deeper into responses to questions is one of the main advantages of interviews, compared to questionnaires. As the scope of this study involved only one, or occasionally two, personnel in each of the thirteen Scottish universities, the decision was taken to gather the primary data by means of face-to-face interviews. The principal rationales for this choice of personal, face-to-face interviews included the size of the group of available interviewees, their in-depth knowledge of the subject area, and the need to probe that knowledge in a flexible and inter-active manner. In this context, interviewing offered a number of advantages. Walford (1994) suggests that interviewing is the preferred tool of analysis, where it is not possible or desirable to pose a set series of questions. This was very much the case in this research project, where the primary goal of interviewing was not so much to receive standard answers to set questions, but rather to elicit in-depth information about the opinions and viewpoints of the interviewees. Hence, what was of the greatest importance in these interviews, was to gain an understanding of processes and outcomes, from the perspective of the individuals interviewed, or in other words to enter their 'assumptive worlds' (McPherson and Raab, 1988). This meant that, while a semi-structured interview technique was applied, open-ended questions were used to follow leads and to introduce new questions.

In this context, the purpose of interviewing went beyond the immediate goal of eliciting information as data for the research project. Following Moyser (1988), our interviews served to identify patterns of day-to-day behaviour, which could not have been explored on the basis of written and publicised information. By conducting the interviews relatively early in the research process, some interview information additionally served to point to further avenues of research, notably as concerns the competing role of research assessment vis-à-vis teaching assessment.

The principle advantage of elite interviews, in the specific context of this research project, lay in the fact that interviews aided the identification of the real preferences and criteria, which guided decision-makers within higher education institutions, as compared to formal, officially-stated procedures. Thus, several respondents pointed out that, while university policy stated that teaching would

be rewarded through promotions, such promotions were typically based on a staff member's research output. This behaviour was in line with the observation by Fitz and Halpin (1994) that interviews with individuals actively engaged in the policy process often provide the only access to information not otherwise available.

The reliance on elite interviews, in general, as well as within this research project, is not without dangers. One of the disadvantages of in-depth interviews is that responses may be highly subjective and introduce elements of bias. However, bias is not confined to interview responses and can also be found in questionnaire returns, where its detection may be even more difficult. Fitz and Halpin (1994) have suggested that, when interviewing elites, there is a real danger that a researcher ends up reproducing the discourse of the powerful and uncritically accepts elite narratives as an authentic account of events and processes.

By relying on the narratives of senior staff, responsible for quality, our account of the impact of the TQA exercise on practices within higher education institutions, encountered some of the problems of accepting an elite version of events. As a result, there may have been a danger that the senior staff interviewed over-estimated the positive impact of the TQA. Likewise, there is the possibility that more junior staff members might have given a somewhat different account of the events. None of these possibilities devalues the research conducted, as its principal focus was not on these events *per se*, but rather on the perception of these events amongst a specific elite group, responsible for policy making in the area of quality in higher education.

This means that, rather than presenting a close account of actual events, we must consider our interview data in terms of the specific position of individuals, who have been placed by their institutions in an interfacing position between government demands for quality and a specific institutional response. This position, in itself, does not attach a great deal of power to these individuals, but rather makes them influential subject experts within their institution, whose recommendations may or may not be followed by others.

The format and approach chosen for these interviews was therefore aimed at facilitating a dynamic dialogue with a group of professionals who maintain a certain level of influence without acting as principal decision-makers. Throughout the interviews, we attempted to elicit a critical understanding of the facts from these individuals. This meant that interviewees were actively encouraged to enter a critical and reflexive dialogue in which their own opinions were discussed independently from their account of policies and events in their own institutions.

Having decided on the interview, as the primary method of data collection, the next questions to be addressed related to the format of the interview itself. In particular, the extent to which the interview would be structured or unstructured. In a structured interview, the content of the questions and the procedures to be followed are decided in advance. The sequence and wording of the questions are determined by a schedule, which the interviewer has little freedom to change (Cohen and Mannion, 1994). In an unstructured interview, on the other hand, there is much greater flexibility and the interviewer can vary the sequence and wording of the questions. The problem with the former is that its rigidity denies the interviewer the opportunity to follow additional lines of questioning, or probe deeper into the respondent's answers. In the latter, non-directive approach, areas of questioning may be missed and analyses of interview data made more difficult. Between these two extremes, lies the semi-structured interview (Moyser, 1988), where a balance between ensuring that data is collected on key questions, and encouragement of the respondent to freely express personal opinion, is sought by the researcher.

Within each of these styles of interview, a range of question formats and response modes can be utilised. The researcher may be seeking objective responses, in which a description of some factual situation is required. Alternatively, the questions may call for subjective responses, in which an evaluation of the situation or event is sought (Saran, 1988). In our interviews, both objective and subjective responses were sought. Cohen and Mannion point to the difficulty all researchers face, in constructing interview questions and analysing responses, when they state that 'both fact and opinion questions can

yield less than the truth ... the former do not always produce factual answers, nor do the latter necessarily elicit honest opinions. In both instances, inaccuracy and bias may be minimised by careful structuring of the questions.' (Cohen and Mannion, 1994, p.278)

In addition to careful structuring of the questions, particular consideration was given to the response mode, in the context of the future analysis of the data. Response modes include *fixed alternative* items, where the respondent selects appropriately from 'yes', 'no' or 'don't know'; *scales*, in which degrees of agreement or disagreement with a statement are recorded; *ranking* of statements, from most important to least important; and *checklists*, where all applicable statements are ticked. These response modes lend themselves to quantitative methods of analysis and while some could be utilised in a face-to-face interview, they would present a highly structured framework to the respondent - one in which the free expression of opinion would be made more difficult. In an interview situation, therefore, the *open-ended* question is more commonly used, in which there is a frame of reference for the answer, but minimal restraint on its expression (Cohen and Mannion, 1994).

In an 'open-ended' question, the subject of the question is determined by the nature of the problem under investigation, but the exact wording of the question by the interviewer, and the manner in which the respondent replies, are unrestricted and open to choice by both parties to the interview. 'Open-ended' questions allow flexibility into the interview situation: deeper probing of answers; clarification of misunderstandings; testing of what the respondent truly believes, and the possibility that previously unthought-of relationships may be exposed (Cohen and Mannion, 1994). This was the format selected as being most appropriate in our interviews. Open-ended questions do, however, present more difficulty in converting the data into a form suitable for analysis (Moyser, 1988). Interview data can be coded and scored, either by pre-coding the questions on the interview schedule and assigning the responses to a code, or by post-coding, following the interview. An alternative method involves content analysis, where the rate at which certain words are used, may be calculated. In both of these examples, the aim is to produce qualitative data which can be

quantitatively analysed. With a relatively small sample, of thirteen universities, we were able to employ a more qualitative approach, in a similar style to that adopted by McPherson and Raab (1988) in their study of educational policy in schools.

McPherson and Raab did not seek to quantify aspects of their interview texts. The responses of sixteen individuals, who had been involved in the making of Scottish educational policy from the 1940s to the 1980s, were to form a major part of their book on *Governing Education*. Extensive use of the interview material was made, with relatively little supplementary writing (Raab, 1987), as the authors wished to highlight different viewpoints on the same situation and gain an insight into the values and beliefs of these key participants. The interview data was not used consecutively, but spliced and interwoven, in order that differences and similarities could be identified, and analytical commentary added, to provide further insight. McPherson and Raab's successful approach influenced the way in which we structured our interviews in this thesis. Notably, like McPherson and Raab, we focused on interview data from key personnel who, in this instance, were involved in quality matters, within the Scottish higher education sector.

Where interviews take an unstructured, or semi-structured, format with largely open-ended questions, consideration must be given to the most appropriate method of recording the responses. The choice lies between note-taking, either during or after the interview, or tape-recording and transcription. Tape-recording has the advantage that the interviewer is able to concentrate on the response, without the distraction of note-taking. This facilitates a more conversational atmosphere between the two parties, with good eye contact and natural responses, as well as the opportunity to introduce further questions (Wagstaffe and Moyser, 1987). However, Saran (1988) argues that tape-recording can actually be detrimental to the free flow of comments from a respondent - a statement which Saran supports with an account of the visible relaxing of one of his interviewees when he put his notebook away.

While it is possible that some respondents may be conscious, particularly in the early stages of an interview, that their comments are being tape-recorded, this can be overcome by the interviewer creating a good rapport and sense of trust between her and her respondent (Measor, 1988). If necessary, the tape-recorder can be switched off when comments are highly sensitive and not 'for the record'. On the other hand, a notebook and pen are constantly visible. In the act of writing down comments during an interview, eye contact is lost with the respondent and unnecessary pauses may ensue, as the interviewer tries to keep up with the flow of information being presented to her.

Nonetheless, Stake (1995) also dismisses the value of tape-recording, with the argument that this is of little value unless an audio presentation is intended. Stake believes that getting a note of the exact words of the respondent is unnecessary and that it is better to listen and gain understanding of the meaning behind those words. He advocates brief note-taking at the interview, followed by a later reconstruction of the account which can be submitted to the respondent for accuracy and improvement. This relies heavily on the memory of, and interpretation of, the respondent's comments by the interviewer, bringing serious questions of reliability into account. Furthermore, the exact words or ways in which something has been expressed, by an interviewee, can be highly significant and worthy of detailed consideration. This latter view was the one we adopted in deciding to use audio-tapes, rather than a notebook, to record our interviewees' responses.

Tape-recording an interview does, however, require that the contents of the tape are transcribed into written form, before analysis can take place. This is a time-consuming process, estimated at between ten and fifteen hours of transcription for every hour of tape (Wagstaffe and Moyser, 1987), and made more difficult if background noise interferes with the quality of the recording, or the respondent has a habit of mumbling or dropping the level of his voice. The interviewer herself may lack the necessary typing skills and pass the task to a skilled secretary to undertake. Such an action may result in a less accurate result, than if one carries out the transcription oneself, as memory can be called into play, when responses are unclear. The benefit can therefore be lost if the transcription is not

undertaken personally, and within a week or two of the interview being recorded (Moyser, 1988), as is the opportunity for the interviewer to think about the evidence and start to make some tentative analyses, as the tapes are listened to during transcription. Once transcribed, the written account can be sent to the interviewee for amendment, or clarification of words or sentences (Raab, 1987) before the final version is prepared and ready for analysis.

In the same way that choice of methodology is critical to the success of a research project, so too is the choice of subjects for interview. One of the aims of this study was to gather the opinions of key personnel in the thirteen Scottish universities, who had responsibility for quality issues, relating to teaching and learning. Such a group of individuals, with some common characteristics, can be described as an *elite*. Moyser and Wagstaffe (1987) point to the difficulty of defining elites. The definition can be so narrow that they are almost impossible to find, or so broad that there is virtually no analytical benefit to be gained. The word is, in fact, used to describe people at the top of any social grouping; people who have an influence within their sphere and who may be identified by the position they hold, their reputation or decision-making powers (Wagstaffe and Moyser, 1987). In a study of urban communities, Wagstaffe and Moyser (1987) identified a number of elite groups, some conventional and some unconventional. Within the conventional elite grouping, there was a shared belief in the value of openness and the benefit of academic investigation into the situation within their community. These elite were co-operative with the researchers, believing that the outcome of the research exercise would be objective and unbiased and that the findings would provide valuable input into future policy formulation. The subjects of the research interviews carried out for this thesis were similarly co-operative and helpful. The interviewees were members of an elite group who, being academics themselves, already had an understanding of the researcher's task and were willing to give time and assistance to the project.

The elite group need not be the primary object of a research project, i.e. the focus might not be on the behaviour or actions of the elite *per se*, but on its views or perceptions of an issue. Moyser and Wagstaffe (1987) describe this as the distinction between elites *qua* elites, and elites as experts or gate-keepers of

information. In the latter two instances, it is the quality of information or advice, or degree of access to other data, which is the primary concern of the researcher and not so much whether the individuals are 'elites' or not.

Selection of the elite group for this study came initially from the membership list of the Teaching and Learning Sub-Committee, of the COSHEP (Committee of Scottish Higher Education Principals) Staff Development Committee. Such individuals would have been nominated by their institutions to take part in the sub-committee and were therefore likely to have direct involvement in the management and/or development of teaching and learning quality. It was therefore a group of elites as experts, rather than as elites *per se*, whose opinions were being sought.

Having selected the elite grouping from which it is hoped that valuable insights will be gained into the subject matter of the research, issues of access and co-operation come to the fore. Advance approaches can be made by letter, outlining the researcher's background, the nature of the investigation and the areas which would be covered in the interview (Saran, 1988). Some sort of link name may be useful, in the initial introduction, followed by a phone call, to arrange an appointment (Wagstaffe and Moyser, 1987) and it is useful at this stage to seek permission to tape-record the interview, if that is the chosen method. At the interview itself, the respondent can be briefed again on the purpose of the interview and assent confirmed to tape recording the conversation (Cohen and Mannion, 1994). Non-verbal elements are important in any interaction between human beings. Looks, body posture, silences and dress are all significant in an interactional interview situation (Fontana and Frey, 1994). Fontana and Frey advocated that the researcher should try to fit in to the world of the individuals being studied. If they are professional people, then she should dress in a smart, if not business-like, way. The main purpose of this 'fitting in' is to make the interviewee feel more relaxed; to make the interviewee believe they are speaking to someone who comes from a similar background and who therefore understands their concerns and outlooks (Fontana and Frey, 1994).

Building up a sense of rapport and trust between the interviewer and the respondent is a necessary part of the interview process, as there is only a short period of time in which to elicit the type of open and honest replies which are being sought. Apart from the non-verbal elements of appearance, the researcher has to demonstrate that she understands the terminology, personalities and events which are important to this elite group (Moyser, 1988). This helps to build the necessary degree of seriousness and a sense that she understands the issues under investigation. Moyser (1988) also points to the practical and logistical issues which need to be addressed, such as the location in which the interviews will take place, how to operate the recording machinery and whether background noise will make transcription difficult. Careful management of these logistical issues, and the right approach to creating empathy between interviewer and respondent, will encourage members of the elite group to give full and frank answers.

It has been suggested that, throughout the interview itself, the interviewer should try to present herself as a sympathetic listener - a non-threatening academic observer (Moyser, 1988). Through good eye contact, nods of assent and murmurs of agreement, the interviewer encourages the respondent to express himself freely. At the same time, the interview process has to be carefully controlled. Often, in responding to one question, another will be answered and the interviewer needs to be flexible in order to ensure that the agenda is covered, without duplication or omission of elements. She has to keep an eye on the time and find a way to move naturally from one topic to the next, listening carefully to the answers, seeking clarification where necessary, and curbing verbose responses (Moyser, 1988). The interviewer has also to consider the extent to which a question might influence the respondent to show himself in a good light, or give the answer he believes the interviewer might wish to hear (Cohen and Mannion, 1994). Noting pauses, or body language, which might suggest hesitation or uncertainty before answering, can help to illuminate such answers. The spoken or written word are always at risk of ambiguity, no matter how carefully worded or recorded (Fontana and Frey, 1994). Questions may not be eliciting the answers which the interviewer might have expected, invalidating the results (Cohen and Mannion, 1994). Careful formulation of the questions and, if

necessary, a re-wording of certain items, following the initial interviews, can reduce such an effect.

Finally, consideration must be given to any ethical issues relating to the publication of interview material. If a free and frank exchange is to take place, interviewees may feel more comfortable if assured that material will not be directly attributable to them. Any guarantees of confidentiality need to be respected and restrictions put on the extent to which public access to the original transcripts will be allowed (Moyser, 1988). As the success of the interview is predicated on trust, between the interviewer and the respondent, with regard to what is said in the course of the interview and how this material is handled thereafter, high ethical standards must be maintained by the interviewer, and confidences kept.

With regard to this thesis, the initial contact was made by letter with members of the COSHEP Teaching and Learning Sub-Committee, explaining the focus of the study and outlining the intention to carry out interviews with appropriate personnel. The letter, which was printed on letterheaded paper from the writer's own institution, expressed the intention to contact the recipient by telephone within the following week to discuss the matter further. Where possible, we utilised past encounters with these individuals, at educational conferences or workshops, by way of introduction. A sample letter can be found in Appendix 1. During the subsequent telephone conversation, we attempted to ascertain whether the initial contact deemed themselves to be the appropriate person to answer questions on institutional policy with regard to quality in teaching and learning. In eight instances, we were referred to a more senior member of staff of the university.

Such referral proved to be important, since only five of the original contacts, although representing their institutions on the sub-committee, considered themselves to be sufficiently familiar with institutional policy on quality issues in learning and teaching to answer our questions. In one case, an interview was carried out but was followed up by an additional interview, with a more senior member of staff, whom the original interviewee considered to be more

knowledgeable with regard to certain aspects of the questions. In another instance, two individuals - the Director of Educational Development and the Head of Academic Staff Development - took part in the same interview. In the case of the eight 'referrals', there was the opportunity to use the original contact with the COSHEP sub-committee member, as a means of introduction to the subsequent interviewee.

Everyone who was contacted agreed to participate in the study and made freely of their time. An interview schedule was drawn up and interviews carried out over a ten month period, between April 1997 and February 1998, in visits to all but one of the institutions (see Appendix 2). One of the subjects found it more convenient to conduct the interview at our office. With Scotland being fairly small geographically, and with the majority of the universities being situated in the Central Belt, it was possible to travel and carry out interviews in the course of a day. Where the institutions were more than one hours' travel from Glasgow, such as in Dundee or Aberdeen, two institutions were covered in one day - one interview in the morning and one in the afternoon.

The fifteen persons, with whom we recorded fourteen interviews, occupied a variety of positions within their own universities. Five were members of senior management, with titles such as Assistant, Depute or Vice Principal. Six had wide remits for the management of quality assurance and quality enhancement in learning and teaching. As the specific job titles of these six individuals varied, and would more easily identify both them and their institutions, we utilise the generic title 'Director of Quality' in the edited transcripts, and for quotation purposes. The final four interviewees were primarily responsible for academic staff development. Two were Directors of Learning and Teaching / Educational Development and two were the Heads of Academic Staff Development units. Thirteen respondents were male, and two were female.

Each interview consisted of a number of semi-structured interview questions - normally around 20 - and lasted approximately one to one-and-a-half hours in duration. Five to ten minutes were spent in outlining the background to the study, seeking permission to tape record the conversation, and discussing how

the interview data would be used. The interviewees were assured that recorded material would not be attributed to individuals and that, to this extent, it would remain confidential. They were also advised that a full transcript would be sent to them and that any amendments, additions, or deletions they wished to make would be incorporated. In this way, the interviewee was reassured that s/he had control over the final version, which would be used in the analysis and commentary. The interviews all took place in university offices, with minimal distraction due to phone calls or interruptions, as the interviewees all had secretarial assistants to whom calls could be diverted, and by whom any unexpected visitors could be intercepted. The tape recorder was tested for sound level and placed near to the respondent, on a desk or table. In one instance, the recording machine was faulty and hand-written notes were taken. Although this produced answers to the interview questions, the material was much less substantial than the tape-recorded interviews and produced fewer direct quotations, which could be used for illustrative purposes.

The atmosphere in the interview sessions was fairly relaxed and comfortable. The respondents were experienced academics and professional managers. As the interviewer was herself a promoted member of academic staff, with considerable involvement in learning and teaching quality issues in her own institution, and presenting a professional appearance, the interview was conducted more as between colleagues, rather than between student and subject. As a result, the responses to the interview questions appeared to be honest and frank. Indeed, in some cases, more frank than we might initially have expected.

The interview questions were grouped around eight key areas :

- *whether the Teaching Quality Assessments were used to inform and enhance quality of teaching and learning in each institution*: how the TQA reports were used; how follow-up action was monitored; how good practice was disseminated; whether the reports informed staff development policy; whether there had been a wider impact on Scottish higher education;

- *where the responsibility for quality of teaching and learning lay, and what structures were in place to monitor such quality* : information on committees and senior management responsibility;
- *what staff development took place with regard to learning and teaching and the extent to which this was compulsory* : whether there was a separate educational development unit; induction programmes; continuing professional development; postgraduate qualifications;
- *how teaching quality at the delivery stage was monitored* : student evaluation questionnaires; peer review;
- *what rewards and recognition were given to excellence in teaching and learning, compared to excellence in research* : staff development and career review; promotion criteria; weighting given to research excellence;
- *what impact semesterisation and/or modularisation might have had* : whether academic year had changed since 1992; whether modularised;
- *whether management philosophies, such as TQM, had (or could) play a part in the drive towards quality enhancement of teaching and learning* : seeking opinions on the applicability of industrially-derived management practices; application of standards, such as BS5750/ISO9000;
- *whether other quality marks, such as Investors in People, had been considered or implemented, in relation to academic staff*: relevant to the staff development issue.

In addition, there was a final 'catch all' question that asked the respondents to highlight any other issue, which they considered significant in the context of the research focus, and which specifically invited them to comment on any differences which they perceived in the approaches of the old and the new universities, to the management and development of teaching and learning. A copy of the interview schedule can be found in Appendix 3.

The interviews therefore commenced with questions designed to elicit factual, descriptive answers and moved on to those which sought opinion and personal perspectives. In this way, trust was built up between the interviewer and interviewee in the early part of the dialogue, by means of questions based on the interviewee's knowledge - 'what was done'; 'by whom' and 'how'? These were questions which were straightforward to answer and non-threatening. As the

interview progressed, the questions became more searching of personal opinion - 'what impact do *you* think this had'; 'does this have a place' and 'why was this rejected'? Gaining trust, and creating a relaxed atmosphere, were essential to achieving the frank responses which we were seeking to our research questions.

Although each interview commenced with a brief introduction and the same first question - which asked how the TQA reports were used within the respondent's own institution - the order in which the subsequent questions were asked could vary, depending on the answers to previous questions. It became clear, from the early interviews, that the Research Assessment Exercise was perceived to have had a major impact on individual and institutional attitudes towards teaching and learning. As a result, the RAE and the tensions which were created between teaching and research activity became a major focus of the work. This focus was not in the original outline of the thesis, but was introduced as a result of the experience and insight which the elite interviewees brought to the subject, thereby influencing a new line of enquiry.

Transcripts from the tape-recorded interviews ranged from eight to fourteen pages, with single line spacing, and the one taken from handwritten notes was just over five pages in length. Each interview was transcribed by the writer, which although an extremely lengthy process, did allow the opportunity to listen to the answers several times over and to make sense of parts where the respondent's voice lowered or a word was unclear. The transcript was sent to the interviewee within 2 to 3 weeks with a covering letter, requesting that any corrections be noted. The letter stated that selected quotations would be utilised in the thesis and gave the interviewee the opportunity to identify any statement which they would not wish to see in the public domain. A sample of this letter can be found in Appendix 4. Nine of the transcripts were approved with no, or only minor, amendments suggested. Despite further requests, five of the interviewees did not return the draft transcript and therefore no amendments were made to these. Only one respondent chose to emphasise that nothing in the transcript should be capable of being directly attributable to him.

Once all the tape recordings of the interviews had been transcribed, and the interviewee given the opportunity to amend the transcript, the contents were analysed question by question. Due to the relatively small number of transcripts, it was possible to use word-processing software to 'cut and paste' all the responses to individual questions, even when the answers appeared as part of responses to other questions. Thus, all the responses could be read consecutively on a few pages. This helped to create a picture of areas of agreement, divergent views and patterns of response between similar types of institution, e.g. all the ancient universities, or all the post-1992. Where the questions sought objective, factual answers, for example on whether academic staff were required to undertake a postgraduate programme in learning and teaching, these were coded and presented as quantitative measures. Where the questions sought subjective responses, based on personal opinion, particular viewpoints were highlighted and quotations used as illustration throughout the thesis.

Although this thesis is primarily based on qualitative research methods, the issue of the Research Assessment Exercise and its impact on teaching and learning had an effect not only on the direction of the interview questions, but led to a more detailed, quantitative investigation of the RAE and TQA results, and the relationship between the two. In particular, we explored the strength of the relationship between the TQA results, averaged over a period of five years from 1993 to 1998, and the type of university, as classified by age grouping. This exploration was triggered by frequent interview responses which highlighted differences between those universities established before 1992, and those established after that date.

This led us to further explore quality indicators, such as RAE ratings, student entry pointage, staff-student ratio and library spend per full-time equivalent student, which might have been influential in achieving high TQA results for an institution. In these analyses, we regressed the mean TQA results for 1993-98 with the mean 1996 RAE scores for each institution. This model was refined by investigating eight individual subject areas, separately. The detailed analyses were undertaken utilising SPSS and Excel software and displayed graphically. The small size of the sample data, particularly in the analyses of the relationship

between TQA scores and RAE scores in individual subject areas, casts some doubt on the reliability of the results. Nonetheless, the extreme variations which were produced are interesting in themselves and therefore considered worthy of inclusion. We also regressed the mean TQA results with student entry pointage, staff-student ratios and library spend, averaged over a 5-year period. The results are discussed in Chapter 4.

The validity of the oral evidence given in the interviews is less easy to verify than that of the quantitative analysis. Internal university documents, and the reports produced for HEQC audit, perhaps could be used to verify factual statements on committee structures and loci of authority. However, institutions may have written policies on a number of quality issues, which are not fully implemented in practice. The interview questions therefore sought honest responses as to what was actually happening in each of the institutions visited, albeit from the perspective of one or two key individuals. There was a great deal of similarity in the responses to the more descriptive questions, strengthening the view that there is a fairly common approach to quality assurance procedures at the institutional level. For example, in each of the Scottish universities, a member of the senior management had strategic responsibility for quality matters and a high level committee normally existed to develop and drive policies on academic quality. The titles of individuals and committees might vary, but the functions were relatively similar.

Of much more interest, were the responses based on personal opinion. These comments helped to illuminate the thinking behind certain institutional initiatives or policies, e.g. whether continuing professional development in teaching and learning was compulsory, or why Total Quality Management was not deemed suitable in a higher education environment. Again, we found considerable consensus in a number of areas, such as the difficulties inherent in creating a system of rewards for excellence in teaching and learning, or on imposing compulsory continuing professional development on academic staff. Our interviewees came from different universities and had varying levels of responsibility - both strategically and operationally - for quality matters, yet the

similarity in their views on the impact of the TQA exercise, and the applicability of the principles of TQM, on the Scottish higher education sector, were striking.

Although this thesis is centred on a qualitative methodology, we believe that combining this with a quantitative analysis of TQA scores reinforces our argument that the TQA exercise has not achieved its aim of mission sensitivity. While the interviews reflect a perception that the TQA reports and scores for the post-1992 universities have not been as good as might have been expected, the regression analyses enable us to highlight the factors which may have contributed to the success, or otherwise, of the Scottish universities in these quality assessments.

The following two chapters establish the conceptual and historical basis for our analysis of the Scottish experience in attempting to measure and promote quality in higher education. Chapter 3 will provide a detailed discussion of different approaches to the concept of quality in higher education; to the use of performance indicators; and to the extent to which external assessment of quality represents increasing government control and a threat to institutional autonomy. These issues are then related, in Chapter 4, to the reforms of higher education in the early 1990s, which led to the establishment of the funding councils, with their remits for the assessment of quality in teaching and learning; the relationship of the funding councils' TQAs to the Higher Education Quality Council's institutional audits; and finally, to the outcomes of the TQA exercise for the Scottish universities and the factors which may have influenced these results.

CHAPTER THREE : QUALITY, ASSESSMENT AND CONTROL

> **'Quality'** - *a distinguishing characteristic or attribute; the basic character or nature of something; degree or standard of excellence, especially a high standard; high social status or the distinction associated with it.*
>
> (Collins English Dictionary and Thesaurus, 1993)

Introduction

In this chapter, we explore various definitions of the concept of quality, and the related practices of assessment, audit and control in higher education. Quality is a relative, as opposed to an absolute, concept. It is something towards which one aims; seeking improvement rather than achievement. It is a dynamic concept in which the boundaries are constantly changing. Its definition depends largely on the ideology, or the political context, of the time and place in which it is set. In higher education, the 'purpose' of the university and the values which it holds to be paramount, will determine which definition of quality is favoured. This, of course, raises the question whether a uniform definition of quality in higher education *can* be generated, or whether we must accept that different definitions will be employed across the HE sector, with the inevitable consequence that measurement and assessment will be highly complex (Wright, 1989).

Assuming that a definition of quality has been secured, the questions of how one can assure, audit and control the aimed-for quality arise. In order to evaluate success in achieving, or even exceeding, organisational and personal objectives, one must have evidence on which to base one's judgements. Such evidence, ideally, should have some objective grounding. Not surprisingly, performance indicators, which can provide evidence and allow comparisons to be made, both internally and external to the institution, have been popular with the Government. In this chapter, we shall discuss the issues surrounding the use of PI as part of quality assurance procedures. This discussion will bring us on to the wider issue of quality assurance, in the context of increased government regulation and control and, later in the thesis, to the extent to which a quality management

approach, based on externally-derived assessments and performance indicators, can bring about real enhancement of quality in teaching and learning.

During the 1990s, the link between government funding and quality assessment outcomes has become explicit. Universities are no longer private (albeit state-funded) autonomous institutions, free to set their own standards and judge themselves against the standards set. The evaluative element now comes as a result of an external process, involving a non-governmental, but nonetheless government-funded, agency. This raises questions about the main aims behind such quality assessment processes. Are these processes aimed at enhancing quality, or at establishing govenment control? Perhaps more importantly, what impact will they have on higher education institutions? (Harvey, Burrows and Green, 1992)

The Concept of Quality

The concept of quality, and the way in which it is defined, is central to the debate on quality assurance, audit and enhancement. Like 'beauty', the appreciation of quality is highly subjective. We may agree on some general principles, but the exact nature of the concept varies from observer to observer. The dictionary definition, given at the beginning of this chapter, demonstrates the difficulty in finding agreement on what exactly 'quality' is.

Quality is defined as a 'distinguishing characteristic' but in what ways and in whose judgement? It infers a 'degree of excellence'; but using what criteria, set by whom and for what purpose? It results in a 'high standard' and confers 'high social status'; but what are the benchmarks against which such judgements are being made and what rewards will be made available to those who achieve such high standards?

Green, Burrows and Harvey (1993) group the concept of quality into five distinct, but inter-related, viewpoints. In their view, quality can be defined as something which is 'exceptional', or brings 'perfection' or 'consistency', or ensures 'fitness for purpose'. Alternatively, it can be defined in terms of 'value for money' or as a 'transformative' experience. Other writers focus on the

expectations of the various stakeholders in higher education, defining quality in terms of their needs (Vroeijenstijn, 1995b; Frazer, 1992). The concept of quality which is adopted, and the way in which this is measured, arises out of the concept and purpose of higher education which is held by each of these stakeholder groups (Barnett, 1992a). We shall explore these alternative conceptions in more detail below.

The first definition provided by Green, Burrows and Harvey (1993) is that of quality as *exceptional*; a definition which the authors propose can be understood in three particular ways. Firstly, as in 'distinctive' (like Oxbridge), which relates to characteristics that are difficult to define and even more difficult to assess. Secondly, as in 'excellence', which is elitist and implies that quality is unattainable for the majority and, thirdly, as in 'beyond minimum standards', which infers that a benchmark is set, against which the range of products or services is compared. Quality, when viewed as 'exceptional' becomes an absolute, rather than a relative concept (Sallis, 1993). It represents an exclusive, as opposed to an inclusive, view. In some sense, this reflects a traditional approach to higher education; one in which international reputation, a strong research record and the ability to attract high calibre students is critical. As such, it is essentially elitist and is an interpretation which would only apply to a minority of universities.

Their second definition of quality is one which is attached to notions of *perfection* or *consistency*. This includes the idea of 'zero defects' i.e. that each aspect of the service is delivered free of faults every time, and is bound up with the notion that customers are the final arbitrators of quality (Sallis, 1993). This view is closely tied in with the principles of Total Quality Management and standardised approaches to quality such as BS5750 / ISO9000, which will be explored in more detail in Chapter 7. It requires the organisation to set standards for everything it does and to train and encourage all staff to work towards achieving those standards, in order that the customer can be satisfied. 'Right first time' is another phrase which, similar to 'zero defects', infers that by following the quality procedures set down for a task, it will be carried out without fault. In

the context of this concept of quality, organisations have some freedom to set their own standards and are not bound by an elite 'gold standard'.

The third conception of quality, that of *fitness for purpose*, requires those implementing the concept to devote considerable thought to the question of 'whose' purpose is being served and 'how' this is to be assessed. It is a 'functional' definition rather than an elitist or exceptional one and quality, in this context, is seen as a relative rather than an absolute concept. Quality resides in conforming to 'customer specification' or to the stated 'mission' of the institution. As with the preceding definition, it is a concept closely related with TQM and quality standards.

Quality as 'fitness for purpose' was the approach advocated by the funding councils, when the TQAs were first introduced in 1992. The aim of these assessments was to be mission-sensitive, i.e. to judge the quality of provision against the institution's, or department's, own aims and objectives. This approach was intended to avoid the 'gold standard' trap, whereby institutions with widely differing missions and student bases, might be judged against a single, elitist standard, which would only be achievable by a few institutions. Barnett (1992a) has criticised this approach. While appearing to be more democratic in approach, Barnett argues that 'fitness for purpose' could be used as a mask for a hierarchical view of higher education. Institutions may have different purposes, as reflected in their mission statements, but some purposes may be valued more highly than others, both in terms of esteem and financial rewards. On the face of it, all institutions would be seen as equal, but in reality some would be 'more equal than others'. This perceived inequality was a feature of our interview data, with regard to the respective value of teaching and research activities within the Scottish universities, and is explored in some depth in Chapter 6.

Green *et al*'s fourth conception of quality, as *value for money*, links efficiency and effectiveness in the public sector with accountability to the funders. Performance Indicators are used to monitor this process and Customer Charters specify what customers can expect for the money they pay. The danger with

such performance indicators, as we will see later in this chapter, is that instead of providing a means to an end, they may become an end in themselves.
Progression rates from one year to the next on a course, or the percentage of students achieving a certain level of degree award, may appear as seemingly objective indicators of quality, yet they are open to interpretation, as to what they actually mean, and to manipulation by the institution. High progression rates, for example, could indicate good students, well taught or alternatively could infer low standards for a pass. Frazer (1992) warned against confusing quality with cost or efficiency. Increasing ratios of students to staff may be taken as a sign of improved efficiency, but may in fact result in a poorer quality of learning experience for the individual student and an increased workload and reduced morale amongst academic staff.

Finally, the notion of quality as *transformation* implies that an organisation is aiming to create a qualitative change in the participant. This could take one of two forms: either 'enhancing' the participant in terms of their skills, knowledge and abilities, or 'empowering' the participant by involving them in decision-making and developing their critical abilities (Green and Harvey, 1993). This concept of transformation strikes at the heart of the debate about the nature of higher education. The relevant question is what is 'higher' about higher education? Despite differences in purpose or mission, there are some factors which must remain common to all higher education institutions in order for them to justify the title - the development of an enquiring mind, creative thinking and critical abilities in their students. Yet, numerical performance indicators seem to be a poor way of measuring such transformative experiences. Student pass rates or graduate employment figures cannot measure quality, defined in this way. It is higher education as a life-changing experience. In Barnett's view (1992a), the idea of a life changing experience offers a more egalitarian, than hierarchical, view of quality; one which does not lend itself well to performance indicators. While it is possible to measure improvement in skills, or the acquisition of knowledge, it is impossible to measure what effect the holistic experience of being at university, and taking part in a variety of academic, social and sporting activities, has had on an individual. Each, in their own way, will have been

transformed by the experience and it is in this sense that Barnett's claim of egalitarianism can be justified.

While Green, Burrows and Harvey's five groupings are a useful contribution to the debate on quality, this approach largely fails to recognise that different concepts of quality can coexist in an organisation. Within a single organisation, quality may be perceived in terms of both 'fitness for purpose' and 'value for money', or as 'excellence' and 'transformative' in nature. Indeed, an argument could be made that all five dimensions of quality can be promoted, to a greater or lesser extent, within any organisation.

Frazer (1992) supports the view that quality in higher education is multi-faceted and that there can be no single measure of quality. A similar standpoint is held by Yorke (1992) who argues that quality in higher education is multidimensional and that it is therefore more appropriate to think in terms of *qualities* rather than in terms of a monolithic concept of quality. Quality assurance systems must, on this argument, be appropriate for what is being assessed and decisions taken about whether a quantitative or a qualitative approach will produce the most useful evidence. While quantitative measures, such as the data collected by the Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA), may appear to give objective information, it does not, in itself, present a value-free picture of an institution. The very fact of the collection of each of these performance indicators infers an acceptance of their place in the quality assurance process. Frazer advocates the use of a 'quality profile' and suggests that it is meaningless to add the scores of different and unrelated characteristics within such a profile. Yet, this is exactly the means by which *The Times*, and other newspapers, compile their annual league tables of higher education institutions. These compilations include factors as diverse as the percentage of students accommodated in halls of residence, and research ratings. Yet they lead to widespread public inferencing on the quality of education and experience which a student attending each HEI might expect to receive.

An alternative approach to the definition of quality is through the eyes, and expectations, of the various stakeholders in higher education. The Government,

as the primary funder of universities, is concerned with quality in terms of 'value for money'. Its concern will lie with progression rates of students and the percentage of final degree classifications awarded. Vroeijenstijn describes this in terms of 'as many students as possible finishing the programme in the scheduled time with a degree at international standards with reducing costs' (1995b, p.24). The students, on the other hand, may be more concerned with their experience within the institution; with their own personal development and the ways in which they may be prepared for future careers. This brings in the enhancing and 'transformative' aspect of quality. Employers, however, will look for certain types of knowledge and skills in graduates. They will expect them to be 'fit for the purpose', i.e. ready to play an effective part within the working environment. Meanwhile, academics may seek to ensure good knowledge transfer between themselves and their students. This may lead them to set high standards which aim towards 'excellence', or at the very least 'consistency' in achieving a certain level of understanding.

Like Frazer (1992) and Yorke (1992), Vroeijenstijn (1995b) advocates our thinking in terms of *qualities*, rather than quality in higher education. Vroeijenstijn goes further in suggesting that we consider the different aspects of each quality in terms of input, process and output and explore how each of these elements might be assessed. In order to do this, the organisation would need a good understanding of the requirements of each of its stakeholders. It also needs to accept that while some of these requirements may coincide, some may conflict with one another. Thus the Government's drive for greater efficiency and value for money may be perceived as detrimental to the academic's perception of quality and to the student experience. 'Quality requirements set by governments may be threatening for the quality of the university' (Vroeijenstijn, 1995b, p.25). As this is undoubtedly not the Government's aim, there needs to be a balance between the desire for efficiency, the effective use of public funds, and the maintenance of a high quality educational experience for students. Such a balance can only be achieved if there is continuous dialogue between the universities and Government, in order that both understands each other's needs and aspirations, and can reach consensus on the best ways in which to assure quality.

Frazer (1992) advocates a comprehensive approach to quality assurance, which examines a wide range of inputs, processes and outputs; involves both self-assessment and peer review; and includes ultimate sanctions, such as dismissal of staff or closure of departments, for failure to achieve and maintain quality standards. Frazer's view is founded on his belief that the essential purpose of a university is to promote learning. However, as we will see later in this chapter, this is just one conception of the purpose of higher education. Depending on the conception of HE which is being advocated, will depend the values being associated with it.

A key issue for Middlehurst (1992) is where authority for the assignment of value should rest. Middlehurst takes the view that ideas about quality are value-related and judgmental. She draws a distinction between the practice in higher education and that of the commercial sector. In the former, quality is largely defined by professionals within institutions, as well as by those external professionals who judge the quality of service provided through the TQAs. In the commercial sector, more emphasis is put on the customer, although higher education seems to be converging towards a *greater* focus on the student or employer, as customer. Many universities have adopted Student Charters, which clearly set out the student's rights, and the introduction of student tuition fees in 1998 has been expected to result in students taking a much more consumer-oriented approach. This includes a greater willingness to express dissatisfaction and a desire for redress when the quality of their experience, or results, fails to satisfy their expectations.

Middlehurst raises the question of whether quality could be used as an 'organising principle' for higher education. She puts forward three arguments in favour of this view. Firstly, 'quality' could be the fundamental concept around which all institutional activity was focused and measured, and the means by which institutional (and individual) priorities were established. Secondly, 'quality' could bring all parts of the institution together, encouraging co-operation between different elements in order to achieve the central focus on quality. Thirdly, 'quality', as an organising principle, implies the provision of an

orderly structure; a framework which relates elements to each other and establishes a working order for the achievement of quality.

Middlehurst argues that quality, as an organising principle in higher education, provides a stimulating and challenging focus for the physical and intellectual efforts of the whole institution. She refers to the need for clarity of purpose, feedback on performance and constant efforts to develop and improve, as being central to this approach. Her view that a common commitment to quality is conceivable within higher education institutions, despite some difficulties, is clearly supportive of a TQM approach to higher education management. This is an argument which we will return to in Chapter 7, when we explore the attitudes toward TQM held by senior personnel in the Scottish universities and the potential advantages such an approach may bring to quality enhancement of teaching and learning.

Nonetheless, Middlehurst does identify a number of barriers to the idea of quality as an organising principle. These include the difficulties in achieving consensus over the definition of quality and how to achieve it; difficulties in reaching agreement over where the judgement should rest; the difficulties in defining the nature of the education process itself and the extent to which it can, or should, be shaped towards the achievement of pre-specified outcomes; the cost of implementation; and most importantly, in her view, the internal perception of the reasons behind pressures for quality. Since quality systems require teamwork and a full commitment to quality, a lack of trust, or feelings of fear on the part of staff, or institutions, as to the motives behind the introduction of such measures, would provide a considerable barrier to their successful implementation. The suspicion that moves towards systematising quality assessment across the HE sector represent moves by the Government to increase its levels of control on such institutions are issues to which we will return later in this chapter.

Quality Assurance, Quality Audit and Quality Control

The Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC)'s *Guidelines on Quality Assurance (1994)* provide definitions of quality, and guidelines on the processes

of assurance, audit and control, associated with it. In this publication, the HEQC compared the approach utilised by its own organisation, by the 1992 Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act and by the British Standards Institution (BSI), from BS4778.

As a starting point, HEQC adopted the BSI definition of 'quality'. The BSI defined quality as 'the totality of features or characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy a given need'. Adopting this definition, HEQC was introducing terms which were primarily directed at the manufacturing and commercial sector. Words such as 'product', and aims such as 'satisfying a given (customer) need' are, as can be seen from our interview data in Chapter 7, often considered to be inappropriate in a higher education environment. They are seen as too closely related to the manufacturing sector and taking no account of the transformative element of university education. There is no attempt in the BSI definition to identify what qualities such 'features' might have, or whose needs should be satisfied. It is a definition which is so broad as to be almost meaningless.

Similarly broad definitions are provided of the process of 'quality assurance'. The BSI defined this as 'all those planned and systematic activities to provide adequate confidence that a product or service will satisfy given requirements for quality'. While the HEQC attempted to apply the term more specifically to the higher education environment, by stating that quality assurance was 'the arrangements by which an institution discharges its corporate responsibility for the quality of the teaching and learning it offers by satisfying itself that its structures and mechanisms for monitoring its quality control procedures are effective and, where appropriate, that they promote the enhancement of quality.'

This definition attempts to go beyond the mere satisfaction of corporate responsibility for a certain level of quality by bringing in the concept of *enhancement* and the idea that quality should be continuously improved. Enhancement is also present in the definition of quality assurance provided by the 1992 Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act :

> All the policies, systems and processes directed to ensuring maintenance and enhancement of the quality of educational provision in higher education.

While 'quality control' is largely about post-event checking, 'quality assurance' brings with it an element of proactivity, by putting in place systems which will hopefully prevent mistakes from being made and, further, ensuring that improvements can be made. Examples of such proactivity include guidelines on new module or programme validation, moderation of examination papers and the utilisation of student evaluation feedback to enhance quality in teaching and learning. This 'assurance' process appears to be what some funding agencies advocate. A major aim of SHEFC's Teaching Quality Assessments was the dissemination of good practice and enhancement of teaching and learning. Whether these approaches have been successful is open to debate. In Chapter 5, we will explore the extent to which senior personnel, in the Scottish universities, believe this aim has been achieved.

Whereas quality assurance is designed, by means of systems and processes, to ensure that a certain level of quality is achieved, each and every time, 'quality audit' is the means by which judgements can be made about the *effectiveness* of such processes. Quality audit has been defined, by both the BSI and HEQC, as a 'systematic and independent examination to determine whether quality activities and related results comply with planned arrangements and whether these arrangements are implemented effectively and are suitable to achieve objectives.'

The 1992 Act, meanwhile, defines audit as 'the process of ensuring that the quality control arrangements are satisfactory'. Both these definitions put emphasis on compliance, suitability and effective implementation of quality assurance systems. Audit is conceived as a check on the checking procedures. It compares the institution's stated aims, objectives and procedures with what they are actually doing in practice.

Despite their title, the Teaching Quality Assessments were a form of audit. They required institutions to prepare a self-assessment document, against which they were judged (or audited). The outcome of the TQA was the awarding of a grade and the associated potential of rewards or penalties. TQAs were carried out in distinct cognate areas on behalf of external agencies, the Higher Education Funding Councils. The funding councils are so-called 'Quangos' - organisations funded by government, but ostensibly operating at arms' length – a situation described by Watson (1995) as at least maintaining the 'fiction' of institutional independence.

In parallel to the TQAs, quality audits of institutional procedures were conducted by HEQC, as an agent of the higher education institutions themselves. In Chapter 4, we will explore the specific intentions and nature of the Scottish funding council (SHEFC)'s Teaching Quality Assessments, and the HEQC institutional audits. In parallel, we will discuss the introduction of assessment of a different kind - that of research quality (the Research Assessment Exercise) which, as we found from our interview data, was perceived to have had a major impact on the value given to the activity of teaching, in the Scottish universities.

To prepare for our discussion of Total Quality Management, in Chapter 7, it is useful to explore another term used in the quality vocabulary, that of 'quality control'. This was defined by the BSI as 'the operational techniques and activities that are used to fulfil requirements for quality'. HEQC adopted a slightly different definition when it stated that quality control was 'concerned with the checks and measures by which a body determines ... that the operations for which it is responsible are working as planned and intended'. Finally, the 1992 Act defined this as 'the arrangements (procedures, standards, organisation) within HE institutions which verify that teaching and assessment are carried out in a satisfactory manner ... would usually be *post hoc*'.

Quality control is, accordingly, primarily concerned with checking procedures. It is an 'after the fact' procedure. Whatever has happened, has happened, and quality control merely allows a review of the outcomes. Quality control is, resultantly, a much narrower concept than quality assurance, which although

concerned with systems and procedures, includes the element of enhancement within its definition. An example of quality control would be annual programme monitoring, which may include reports on the quality of provision during the course of an academic year made by external examiners, and student representatives. Such a review may identify remedial action which requires to be undertaken, but it is a reactive as opposed to a proactive approach.

The HEQC report (1994) identified three approaches to quality, which were taken from the business sector. These included the Investor in People approach, the standardised approach of BS5750 and that taken by advocates of Total Quality Management. The first approach was that of *Investors in People* (IiP), which takes as its premise that quality is achieved by people and that the development of each employee's potential better equips them to attain the organisation's goals. The process for gaining recognition as an 'Investor in People' is carried out through the local Training and Enterprise Council. The second approach, was *BS5750*, which involves designing a system to control each step of the 'production' process so that every 'product' matches the technical specifications set for it. The BS5750 registration mark does not imply 'excellence'. It is simply describes the capability of the system to produce goods to the agreed specification. Finally, *Total Quality Management* approaches describe the process and management of change, whereby the culture of the organisation is based on a commitment to fulfil customers' needs by ensuring that all members of the organisation seek to constantly improve what they do, and provide, for its customers.

The focus of these approaches is on quality assurance, maintenance of standards and enhancement of quality. The emphasis is on the training and empowerment of employees, in order to equip them to fulfil their roles and deliver service at the highest levels of quality. The extent to which any, or all, of these approaches may be applicable in higher education institutions and their perceived impact in the Scottish universities, is examined in Chapters 5 and 7.

Performance Indicators

Performance indicators provide data for the evaluation of various aspects of an institution's, or individual's, performance. In the first instance, this involves a decision about which aspects of performance will be recorded and analysed. The choice of these performance indicators is therefore not value-free. By choosing to collect information on some aspects of performance, rather than others , the individual, institution or Government, is making value judgements. These value judgements reflect their beliefs, missions or ideologies. Whichever concepts of quality in higher education are held paramount, by the various stakeholders, will ultimately depend which performance indicators are selected and given most credence.

Performance indicators should not be viewed as an end in themselves. They need to be chosen carefully. The paramount question in selecting performance indicators is 'what use would this information be to us and how would we use it?' Having made the decision as to which indicators will be utilised, the next question is whether to adopt quantitative or qualitative measures. Quantitative measures have considerable appeal as they have the appearance of being objective and value-free. However, there is the danger that goals will be promoted for which there are readily apparent indicators, i.e. goals which are measurable are given greater weight than those which are more difficult to evaluate (De Weert, 1990).

Quantitative measures allow fairly simple comparisons to be made. For example, progression rates of students from one year of a course to the next have obvious value as an indicator of the 'success' of a course. Yet progression rates which are too high may infer that the course is set at too low a level or the marking of assessments is too generous. High failure rates could be as a result of poor preparation of students at earlier points of their education, poor teaching or 'hard' marking. This simple example illustrates that we should not take statistical measures at face value. Such data merely indicates the need for further investigations to be carried out into the factors which have influenced the results and the context in which they have been achieved.

Barnett (1992b) takes up the issue of performance indicators and their dependence on the particular concept of higher education being promulgated. In the table below, he relates a concept of quality to a specific concept of higher education and identifies the kinds of performance indicators which might be associated with each.

concept of H.E.	concept of quality	kinds of P.I.
(1) production of highly qualified manpower	ability to succeed in world of work	% graduates into employment and career earnings;
(2) training for research career	research profiles of staff	measures of staff research activity - research income in and publications out;
(3) efficient management of teaching provision	high throughput of varied student body	non-completion rates; degree awards; staff / student ratios;
(4) extending life chances	a civil good	% growth in student nos. and range of entrants

(Barnett, 1992b)

Barnett's first conception of higher education quality, as the 'production of highly qualified manpower', is similar to the 'fitness for purpose' approach of Green, Burrows and Harvey (1993), previously discussed. The 'purpose' of higher education, in this case, is the production of qualified graduates who could make a contribution to 'UK plc'. 'Fitness' for that purpose would be achieved through an emphasis on vocationality of degree programmes and the development of personal transferable skills, which would make graduates more employable and more effective in the workplace. However, the percentage of graduates going quickly into employment is not affected solely by the quality of graduates being produced by our universities. External factors, such as changes in consumer demand, or the general economic well being of the nation, impact

on graduate recruitment. Thus, we have a performance indicator which, like so many others, requires to be seen in the context of other influencing factors and is open to interpretation.

Barnett's second conception of higher education, as a 'training ground for a research career', is similar to the 'exceptional' approach to quality (Green et al., 1993). This is a view of higher education which takes as its *raison d'etre* the training of the future academic elite. Research is the main activity and the most highly valued within the institution. Here, the performance indicators refer not to student achievement but to that of the academic staff. The inference is that highly qualified staff - particularly those eminent in research - will also be excellent teachers. This is a view which appears to be supported by promotion practices and has created considerable tension amongst academic staff whom, as we will see from our interview data in Chapter 6, now perceive teaching to be a less valued activity than research within their institutions.

The third conception, as efficient management of teaching provision, is similar to the notion of 'value for money' (Green et al., 1993). The emphasis here is on economic efficiency. As student numbers and staff / student ratios have increased and, at the same time, the unit of funding per student has fallen, efficiency has been a major driver of decisions within the higher education sector. Class sizes may have increased but standards are not to be allowed to fall. Performance indicators such as progression rates, withdrawal rates and final degree awards are used as evidence of quality. However, statistics such as these tell us nothing of the standards of attainment which are actually being achieved by students. If an Oxbridge university and a post-1992 HEI share the same percentage of students achieving a 2.1 Honours classification, what conclusions can we draw from this? These indicators are unlikely to reflect the same level of academic achievement. In the absence of any benchmarking arrangements, however, even this is impossible to say. Regardless of these flaws, it is information such as this which is used to create league tables of institutions, such as the annual output from the *Times Higher Educational Supplement*, which influences student, parental and employer choice.

Barnett's final concept of higher education focuses on extending life chances and the concept of quality as a civil good. This is similar to the concept of quality as 'transformation' (Green et al., 1993), which fits well with the current Government's emphasis on lifelong learning and widening access to higher education. In this context, participation rates for the overall population and for particular groups within that population become key performance indicators. It is unlikely, however, that this conception would ever sit on its own, for it ignores any mention of standards or achievement, whether in terms of degree awarded or employment obtained, and is, as we have previously suggested, difficult to measure.

It is difficult to accept Barnett's four conceptions as four discrete viewpoints on higher education. The reality is that most universities would claim that they aim to achieve all four goals, to a greater or lesser degree. In Oxford, Cambridge and those other institutions which see research as their defining activity, Barnett's second definition - training for a research career - may be prominent. But, in an increasingly competitive marketplace, his first and third may also play a part. In the newer universities, which have risen from the former polytechnic sector, the fourth dimension - that of extending life chances - may be a key part of the mission. However, the first and third concepts may also play an important role, as the ability to manage high staff / student ratios and achieve employment for their graduates is critical, while research may be given less prominence.

The 'idea of the university' is a key theme in Barnett's writing (Barnett, 1990; 1992a). There must, he believes, be something 'higher' about higher education - a feature which unites all HEIs, no matter how diverse their missions might be. Yet the four concepts which Barnett identifies relate to higher education when perceived not as some higher ideal but as a *system* in which students are the *inputs*, are processed, and pass out at the other end as *outputs* of the system. Rejecting what he describes as an 'objectivist' approach, Barnett identifies four conceptions which are based on educational *process* and which lead to the development of broader skills and abilities in the student. These include the exposure of students to, and their initiation into, academic forms of knowing and experience which Barnett describes as a continuing process, marked off from the

issues and concerns of the world; the development of the individual student's autonomy and integrity; the formation of general intellectual abilities and perspectives; and the development of critical reason, including the ability to be self-critical (Barnett, 1992a, p.20).

These conceptions are similar to the definition of quality as 'transformation' (Green *et al*, 1993). It is a view of the educational process in which the higher intellectual skills, such as critical reason, are developed. This reflects a particular view of higher education in which 'development of the mind' is the main aim. Obviously such a view harks back to the traditional liberal education of those universities which existed in previous centuries and is one which is far removed from notions of value for money, or vocationality, which are prominent in both the previous and current Governments' thinking.

Doherty (1994) describes Barnett's proposals as derived from a Utopian model, attractive at first sight but logically untenable. It is a view which may still be prominent in the Oxbridge universities, where students 'read' a subject, rather than be 'taught' or 'study' for their degree, and where the development of the individual through not only their academic work, but also their contribution to 'college life' is stressed. However, it is one which is far removed from the reality of the majority of higher education institutions in the UK which, faced with increasing numbers of students, from diverse backgrounds, and with decreasing *per capita* government funding, have had to take pragmatic approaches to teaching and learning and to ensuring that their programmes are attractive to employers. Thus, staff / student ratios have risen steadily in recent years; class sizes have increased, and student-centred learning - particularly involving the use of computer-based delivery and assessment - has been advocated as one means of managing the teaching and learning process, and reducing the burden on academic staff.

Barnett's conceptions of higher education certainly do not lend themselves easily to measurement by performance indicators, particularly quantitative indicators. The Government, on the other hand, is attracted to the use of numerical indicators, because of their appearance as objective and value-free. They allow

simple comparisons to be made, for example on amount spent per capita on library or computing resources. A method which Barnett (1992b) describes as the accountant's or bureaucrat's approach to evaluation.

Performance indicators do have a place, but they must be seen in the context of the varied missions and student intakes of higher education institutions. Rather than being taken at face value, they must be recognised as being value-related (Middlehurst, 1992). As stated earlier, performance indicators can tell us whether degree results are particularly high or low, but they cannot tell us about the *process* which produced these results. Performance indicators broadly follow the chronology of the student's experience during the course of his studies, from entry qualifications, through progression to final award and employment. However the data is 'raw' and influenced by a wide range of variables, unconnected with teaching, which are difficult to quantify (Sharp, 1995). To use such data to make inferences on quality of teaching is inherently dangerous. This is not to argue that there is no value in current performance indicators, but that they must be treated with care and interpreted within the context in which they arise.

Barnett (1992a) categorised different approaches to quality assessment as either objectivist, relativist or developmental. The use of performance indicators underlies the *objectivist* approach. It is founded on a belief that it is possible to identify and quantify certain aspects of higher education, evaluate these and make valid comparisons between institutions. It is mostly concerned with measurable inputs into, and outputs from, the system. Inputs such as student entry pointage, ethnic background and socio-economic class can be used, for example, to target increased access to higher education from poorly represented minority groups. Such data can also be utilised in the analysis of failure rates, with a view to exploring what additional means of support might be required for particular groups of students. In a similar vein, outputs lend themselves readily to quantitative measures. Examples include the proportion of students achieving particular awards; the percentages of graduates employed or in further study; and staff research publication records. In focusing on these indicators, the objectivist is making a major assumption that there is a direct link between the PI

and quality. However, as we have previously argued, this information cannot be removed from the wider context in which it was generated, both within the institution and within the society in which it operates. There is a story behind the data, and the data cannot be understood without the story. More significantly, what such performance indicators fail to address is the quality of the course process and the student learning experience (Yorke, 1991).

The choice of performance indicators, far from being objective, mirrors certain beliefs. Academics may choose to believe that research is a superior activity to teaching and therefore the decision to collect and compare data on this aspect of higher education will not be objective. Rather, it will reflect an existing set of values and defend the interests of a particular group within the sector.

One of the indicators, mentioned by Barnett (1992a), is that of 'capital resources'. When considering the assessment of teaching quality, the capital resources of an institution might be expected to play a minor part. However, the perception of the interviewees in this study was that an attractive environment, such as that found in many of the more established universities, which have excellent library and laboratory facilities, influenced the assessors who took part in the TQA visit. While the overall learning environment for students is undoubtedly important, quality of teaching cannot be inferred from the provision of state-of-the-art equipment, or the beauty of ancient buildings. Yet, one Vice Principal of an ancient university stated :

'If (the assessors) go into a lab with gleaming equipment, funded from research money ... they think "this must be a good place to learn"'

The objectivist approach is a crude measure. It does not reflect the diversity of mission and approach within the higher education sector. To counter this criticism 'value-added' measures are now being included in performance measurement (Edwards, 1994). These attempt to take into account starting and finishing points. They include, for example, the difference between entry qualifications of students and their final degree awards. In this framework, the achievement of a student who entered university from an access course, compared to another who entered with high pointage - both of whom ultimately

achieved an Upper Second Class degree - would be considered to be greater and the impact of the institution correspondingly so. While value-added has highlighted the problem with crude performance indicators, it is still, in Barnett's words 'objective through and through' (1992a, p47). However, without value-added measures, it is impossible to make *any* comparisons between institutions with different missions and diverse student populations. Performance indicators are, as we have seen, crude measures behind which there is a story which must be told. To compare one set of data with another, we must put them in context (Yorke, 1995). We need to ask whether the socio-economic backgrounds, or entry qualifications, or ethnicity of students are influencing the outcomes, as measured by our performance indicators. For Barnett to dismiss value-added measures, because they still rely on 'objective' data is to deny the fact that performance measurement, as evidenced by performance indicators, is here to stay, and to discount attempts to make any sensible comparisons in the data.

Barnett's second approach to quality assessment is that of *relativism*. As the term would imply, quality is seen as a relative concept and one which must be assessed in context rather than as some kind of absolute. The relativist view is linked to the idea of 'fitness for purpose'. As we have seen, earlier in this chapter, Barnett believes that fitness for purpose can be interpreted in a way which supports a hierarchical view of higher education. The relativist view would acknowledge that institutions are different and 'fit' for different purposes. However, some purposes - such as research - could be considered to be more worthy than others and funding could reflect this. Taken to its extreme, the hierarchical view of fitness for purpose could lead to teaching-only institutions, with research activity left in the hands of an elite few establishments. There are serious dangers in this approach, as it might ultimately deprive young, dynamic institutions of the opportunity to develop academically and to carve a niche for themselves in specialist areas, in which they already have considerable expertise. Retrospectively, we can see that a number of the universities which received their charters in the 1960s have gone on to achieve research rankings on a par with some of the ancient establishments. On this argument, there is no reason to assume that some of the post-1992 institutions will not do the same.

Still within the relativist framework, but an alternative view to the hierarchical approach, described above, is Barnett's idea of 'parallel relativism'. This supports the notion that institutions are equal but different; that they operate independently and with different missions, within the higher education sector. The measure of success is based on how effectively each implements its own mission statement, not how it compares to another HEI. In this respect, a new university with a mission for wider access and non-standard entry will be judged on the extent to which it achieves higher participation rates from lower socio-economic groups, and mature students, and would not expect to be compared with an ancient establishment, which has excellence in research as one of its key objectives. That is not to say that there can be no comparisons made within the parallel relativist view. Again, Barnett's argument comes to the idea that there must be something recognisably 'higher' about higher education which links all such institutions (Barnett, 1992a).

Both the objectivist and relativist approaches, outlined by Barnett, depend on taking a retrospective view of performance. They are concerned with providing evidence for stakeholders, either in the form of external assessments or self-assessments, on which summative judgements on performance can be made. These approaches encourage the collection and collation of a variety of performance indicators, from which league tables are subsequently drawn. However, the extent to which such information is utilised in the institutional quality assurance process, in order to enhance quality, is a matter on which our interviews with senior personnel cast some doubt.

Barnett proposes a third way - the *developmental* approach - which could lead to a greater likelihood of genuine quality improvement. Barnett's developmental approach is formative, rather than summative, seeking review and enhancement as opposed to outcome-based judgements about quality. This approach does not set out to satisfy external stakeholders nor to place itself in some kind of hierarchy with other institutions. Instead, it looks to improve on the quality of teaching and learning by taking from best practice elsewhere. It asks individual staff to actively review their own performance, with a view to enhancing it. Improvement becomes the goal, rather than positioning on league tables. Its

advantage is that it fosters the development of a learning organisation, in which continuous improvement is the major goal. This approach sits well within a TQM environment, which we shall argue, in Chapter 7, is more effective in achieving quality enhancement than existing, retrospective measures which rely on checking mechanisms.

The four approaches outlined above do not have to sit apart from one another. Barnett (1992a) himself advocates a combination of parallel relativism and developmental approaches, with objectivist and hierarchical relativism in supporting roles. His proviso to this is that lower limits must be set on standards, in order that there is some meaning to the term 'higher' education. His view is that performance indicators should not be allowed to drive quality, for if allowed to do so, they may become ends in themselves. If achieving a high percentage of graduates with Firsts gets an institution more 'points' on a league table of results, there may be an incentive to relax standards and allow more to achieve this level of award. Such performance indicators tell us nothing about the quality processes within the institution or even the quality of the output - the graduates themselves.

As with all statistics, interpretation and context are the key. Crude comparisons are to be avoided but performance indicators are useful in allowing institutions to identify areas of concern. Poor course progression rates can be examined in relation to the entry qualifications of the students; to the methods of teaching and support or to the extent of student part-time working. Simplistic judgements about the quality of either the students or the teaching must, at all times, be avoided.

If performance indicators are not to be an end in themselves, and quality enhancement is to take place, review and reflection are essential. Yorke (1992) expressed concern that the TQA exercise would lead to the creation of a 'compliance culture' - one in which the need to respond to external demands, for a demonstration of a certain level of performance, could subvert the fulfilment of aspects of the institutional mission. In other words, academic staff would spend more time complying with the requirements of quality assurance mechanisms, to

the detriment of actual quality of delivery. Yorke suggested that the quality management literature seemed to point to quality being best assured when an institution secured the commitment of its workforce and that a light touch might be best under these circumstances. This view is echoed in the TQM approach, which we discuss in Chapter 7. In TQM initiatives, workforce commitment is a key factor in successful quality management and progress is conditional on the participation of all relevant parties.

The preference in the 1990s for the use of performance indicators may have led to a focus on certain aspects of higher education, to the detriment of others. In Barnett's view 'it is far easier to raise technical and procedural issues than to raise fundamental issues connected with the aspirations and ultimate values which lie behind different approaches to quality' (1992a, p.45). The resulting displacement of effort is a consequence of our human and organisational responses to inappropriate indicators, which carry with them the promise of reward, or the threat of punishment (Fairley and Patterson, 1995).

As an alternative to a focus on performance indicators and external quality audit, Barnett (1992a) has proposed a system of evaluation based on critical self-assessment, review by students and following that, a review by peers from other institutions or the wider society. The crucial aspect of his proposals is the self-criticism by the professionals responsible for course delivery. While the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) had placed similar requirements on the polytechnics, Barnett questions the willingness and commitment of the existing university sector in conducting a searching educational evaluation of its own teaching activities. His concern has been borne out by several years of Teaching Quality Assessments, which have resulted in reports from the funding councils on the *lack* of critical self-assessment in many of the documents they received from academic departments. Our research interviews explore the perceived impact of the TQA process in the Scottish universities and this issue is discussed in Chapter 5.

Quality Assessment and Government Control

The motivation behind the introduction of performance indicators was questioned by Cave, Hanney and Kogan (1991). These authors described performance indicators as part of a general shift from control of educational objectives and evaluation by academics to control by the system and its managers - Barnett's 'accountants and bureaucrats' (Barnett, 1992b). They agreed that performance indicators could be used to measure *input*, in terms of human and financial resources; *process*, in terms of the productivity of resource use and management effort; and *output*, in terms of what had been achieved i.e. the products of the institution. However, performance indicators did not take background variables, such as the location of the institution or the ability of its students, into account (Badley, 1993). Based on this analysis, Cave, Hanney and Kogan described the performance indicator approach as a crude 'market model' of higher education, which advocates the compilation of statistics on a variety of factors - from entry points to library spend - as a means of making valid comparisons between institutions with widely varying missions and student bodies.

Many questions have been raised about the true purpose behind the teaching quality assessments. Are they primarily intended as a means of *enhancing* the quality of teaching and learning or are they really designed to increase *government control* of higher education? (Sizer, 1988) Even if not designed to have that effect, is increased government control and interference a natural consequence of the process? The quandary for higher education is to find the correct balance between accountability and autonomy (Frazer, 1993).

Fears surrounding the creation of the Funding Councils centred on the question as to whether the pursuit of accountability would lead to greater government control and a narrowing of the provision currently on offer. Thompson (1992), foresaw academics reacting to the new quality assurance arrangements by putting effort into those aspects which were being measured, while neglecting aspects which were more difficult to assess. The notion that the TQA was being perceived, to a certain extent, as a game which one played to maximum

advantage, is evident in some of our interviewees' comments in Chapter 5. This view is also reflected in an analysis of the English TQA results from which it can be seen that the proportion of 'Excellent' awards grew from 20% in the first round to 37% in the third, with some sceptics suggesting that this was not necessarily for being excellent at teaching but rather for being excellent at meeting the criteria set by the Funding Council on their TQA visits (Chalkley, 1996).

Thompson (1992) suggested that quality should be interpreted in a more imaginative way. While HEIs should be accountable, the funding councils should concentrate on *stimulating* quality, not on *controlling* it, as the latter would inevitably narrow that which was being controlled. Ultimately, the responsibility for assuring, monitoring and enhancing the quality of the student's educational experience must lie with the institution and its staff (Gordon and Partington, 1993). These are views which put emphasis on quality enhancement and continuous improvement, rather than quality audits and control, and are more akin to a TQM approach.

The various stakeholders in higher education have their own concepts of what quality actually means, and how it can be evidenced. Equally, different forms of quality assurance can have multiple purposes. Barnett (1994a) made a clear distinction in the underlying purpose of such assessments as being either intended for *enlightenment* or for *surveillance*. He detected a trend towards the latter, claiming that there was a drive on the part of the state to secure greater levels of control and surveillance over higher education. He hypothesised that this had encouraged a 'technicist' approach to quality evaluation, as evidenced by the increasing use of performance indicators. This technicist, bureaucratic approach was not, in his view, best suited to the purpose of quality enhancement. While the benefits of evaluation certainly included the element of providing accountability to society, Barnett stated that 'quality evaluation gains its greatest justification when, as a result, the actors centrally involved in offering programmes in higher education learn about themselves and, as a result, change and improve the quality of their own professional activities and services to society' (1994a, p.178)

The proposal to second academic staff to the quality assessment units of the funding councils also drew criticism. Bocock speculated that, with academics involved, the TQAs would not be a supportive process but a judgmental one, with a 'direct sting in its tail' (1991, p.33). With the assessments in Scotland graded in one of four categories, ranging from 'unsatisfactory' to 'excellent', and financial rewards available to those institutions which gained an 'excellent' rating in any of the cognate areas, the process could only be viewed as judgmental. Indeed, the publication of the TQA outcomes and reports provided the data for a form of 'league table'. Good results were used in departmental and institutional publicity material. They were perceived as providing a useful marketing advantage. The extent to which the TQA process was seen as supportive, in the sense of providing for the sharing of 'good practice' is an aspect, explored in the research interviews, and discussed in Chapter 5.

Elton (1992) examined the question of how far one should go in attempting to balance public accountability and academic freedom. He expressed this as a debate between *'trust versus control'*. On the one hand, the public can either trust the providers of higher education and allow them to self-regulate and to monitor and control their own quality procedures. Alternatively, the public may use an external control system, such as the Teaching Quality Assessments of the Funding Councils. Both 'trust' and 'control' are open to abuse and the systems of quality assurance which they generate may not fulfil the purposes for which they were intended.

Examining the question of how far it is possible to balance public accountability with academic freedom, Elton posed a number of questions :

> Should he (or she) who pays the piper :
> - call the tune?
> - negotiate the tune with the piper?
> - let the piper call the tune?
> - verify the quality of the performance?
> - accept the piper's assurance of quality?
> - trust the piper? (Elton, 1992, p. 25)

Elton's conclusion was that the UK appeared to have moved rapidly from 'trust the piper' to 'call the tune'. Whether Elton's view can be substantiated or not, evidence from the research interviews indicates that the Scottish universities are strongly influenced by the external assessment processes - not only that of teaching quality but also of the Research Assessment Exercise - and the rewards which each can generate. This supports a critical view of TQA, as an externally imposed assessment mechanism, which encourages certain types of behaviour, outwith what may be the best approach for achieving quality in a specific institution.

Elton argued that placing a 'buffer' between the providers of higher education and the external control system, such as existed with the British University Grants Committee (UGC) from 1920 to 1980, helped to minimise the worst effects of such control mechanisms while still preventing abuse of trust. However, in 1987, the UGC was replaced by the Universities Funding Council (UFC) and subsequently in 1992 by the Higher Education Funding Councils (HEFC). For Elton, this represented a movement away from 'trust' and towards greater governmental 'control'. Whether Elton's analysis is entirely credible is doubtful. The movement towards quality assessment may well be explained as an integral part of the expansion of higher education, which both generated increased demands for resources from the Government, and increased demands for differentiated programmes of quality education from HE institutions. Thus, Britain was not alone in seeking to impose external quality assurance procedures. Across Europe, Governments were increasing control over higher education and in all countries accountability was the keynote (Maasen, 1987; Green, 1993; Westerheijden *et al*, 1994; Vroeijenstijn, 1995a)). Definitions of desirable quality were being set, based on existing values and norms within each country's culture and the measurement of such quality was highly political and brought various interest groups into conflict with one another (de Rudder, 1994).

Like Elton, S. Jenkins (1995) viewed the British TQA movement as state intervention on a grand scale. Jenkins argued that the Government, under Margaret Thatcher, had carried out one of her most vigorous nationalisations on higher education. In Jenkins opinion, this policy was conditioned largely by

Thatcher's aversion to left-wing academics and local authorities. This is a view shared by Trow (1994) who saw Thatcher's government as one which perceived HE as backward, self-serving and incapable of reform from within. In the Thatcherite view, higher education institutions required to be forced to reform, by means of progressively reducing central government support and making them more responsive to the 'market'. It is obvious that support for the TQA process is not confined to Conservative governments, as it is a policy which has been continued by the 'new' Labour government, which was elected in 1997. Under Labour, the government, through its quangos - the Higher Education Funding Councils - still dictate where, and how, funds are disbursed. If graduate output is not in line with the economy's perceived needs, then funding can be adjusted to encourage more graduates in areas of shortage - as has been seen in the engineering and nursing fields. Yet, the government refutes a link between quality and funding, with the then Minister for Higher Education, Eric Forth, suggesting to an audience of academics that while quality was slipping, there was no link between this change and budget cuts (Tysome, 1996).

Some observers voiced particular concerns over the linking of quality with funding. Green (1993) noted that a key issue across Europe was whether quality should be 'protected' by making funding conditional on its presence and, if so, what system of sanctions and rewards should be used. However, in the early 1990s, only Britain and Denmark were making such a link. 'In no other European country is there at present any suggestion that funding should be related directly to quality' (Elton, 1992). In the United States, the linking of funding to quality was largely considered to be unacceptable (Hodges, 1993). Elton pointed out that while, in the United States, poor quality sometimes resulted in additional funding to remedy deficiencies, in the UK the present tendency had been to reward high quality. Scottish HEIs which achieved an 'Excellent' rating in a cognate area received an extra 5% funded student numbers for the following academic year. Those who received an 'unsatisfactory' rating gained no additional funds to help them improve and, if a follow-up visit also proved unsatisfactory, could find themselves required to withdraw the course.

The need for some form of monitoring of the quality of educational delivery is not disputed, however the method by which this is to be achieved, and the link with funding has raised a number of critical comments. Moodie (1988) noted that, whereas in the United States 'quality' had been linked with 'equity', 'equality' or 'access', in the United Kingdom it had been set alongside 'value for money' as a policy goal in higher education. His comment that had Labour come into power in 1979, things might not have been much different was prescient in light of the positions currently being taken by the New Labour Government. Marketisation is now evident in the introduction of student tuition fees, and the abolition of maintenance grants, in favour of loans - positions which many commentators find difficult to distinguish from those of the previous Conservative Government. If a key aim of the Teaching Quality Assessments was to facilitate the enhancement of quality in higher education teaching and learning, then its strategy of rewarding those who were deemed to be 'Excellent', while offering no resources or support to those in need of improvement, was one which was not only one-sided, but destined to perpetuate the distinction between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'.

The UK Funding Councils are huge quangos with an annual expenditure of several billion pounds. They receive grants from the Secretary of State and in turn make funds available to the higher education institutions. Millar (1994) argues that they are, without any qualification, an instrument of government policy. Where the former UFC/UGC had acted as a buffer between the state and the universities, and was expected to use independent judgement, the funding councils appear to act under ministerial direction. This critical view of the funding councils may not be entirely justified, since the process of quality assurance, and the responsibility for making evaluative judgements on quality, is delegated to panels, whose members are appointed, in a transparent way, from the universities themselves. However, questions have been raised as to the greater benefit to higher education if external quality assessment were to be abandoned, and funds diverted to pump-prime quality enhancement initiatives in HEIs (Gordon, 1993).

Neave (1994) describes this changing relationship as the substitution of 'parastatal agencies' for the more classical intermediary bodies, leading to their being the main driving force of government policy. Like Elton, Neave (1988) has drawn attention to the changing relationship between higher education, government and society, and to a major difference in the UK approach to funding, compared to that of our continental neighbours. He also perceived an incontrovertible switch away from internal peer review assessment and inter-institutional evaluation, which had been a long-standing practice amongst the older universities, and a re-designation of this as a single sub-component within the quality assurance system. Neave uses a quotation from Gilbert and Sullivan - 'when everybody's somebody, nobody's anybody' - when commenting that the older universities had been required to come in line with former CNAA-type practices, and speculates that this might account for the 'new' universities' enthusiasm for the process. This statement reflects an elitist standpoint which, essentially, like Barnett, advocates leaving quality firmly in the hands of university faculty and outwith the reach of external scrutiny. Neave, not surprisingly, concludes that there is something fairly disreputable about Governments which, on the one hand, insist on higher education institutions delivering quality, while at the same time, making it difficult to achieve this by reducing funding.

Hamlin (1994) also highlights the conflict between institutional attitudes towards external assessments of quality and that of the Government. He argues that if the bodies charged with such assessments are Funding Councils, then they have a clear duty to ensure that public funds are being properly used for the purposes for which they have been allocated. However, institutions should then be left to develop as they see fit. Hamlin identified another danger in the possibility that 'institutions may not be measured against their own mission statement but against the assumption by the assessors that there is an underlying context and style which every university should achieve ... These preconceptions will do nothing to encourage diversity of content and style of delivery' (1994, p.11).

This view stands in contrast to Barnett's idea that there must be something unique and unifying about higher education. However, an evaluation of the first

two rounds of the Scottish TQAs revealed evidence that lead assessors had independently identified 'norms' in the provision of teaching and learning, which had subsequently been used as benchmarks against which universities' provision had been measured (Dickinson, Pollock and Troy, 1995). These norms appeared to be subject-specific and unrelated to individual university's aims and objectives. SHEFC's aim that TQAs would be mission-sensitive may have been compromised by assessors' inbuilt biases and expectations, which were based on their own academic experiences. This may go some way to explain why the new universities did not perform as well as the older establishments in the TQAs. It also begs the question whether the assessors, coming in the main from the older sector, had pre-conceived expectations, which the new universities would have found hard to fulfil. This issue is explored further in Chapter 4.

Barnett (1994b) also analysed the outcome of the first Funding Council quality probes, in England and Wales. He found that the list of institutions achieving 'Excellent' scores in the Teaching Quality Assessments were highly co-related with the elite institutions in the UK, i.e. the traditional 'old' universities. This led him to suggest that a cross-subject set of criteria was operating, which favoured certain kinds of institution, despite the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)'s intention - similar to that of its Scottish counterpart - to be mission sensitive. Our own analysis of the TQA results in Scotland from 1993 to 1998 support Barnett's view, and comparisons with other performance indicators suggest some possibilities as to the nature of the underlying criteria. Resourcing appears to be a key influencing factor and those institutions which are longer established, and whose resource base includes substantial amounts of research income, fare better in the TQA than those more recently established. These findings will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

The major concern, particularly for the new universities, which hold teaching as their core activity, is that the TQAs have involved 'uneven playing fields'. Questions have been raised about the truth, and value, of the Teaching Quality Assessments. While the funding councils may have believed that, as a result of assessment, there was strong evidence of more serious and systematic scrutiny of teaching and learning performance by institutions, of greater attention to the

professional development of lecturers and other learning support staff, and of consideration as to how the infrastructure of universities and colleges could better meet the needs of students, this view was questioned by many academics. In a study of staff, who were involved in the first two rounds of the English TQAs, the main conclusion was that although the assessment exercise had had some impact on the quality of teaching and learning, the changes would have been likely to have taken place anyway, and the disproportionate amount of time and resources spent on the exercise had increased the stress on academic staff (Brennan, Frederiks and Shah, 1997).

The funding councils' confidence might be unjustified, as the 'serious and systematic scrutiny' may be more symptomatic of attempts to *comply* with the expectations of visiting assessors, than to improve quality of provision. While compliance to minimum standards might be a widely acceptable ideal, it raises questions both on *who* sets the standards, and on whether this approach is one which will encourage continuous quality improvement. While external quality assurance visits may stimulate the attention given to quality issues in the short term, the danger is that when the visit is over, the staff take the attitude that 'that's that' and proceed as they did before (Vroeijenstijn, 1995a). Genuine enhancement goes beyond mere compliance with minimum standards and must be firmly grounded within an institutional culture and process which encourages reflection, innovation and development.

The data from our research interviews demonstrates a mixed response, within the Scottish universities, to the outcomes of the TQA exercise and their influence on the professional development of academic staff and on improvement of the student learning experience. While the TQA reports themselves were largely not seen as helpful to the institutions, in informing improvements which might be made in the areas of learning and teaching, involvement in the *process*, particularly for those academic staff who acted as assessors, was considered to be developmental and of benefit to both the individual and the institution to which she belonged. With regard to wider staff development, the attention being given to the initial development of learning and teaching skills was widespread, however the issue of continuing professional development in pedagogical matters

was more contentious, with tensions arising between the demands of the Research Assessment Exercise and the continuing improvement of learning and teaching. These aspects will be explored in detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

Conclusions

No single definition of quality is applicable to all higher education institutions. Instead multiple definitions, relating to both systems and process, can be utilised. Higher education institutions are large, complex organisations. They serve a number of purposes, and many stakeholders. It is for each institution to decide its mission, and vision, in higher education. Each HEI will seek to widen access; attract new student groups; teach to a high level of quality; and conduct research, which will bring credit in the wider academic community. They will wish to see their graduates progress quickly into relevant careers and, as an institution, contribute to the local and national economy. They will do all these things, but the emphasis placed on each will depend on the institution's individual focus. Definitions of quality will be necessary in each of these aspects of the work of an HEI, but difficulties in defining quality should not be used as an excuse for not pursuing its continuous improvement.

As recipients of Government funding, it is right that HEIs should be accountable for the effective use of public money and that they should be asked for assurance that standards of quality are being maintained and enhanced. In this respect, performance indicators have a part to play. PI provide data on aspects of performance, which the institution can use for its own quality management purposes. However, the use of such data for inter-institutional comparison is simplistic and dangerous. It relies on comparisons of raw data, without the 'story' which will explain what the data actually means. As a result, the post-1992 institutions have suffered in the comparison. This was certainly not the outcome expected by the Funding Councils, when they established the TQAs and described them as 'mission-sensitive'.

In the next chapter, we will explore the issue of SHEFC's function with regard to quality assessment and improvement, in more detail, as we examine the original aims of both Teaching Quality Assessment, and the related HEQC institutional

quality audits. We also analyse the outcomes from five years of TQA in the Scottish universities and identify some of the factors which have been influential in the achievement of high scores during that period. We explore issues relating to age and reputation of these universities; to their performance in research; and to their abilities to attract highly qualified undergraduate entrants and provide a level of resourcing which will support an excellent learning environment. By exploring these issues, we will provide a context in which the performance indicator data produced by the TQA reports, and HESA returns, should be considered and judgements can be made on the effectiveness of such assessment processes in bringing about quality enhancement in teaching and learning.

CHAPTER FOUR : ASSESSING QUALITY IN THE SCOTTISH UNIVERSITIES

Introduction

In the previous chapter, we explored the concept of quality in higher education and the extent to which Teaching Quality Assessments (TQA) might be utilised as a means of increasing Government control over the higher education sector. We recognised that different conceptions of higher education existed, and that each reflected an underlying set of values and lent itself to different forms of performance indicators and assessment.

In this chapter, we will briefly discuss recent changes which took place in the structure of the higher education system in Scotland. These changes followed the Government's White Paper of 1991 and the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992, which led to the introduction of systematic forms of quality assessment and audit. This chapter focuses on the remits of the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council, and the Higher Education Quality Council, and explores the question of which values and interests were being defended by the systems of quality assessment and audit being operated in the Scottish higher education sector between 1992 and 1998.

In this context, we question what the Teaching Quality Assessment scores actually tell us about teaching quality. Utilising data for the thirteen Scottish universities, we compare the mean TQA scores for the period 1993 to 1998 with a number of factors, including age of institution, research rating, student entry pointage, staff-student ratios and library spend, to determine which factors appear to be most influential on these scores. We further explore the relationship between research rating and TQA scores through analysis of both sets of scores for a number of individual cognate areas. Our analysis leads us to question the value of the 'evidence' which TQA provided on teaching quality and on which both funding and major policy decisions were made.

Reforming Higher Education

The 1992 Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act, and its equivalents in England and Wales, and Northern Ireland, followed discussions of a Government White Paper, *Higher Education - A New Framework (1991),* in which proposals were put to reform the structure of higher education provision in the United Kingdom (Roper and Booth, 1992).

The main features of these proposals were :

- the introduction of a *single funding structure* for universities and colleges of higher education;
- the allocation to *higher education funding councils* of the power to distribute public funds for both teaching and research;
- the extension of degree-awarding powers to major institutions and the *winding up of the CNAA*, which previously validated many of the degrees on offer in colleges, central institutions and polytechnics;
- the *extension of the title 'university'* to those polytechnics and central institutions which wished to use it and, provided certain criteria were met, to other major institutions;
- the external scrutiny of the quality control arrangements of UK higher education institutions by a *UK-wide Quality Audit Unit*, developed essentially by the institutions themselves;
- the introduction of *Quality Assessment Units* within each Funding Council to advise on relative quality across the institutions; and
- co-operation among the Funding Councils of England, Wales and Scotland to maintain a *common approach to quality assessment.*

A single tier of higher education institutions was envisaged, with the 'binary line' between former polytechnics and existing universities being abolished. This was assumed to lead the way to increased student numbers in higher education and to a widening of access. This widening of access was, as subsequent years demonstrated, not to be matched by additional funding. At the heart of the Government's policy was a desire for greater 'cost-effectiveness' in higher education (Yorke, 1992).

Unsurprisingly, the proposals received considerable criticism from those who believed that the quality of education which a student could expect to receive would suffer as a consequence of the reduction in unit funding implicit in the Government's plans (Harris, 1992). We briefly review the criticisms most relevant to our own analysis.

Commenting on the White Paper, Cantor and Bryman (1992) concluded that it could be read as one more phase in the Government's quest to enhance efficiency in public sector organisations, through the introduction of models drawn from the commercial sector. Cantor and Bryman predicted that increased student numbers would lead to pressure on accommodation and on style of teaching (i.e. fewer tutorials); that the 'distinctive missions' of polytechnics and universities would come closer together; and that the traditional autonomy of the 'old' universities, regarding teaching would be eroded. These predictions have largely been realised as the 'old' and 'new' universities struggle to cope with greater numbers of students, leading to larger class sizes, and with the formal assessment of teaching quality now carried out by external bodies.

Cantor and Bryman's concerns were echoed by Bines (1992) who feared that the Government had given little attention to what a 'mass' higher education would actually mean in terms of system delivery. Bines expressed concern at the Government's apparent belief in the efficiency, and desirability, of the 'corporate culture' as a model for educational management. 'Corporate culture' can, however, be interpreted in different ways. Bines' concerns may have centred on a corporate culture which derives from a market model, with institutions in direct and obvious competition with one another - utilising quality judgements and league tables in their battle for supremacy. An alternative interpretation exists in the context of a TQM approach, where the corporate culture advocates teamwork and promotes the idea of continuous improvement as the key to success. We return to the question as to whether higher education institutions may benefit from the incorporation of certain aspects of corporate culture, later in this thesis.

The abolition of the binary line created 'new' universities from the former polytechnics and a substantial increase in the number of university students.

Free from the scrutiny of the CNAA, which had been responsible for overseeing quality in the polytechnic sector, the Government saw the opportunity for the introduction of a new system of quality assurance; one which could be applied to both the existing and the new higher education institutions. In this way, the established universities might be brought into line with government policy. Their autonomy would be reduced and their accountability to the Government, and the public at large, increased. There would no longer be two funding bodies - one for the polytechnic sector and one for universities - and both funding and quality assurance matters were to be regulated for the sector as a whole. However, institutional audit and teaching quality assessment were retained as two separate processes.

Both Elton (1992) and Yorke (1992) questioned the need for separate Quality Audit and Quality Assessment units. Yorke commented that it seemed illogical to separate a quality audit system from what was intended as a quality inspection process. He foresaw duplication of effort and an increased burden on institutions, already under severe pressure to provide information to a variety of external agencies. Yorke's views appear now to have been vindicated, as experience over the period 1993 to 1997 led the Government to call for a major review of higher education and to the formation of a single Quality Assurance Agency (the QAA), which came into effect in 1998.

Before examining these developments more closely, we will briefly explore the values that have stood behind the SHEFC TQAs' and how these differ from the quality audits of the HEQC. In order to address the issue of underlying values, we will examine some key aspects of the 1992 Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act and the missions of both SHEFC and the HEQC.

The Scottish Higher Education Funding Council

Section 37(1) of the 1992 Act established the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC), whose members were to be appointed by the Secretary of State and which would include not only those responsible for the provision of, or currently engaged in providing, higher education but also persons with an industrial, commercial or financial background, or from another profession. The

envisaged membership structure demonstrated the Government's commitment to involving business people, and other professionals, in the operation of public sector organisations. Educational matters were not to be left solely to educationalists. The wider experience of the business sector would be brought to bear on higher education institutions, as part of measures to ensure that they utilised public funding effectively and could be seen to be publicly accountable.

Within the academic community, there were concerns about the appointment of 'non-educationalists' to such Councils. Some academics argued that only professional educationalists or educational administrators had sufficient knowledge and experience to effectively carry out the duty of administering funds for the provision of higher education and the funding of research. An alternative view is that Higher Education establishments have similar problems to any other large business enterprise and that the expertise of industrialists, or those involved in the financial or commercial sectors, should be tapped. Such persons, it has been argued, can bring a fresh view to the Council and help relate the work currently undertaken in higher education to the 'real world' of work. Since all Council members are appointed by the Government and accountable to the Secretary of State, however, it may be difficult to envisage their making recommendations on higher education which are contrary to current Government policy. Thus this constituency may favour increased funding of HE from private sources, including partial self-funding by students, and decreasing reliance on funding by Government.

SHEFC's mission was to promote and encourage the expansion of teaching and research in Scottish higher education institutions through the efficient and effective use of public funds allocated by the Secretary of State for Scotland to support these activities. The Council was charged with the responsibility of ensuring that provision was made for the assessment of quality in higher education and of establishing a Quality Assessment Committee, which would give it advice in this respect. This Committee would largely be made up of persons currently engaged in higher education, and any members of the Council who served on it would be in the minority. It should be noted that the Committee's remit was to 'give advice' to the Council and that the Council itself

did not require to carry out quality assessments but merely 'secure that provision is made' for such activities.

In addition to their remit on the assessment of teaching quality, the Council was made responsible for the administration of funds to the higher education sector. The provision of funds for education and research were at the discretion of the Government, via the Secretary of State for Scotland, and the Council's role was therefore to be one of disbursement to institutions. At the same time, institutions were to be encouraged to seek funds from other, non-governmental, sources, as outlined in *Section 41(2)* of the Act:

> In exercising their functions in relation to the provision of financial support for activities eligible for funding ... the Council shall have regard to the desirability of not discouraging any institution for whose activities financial support is provided under that section from maintaining or developing its funding from other sources.

This exemplified both the previous, and the current, Government's aim to reduce the financial dependency of higher education institutions on the public purse through a combination of reduced funding and encouragement to seek support from the private sector. These measures stood in close parallel with similar initiatives in the housing, transport and health sectors, and were exemplified in the Government's encouragement to public sector organisations to utilise the Private Finance Initiatives (PFI), which some universities have now used to support their estates' strategies.

These policies diverge from the traditional attitude towards higher education in Scotland, which embraces the principle that post-school education should be freely accessed by all students capable of benefiting from it, regardless of ability to pay and which has been a major issue for the new Scottish Parliament. At its root, this view sees higher education as a benefit, not only for the individual student, but also for society as a whole.

Section 43(1) of the Act further tasks the Council with providing information or advice to the Secretary of State on matters of higher education. This would

appear to put the Council in a difficult situation. On the one hand, as the Funding Body of the Scottish higher education institutions, it might be expected to argue the institutions' case for additional resourcing. Such arguments may become increasingly difficult, in times of budgetary constraint. On the other hand, as a 'Quango' it depends for its very existence on the government and may not wish to 'rock the boat' too much.

The 1992 Act created a new framework for post-school education in Scotland. It established mechanisms for funding and for quality assessment of teaching and research. The wider issues, which the Act embraced, were to be taken up separately by the academic community. These were manifested in the *MacFarlane Report (1992)* into teaching and learning in an expanding higher education system and the *Irvine Report (1993)* into the division of the academic year, which were produced by working parties of the Committee of Scottish Higher Education Principals.

The stated objectives of the Council included promoting healthy competition among institutions by being transparent in its funding decisions. In this respect, the Council sought also to improve the availability of information about the quality of teaching and research in the Scottish institutions, i.e. to disseminate examples of 'good practice'. Secondly, within the broad framework of Government policy, the Council sought to balance the need for accountability for the effective use of public funds, with a recognition of institutional autonomy.

These positive, proactive statements have, however, to be considered in the light of some of the changes which have taken place in the higher education sector during the past decade. The number of students attending HEIs has increased substantially, and the backgrounds from which they come to higher education are more diverse than ever before. These issues were highlighted in the *MacFarlane Report*, which stated that effective and efficient support of the learning process was the key to the maintenance of high quality, and the containment of costs, in an expanding higher education sector. The MacFarlane committee recommended the increased use of information technology as a means of dealing with greater student numbers, in a cost-effective way. The Report also identified

a new set of Government expectations, including the need to ensure that higher education served the UK economy more effectively. The search for increasing efficiency was complimented by a concern for standards and excellence. This view sat very comfortably with the Government's drive for vocationally relevant programmes of study, which would be of benefit to the country's economy, and for efficiency and accountability.

In fact, both the SHEFC mission statement and the *MacFarlane Report* brought the element of 'accountability' sharply into focus. The Teaching Quality Assessments were intended not only to enhance the quality of teaching and learning but also to provide evidence that the public taxpayer was receiving 'value for money'. This evidence was to be largely in the form of the performance indicators previously discussed.

It is difficult to argue against the idea of 'accountability' for public funds. It is no less than a reasonable person might expect. However, judgements have to be made about what constitutes effective spending and whether such decisions support Government policy, for example on increased part-time participation rates or wider access. In the higher education marketplace, assessment results are used to 'promote healthy competition' and it is therefore not surprising that they have been used in the promotional materials of some institutions.

As part of its statutory responsibilities, the Council is obliged to make provision for the assessment of teaching and learning and to utilise the outcomes when determining funding for institutions. It is this link with funding which, as we have seen in Chapter 3, gives some academics cause for concern (Elton, 1992; Neave, 1994). However, SHEFC's view is that TQA not only informs funding decisions but is also useful in providing potential students, employers and other interested parties with information on the quality of teaching and learning on offer within particular subject areas. In their first annual report, covering the period 1993-94, SHEFC stated that their principal objectives, with regard to quality assessment of teaching and learning, were to disseminate information on good practice; encourage improvements in quality and promote innovation in

curriculum, teaching and student assessment. The extent to which Scottish university personnel agree with this view will be explored in Chapters 5 and 6.

While the exact style of TQA varied between the four UK Funding Councils, they all encompassed common elements, including institutional or departmental self-assessment, the production of a self-assessment document and a visit by a team of academic peers (Gordon and Partington, 1993). In Scotland, assessments were organised by 'cognate area', which meant that all teaching provision within a subject discipline, like mathematics or history, in all HEIs, was examined within a short timeframe, and a report on overall provision in that cognate area produced by the visiting assessors. The majority of the assessors were nominated by the Scottish higher education institutions themselves, however SHEFC also included a significant proportion - 23% in session 1995-96 - from institutions outside of Scotland, in order to bring a degree of independence into the process (SHEFC, 1997),

Teaching quality assessments were undertaken on a six-year rolling programme. The first cycle of assessments was completed in the 1997-98 academic year and an analysis of the results is discussed later in this chapter. The key features which characterised SHEFC's approach to the assessment of quality of provision in higher education were:

- *Cognate areas* - assessments are carried out at the level of subjects or disciplines, and central services (such as libraries and student support) are assessed in the context of the needs of students who are enrolled on courses in that discipline;
- *Peer review* - assessment is carried out primarily by fellow academics within the same discipline, mainly drawn from other Scottish institutions which are being assessed in the same cycle;
- *Self-assessment* - each institution is asked to give its own account of the quality of provision, in the context of the specific goals and aims of that institution. Quality is then assessed against the institution's own stated goals, and not against some arbitrary or externally-imposed standard;

- *Quality Framework* - this is a set of guidelines which provides an operational definition of quality. It is normally based on eleven aspects of provision (such as Curriculum Design, Learning Resources, and Assessment) which are generic and applicable to all subject areas. The use of a common framework helps to ensure consistency and transparency in the process of quality assessment;
- *Four Point Scale* - the quality of provision is determined to be either Excellent, Highly Satisfactory, Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory. These gradings are defined in terms of the distribution of gradings throughout the quality framework. In the first round of TQA, a three point scale was used. This was amended from 1993/94 onwards;
- *Published Reports* - once assessment of a cognate area is completed, a set of reports is published which describe the provision at each institution. These reports are addressed to a wide public audience (potential applicants, employers, etc.) and distributed to each school in Scotland. A separate, confidential note is sent to the Principal of each institution to provide more detailed information on the findings of the assessment team.

Each institution involved in the assessment process initially submitted a self-evaluation document. This was followed by a visit from independent assessors who observed the quality of teaching in classrooms, workshops and laboratories. These assessors, who came from the UK higher education institutions, industry and commerce, also interviewed staff and students, visited support facilities (libraries, refectories, etc.) and looked at student work. The assessors' conclusions were then considered by the Quality Assessment Committee and a report, containing recommendations for improvement and scores for each aspect under consideration, prepared for Council.

Those involved in TQA are typically confident about its benefits. Commenting on the publication of Quality Assessment Reports in 1995, Dr Chris Masters, Chairman of the Council's Quality Assessment Committee, said 'the information is, I believe, of great value to students in helping them to make better-informed choices and to institutions in helping them in the process of continuous

improvement' (SHEFC Press Release, 15 May 1995). However, we have reason to question the extent to which this statement is true. In Scotland, the over-riding factor in student choice of university appears to be location. The majority of students elect to study in a university close to home and many continue to live at home for the duration of their studies. Only Edinburgh and St Andrews' universities have more non-Scottish students than home students. If location is the first factor in student choice, established institutional reputation is possibly the next most influential. In our analysis of those factors which influenced TQA scores, age of institution and research reputation were highly significant in this choice. The extent to which senior personnel in the Scottish universities accept Dr Masters' view that TQA has assisted institutions in their process of continuous improvement, is investigated in our research interviews and discussed further in Chapter 5.

In a review of the operational and administrative arrangements for the 1993-94 round of quality assessments, a number of issues were raised both by assessors and by institutions. One of these focused on the differences in expectation between the assessment team and the institution being visited. The differences appeared to evolve from the assessment team's concentration on the summative purposes of assessment as opposed to the institution's concern with formative aspects which could then be fed into improvements in quality. So, while the institution engaged in the process of TQA, with a view to learning from assessment, and enhancing the quality of its provision, what it encountered was a judgemental process. Based on the first four years of the assessment cycle, a 1996 study found that the TQA process was largely perceived, by those assessed, to be summative (Sharp, Munn and Paterson, 1997). Where the reports identified areas as requiring action, there was little comment as to what action might be an appropriate remedy - either in the main public report or in the confidential 'further points', which only the institution received. These findings are supported in comments made by our interviewees, where the usefulness of the reports was seriously questioned. If the TQAs were not effectively performing their task of aiding continuous improvement of quality, this raises doubts about the real purpose of TQA, and its impact.

SHEFC's view was that, while the core outcome of the process was a summative judgment on a four-point scale, 'both the published report and the further points confidential to the institution, serve the purposes of formative assessment and have as their ultimate goal, quality improvement' (SHEFC Circular Letter No. 12/95). Respondents to the survey by Sharp, Munn and Paterson (1997), which questioned both assessors and assessed, showed that they were not confident that a different group of assessors, using the same criteria, would have come to the same judgment about teaching quality. If this result were true, it would cast considerable doubt on the value of the reports.

In the Annual Report for 1994-95, the second report of SHEFC's Quality Assessment Committee, Jim Donaldson, Director of Teaching and Learning, stated that the promulgation of good practice in teaching and learning was a high priority. To this end, SHEFC created an integrated Teaching and Learning Directorate with branches devoted to quality assessment and academic policy, the latter of which has taken forward funded initiatives based on findings in the quality assessment reports.

Donaldson, however, highlighted a major mismatch between the institutions' views on the quality of their academic provision and that of the assessors. He suggested that more critical self-analysis was required and that this should take place within existing institutional quality assurance structures, before a submission is made to SHEFC. However, with a judgmental component and the linking of quality to funding, institutions have tended to 'talk up' their achievements. If they do not profess themselves to be 'Excellent' how can they expect the assessors to do so and without an 'Excellent' rating there is no financial reward to be gained. Honesty in a self-assessment is an ideal but perhaps not a pragmatic approach.

One means by which quality can be improvement is by addressing the confidential 'further points', which are produced for each institution. This section of the TQA report gives more detail on why particular judgements were made in the main published report, and can be used as the basis for quality enhancement. In addition, the reports on particular disciplines enable the

identification of strengths and weaknesses across the cognate area as a whole. This may create further opportunities to learn from 'good practice' elsewhere. Nonetheless, the study carried out by Sharp, Munn and Paterson (1997) found that many of the staff involved in TQA felt that, where weaknesses were identified in individual reports, little guidance was given on what course of action could be taken to improve the situation. For the time and effort spent on TQA, the benefits in terms of quality enhancement appear to be inadequate The extent to which dissemination of good practice took place within individual Scottish institutions is explored in Chapter 5.

As concerns continuous quality improvement, Sharp *et al* commented favourably on certain developments, such as group-based learning and the development of broad transferable skills. However, two areas of weakness were identified. These were firstly, the extent to which broad transferable skills were reflected generally in the curriculum and secondly, the extent to which staff development truly incorporated concern for quality in teaching and learning. This latter point was based on the assessors' views that few staff appeared to avail themselves of the opportunity to take part in staff development activities on teaching and learning and that this was an aspect which required attention across the higher education sector as a whole. In our research interviews, we explored what measures universities had taken for the induction for new staff in teaching and learning; for the continuing professional development of academics; and for the accreditation of teaching qualifications in the tertiary sector. The extent to which the assessors' views, outlined by Sharp *et al*, are supported by the findings from our research interviews is discussed in Chapter 5.

In addition to their responsibilities vis-à-vis the quality of teaching and learning SHEFC, through its Research Funding and Policy Branch, is responsible for the Scottish element of the UK Research Assessment Exercise. The RAE assesses the quality of research in universities and colleges in the UK and takes place every four to five years. The last exercise was in 1996 and the next takes place in 2001. Around £5 billion of research funds will be distributed in the UK in response to the results of the 2001 RAE (http://www.rae.ac.uk). In Scotland, the Branch advises the Funding Council on the distribution of research resources to

the Scottish higher education institutions. It is also responsible for research related, pump-priming, strategic programmes (http://www.shefc.ac.uk).

As discussed in Chapter 2, it was not our original intention to focus on the outcomes of the RAE. However, the results of our interviews with key personnel in the Scottish universities demonstrated a widespread perception that the influence of the RAE had been extremely strong and had created tensions between the activities of teaching and research, with the latter being more highly rewarded than the former. Later in this chapter, we will explore the relationship between high scores in the TQA and high scores in the RAE across institutions, and within individual cognate areas. In Chapter 6, we will follow this up with an exploration of the differential level of rewards available for excellence in each of these aspects.

Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC)

Like the Funding Councils, the HEQC was also established in 1992. However, unlike the Councils, its funding came not from the Government direct but from subscriptions paid by universities and colleges of higher education in the United Kingdom. HEQC was not therefore a 'quango' but a private company, limited by guarantee, with offices in London, Birmingham and Glasgow. HEQC'S mission was to :

> Contribute to the maintenance and improvement of quality, at all levels, in institutions of higher education in the United Kingdom. HEQC seeks to promote public confidence in the standing and quality of the universities and colleges and the programmes and awards they offer, thereby *protecting institutions' autonomy in setting and maintaining academic standards.* (HEQC, 1994a)

The organisation viewed its primary role as one of providing services for all universities and colleges of higher education. It had three principal tasks : to engage in *quality assurance*, including the regular auditing of the ways in which institutions discharge their responsibilities for standards and quality; to provide

quality enhancement, including the dissemination of good practice; and to act as a national voice on quality issues in higher education. To act, that is, as the voice of the higher education sector, with the aim of *protecting institutions' autonomy.* In this respect, the funders of HEQC hoped to retain some control over the determination of their quality assurance procedures and to avoid increasing government, or quasi-government, intervention.

Within HEQC there were two groups, one of which focused on quality assurance issues and the other on quality enhancement. The Quality Assurance Group was responsible for scrutinising each institution's quality assurance mechanisms, in order to ensure public accountability for the maintenance and improvement of academic quality and standards. It undertook this duty by carrying out regular *audits* of the procedures by which institutions controlled the quality of the academic programmes which they delivered. This responsibility also related to collaborative arrangements with associated institutions, at home and overseas.

The quality audit consisted of three parts: the provision of briefing documentation which described the quality assurance structures and procedures in the institution; a visit by a small group of experienced auditors; and a subsequent report. The auditors scrutinised quality assurance procedures used in relation to:

- design, monitoring and evaluation of courses and degree programmes;
- teaching, learning and communications methods;
- student assessment and degree classification;
- academic staff;
- verification and feedback mechanisms;
- promotional materials.

An outline 'checklist' of headings and associated lines of enquiry for the audit team was contained in *Part II* of *Notes for the Guidance of Auditors (March 1995). Section IV* of these guidance notes related specifically to *Teaching, Learning and the Student Experience.* It included sections on how quality in teaching, and in students' learning, was identified and the initiating, evaluating and monitoring of equal opportunity in teaching and learning. Related sections

concerned evaluation of the monitoring procedures which were in place to judge the effectiveness of teaching and learning and the action taken to maintain and enhance quality, as well as the means for identifying and disseminating good practice. In other words, within the stated procedures, the HEQC auditors were encouraged to look for feedback loops, i.e. evidence that issues identified through the quality monitoring exercises were being dealt with and that quality was being enhanced. Like the Funding Councils, HEQC's stated aim was to assist the dissemination of good practice throughout the higher education sector.

The HEQC reports had both formative and judgmental elements, but unlike the Funding Council's TQAs did not proffer categorical judgments of the 'satisfactory / unsatisfactory' type (HEQC, 1994a). Instead, HEQC auditors took, as their starting point, the institution's own aims and objectives and attempted to assess how effectively the institution was meeting its stated mission (Buckingham, 1994). Audit reports included a description of the quality assurance processes in place and the auditors' perceptions of their effectiveness. They also highlighted areas of good practice and made suggestions for improvement. Reports were published and widely disseminated and a response on the actions, taken on the reports, was required from institutions.

The second group, focussing on quality enhancement, took the audit process one step further by undertaking activities which facilitated the sharing of good practice between institutions. The Quality Enhancement Group's aim was to facilitate the enhancement of the overall quality of educational provision in the UK. Their functions included gathering, evaluating and publishing information on quality assurance and its practice, for example the reports based on audits and collaborative audits. The Group also undertook and commissioned projects, reports, conferences and workshops; networked with individual institutions and staff engaged in the development of quality; and collaborated with other organisations committed to the advancement of quality and standards. A key function was to contribute, at both national and international levels, to the development of policy on quality in higher education.

The Quality Enhancement Group's initial output was the first edition of the HEQC's *Guidelines on Quality Assurance* (1994); followed by *Learning from Audit* (1994) and *Learning from Audit 2* (1996). Their areas of interest included the role of subject-based groups in establishing and assuring standards; standards-related issues in programme review and validation; academic standards and degree classification, and academic standards in modular programmes. With both the Funding Councils and HEQC demonstrating an interest in quality issues relating to teaching and learning, it was inevitable that some confusion would arise as to their exact remits, with concerns being raised that these dual processes of quality assurance and audit were leading to duplicated effort on the part of the institutions and departments under scrutiny.

In an attempt to clarify the respective responsibilities of each body in the Scottish higher education sector, SHEFC and HEQC published a *Joint Statement on Quality Assessment and Quality Audit (June 1994).* Referring back to the 1991 White Paper, *Higher Education - A New Framework,* a distinction was drawn between quality audit and quality assessment. Quality 'audit' was the designated task of the HEQC and was intended to provide the external scrutiny which would guarantee that institutions had suitable quality control mechanisms in place. Quality 'assessment', on the other hand, was the responsibility of the quality assessment units established within the Funding Councils and involved external review of, and judgements about, the quality of teaching and learning within institutions.

Since both audit and assessment were designed to reinforce an institution's own internal quality assurance processes, a central element was to be the institutional *self-assessment.* These self-assessments did, however, have their own focus. In a quality audit, the principal concern was described as follows:

> The mechanisms and structures used by individual institutions to monitor, assure, promote and enhance their academic quality and standards, in the light of their stated aims and objectives...
> (quality audit) is *not concerned with the details of individual courses*, programmes or awards, but rather how institutions satisfy and assure

> themselves about the standards and quality of the courses, programmes and awards they offer. (SHEFC / HEQC, 1994, p2)

While an HEQC audit was concerned with overall mechanisms by which an institution assured the quality of its provision, a SHEFC teaching quality assessment focused on particular subject (or 'cognate') areas. Each self-assessment was expected to examine the breadth, and depth, of the student learning experience and student achievement in the cognate area, within the context of the institution's own aims and objectives. The emphasis was on quality assurance, and enhancement, within the individual courses or programmes. Yet, such quality would obviously be influenced by the existence of institutional procedures for assuring the same. The resulting overlap between quality audit and teaching quality assessment, and the increased workload for institutional staff, was widely criticised (Yorke, 1994).

To avoid unnecessary duplication, SHEFC and HEQC tried where possible to use material prepared for the other's purposes - as well as information which the institution may have prepared for its own internal quality assurance procedures. The two bodies also exchanged copies of their institutional and cognate area reports. From the start of the TQAs in 1992, the costs of these dual exercises were considered by many to outweigh the benefits to higher education, and calls were made for a single agency to be given overall control of quality matters (Wagner, 1993). After several years' operation, a review of the quality assurance and audit procedures in higher education finally led to the establishment, in 1998, of a single body - the Quality Assurance Agency - which deals with both subject area assessment and institutional quality assurance procedures. In Chapter 8, we will explore some of the differences in the new QAA methodology and examine whether this takes us closer to, or further away from, a Total Quality Management approach to the enhancement of quality in higher education.

Despite the criticisms which surrounded the operation of these two quality watchdogs, the HEQC did make efforts to fulfil its aim of allowing a system-wide perspective to be derived from the audits, and of helping institutions to

develop, improve and enhance the quality of their provision through the dissemination of information. In 1994, the HEQC published *Learning from Audit (LfA)*, a report based on 69 academic quality reports carried out between April 1991 and April 1994 by the organisation itself, and its predecessor, the CVCP Academic Audit Unit. The information on which *LfA* was based came primarily from the older universities, with only 5 of the 69 reports coming from post-1992 universities. What the auditors found was a great diversity of practice in the higher education sector. While the post-1992 institutions, which previously functioned under CNAA requirements, were seeking to revise their systems, making them less rigid but still effective, the 'old' universities were having to put procedures in place which had not previously existed.

Concerning availability and distribution of resources, the HEQC report noted that:

> In some critical areas, such as teaching innovation, staff development and training, and assessment methods, the money and, especially, the time which are needed to encourage new and better ways of doing things have not been forthcoming. This state of affairs is made more difficult by the continuing *dominance of a research culture* in higher education, which the audit reports frequently comment upon, that gives much *greater status and reward to research than to teaching excellence.*
>
> (HEQC, 1994b, p.*x*)

This issue was also highlighted in a subsequent report, *Learning from Audit 2,* and will be addressed later in this chapter.

Since the quality audit was concerned not only with accountability, but also with development, HEQC required institutions to report on what had been done with the report - one year on. The responses showed that institutions had given serious attention to the points raised in their audit reports and that, as a result, they had carried out changes in their systems and procedures. Some institutions argued that such changes had come about independently of the audit's findings and HEQC particularly welcomed such a response. Indeed, HEQC asserted that while audit and assessment were about quality, quality was not about audit and

assessment. In other words, while for some institutions the HEQC audit may not have been the direct reason for change, it undoubtedly had had an influence in 'getting the wheels moving, and generally moving in the right direction' (HEQC, 1994b, p.*xi*)

The *Learning from Audit* report re-emphasised the fact that audits did not examine the quality of teaching and learning in an individual subject or classroom, and that this was the remit of the Funding Councils' TQAs. The purpose of audit was to examine the *structures* which an institution had in place to monitor teaching and learning quality and the performance of students, as well as how students were informed about their own performance. This remit also included the quality of student placements and the ways in which good practice was shared within the institution.

The audit teams found that, in most universities, responsibility lay at the departmental level but that there were unacceptable inconsistencies in the practice across departments. These inconsistencies appeared largely due to a lack of central institutional mechanisms which could monitor that all departments were effectively carrying out their responsibilities and taking action when it was required. This raised major issues about the nature and culture of a university and the relative autonomy of individual members of staff, departments and faculties within a single institution. The question of whether, and how, quality can be 'managed' within higher education institutions is explored further in Chapter 7.

One finding of the HEQC report concerned the lack of formal mechanisms to disseminate innovative practice. Some universities had tried to overcome this lack of dissemination by using booklets and seminars, or by designating a senior member of the university management as leader in the development of quality of teaching or creating specialist units to work on innovation. Our findings support the view that dissemination was, at best, 'patchy' and could be more accurately described as 'poor'.

In 1996, HEQC published a second report, *Learning from Audit 2 (LfA 2)*, which examined the 48 audit reports completed between April 1994 and July 1995. This analysis suggested that while significant progress was being made, there were still a number of areas where institutional quality assurance was being challenged, for example in the area of student assessment. The audit teams also found that HEIs continued to be under pressure for resources and noted that this had an implication for the level and quality of student learning and its support. One caveat which the authors of *LfA 2* felt it right to introduce was the fact that the higher education institutions being examined in this round were a much more diverse group than in *LfA 1*, where the majority were pre-1992 universities. This obviously impacted on the ability to draw conclusions about trends which might have developed over the four year period under review.

However, a change did appear to have taken place with regard to the internal quality assurance mechanisms of higher education institutions, as nearly all now had extensive formal systems, where previously this was the exception. In this context, the auditors cautioned against relying on the existence of formal systems as evidence that good quality must exist. They stated that formal systems were not, in themselves, a sufficient response to the challenges facing good quality, and might in some cases actually be deceptively ineffective. The Report went on to conclude that it was always dangerous to assume that the mere *existence* of formal procedures or systems would *per se* guarantee or assure quality, since quality was about *practice* as well as *procedures*. It is to counter the reliance on checking mechanisms - be they internal quality assurance procedures, teaching quality assessments or institutional audits - that we argue for an approach to quality assurance and quality enhancement based on the principles of Total Quality Management. We develop our argument in detail in Chapter 7.

None of the issues highlighted in *LfA 1* had disappeared from the agenda when *LfA 2* was being carried out. Institutions appeared to be under increasing financial pressures and the need to 'do more with less' was impacting on the resources available for teaching and learning. Since there were costs related to assuring quality, institutions were asking themselves whether these costs were too great. Individual academics were also facing the conflicting pressures to

produce prestigious academic research output, while at the same time improve the quality of their teaching. The auditors in *LfA 2* commented that:

> All the big prizes are given for research achievement: high quality teaching and learning continue to receive scant recognition either internally or externally, even though the task of providing it is getting more and more challenging each year. (HEQC, 1996, p.4)

This issue was given major attention by the interviewees in our study. The differential rewards available to both individuals and institutions for excellence in teaching, *vis-a-vis* research, were explicitly stated. Research, and not teaching, was perceived to be the activity which attracted the greatest financial rewards, and resulted in higher status, for both academic staff and their universities. This tension between teaching and research was creating disincentives for participation in the teaching quality assurance agenda and was perceived as discouraging experimentation and innovation in teaching and learning.

Nonetheless, in some institutions, the university's mission statement explicitly addressed teaching and learning. In addition, internal structures included committees and distinct units, whose remit was to develop and enhance the student experience, and to disseminate good practice throughout the institution. Whilst good practice undoubtedly existed at departmental and faculty levels, this was not always shared within the institution and the majority of interviewees in our study agreed that limited dissemination took place within their own institutions. This highlighted the difficulties inherent in devolving responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning to those most closely involved in it, while at the same time keeping some kind of central overview of what was happening and eradicating isolationism. We found that a wide range of methods was being used to overcome this problem, from the development of institutional newsletters on teaching and learning innovations, to organised sessions for sharing methodology.

The HEQC also found that there had been an increase in the extent to which the teaching ability of new staff was assessed before appointment, as well as during the probationary period. In many instances, promotion criteria had been amended to make a more explicit link between excellence in teaching and learning and innovative methods were being rewarded through increased availability of financial resources to departments and individuals. As will be seen in Chapter 6, the results from our interviews do not substantiate these views.

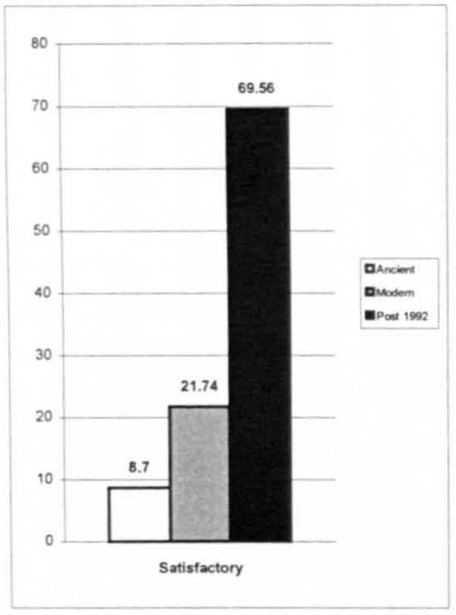
In calling for changes in the new quality assurance framework, the then Chairman of the HEQC called for a system which would respect academic autonomy and diversity (Stoddart, 1995). In this next section, we focus on the actual outcomes of the TQAs carried out between 1993 and 1998 in the thirteen Scottish universities. We explore some of the factors which may have influenced the results, and the extent to which academic diversity played a part in the assessment outcomes.

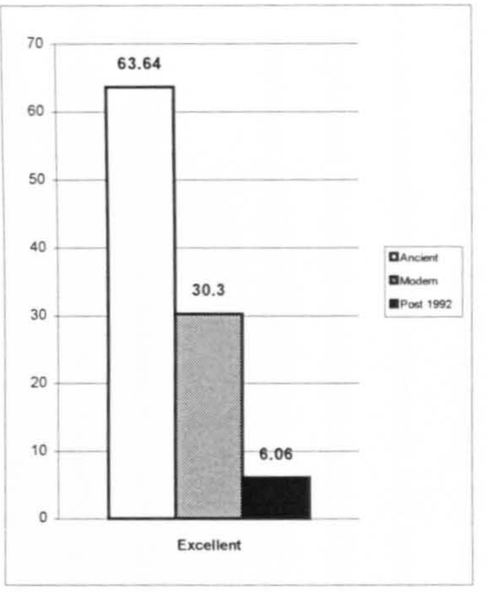
Factors influencing the TQA results in Scotland.

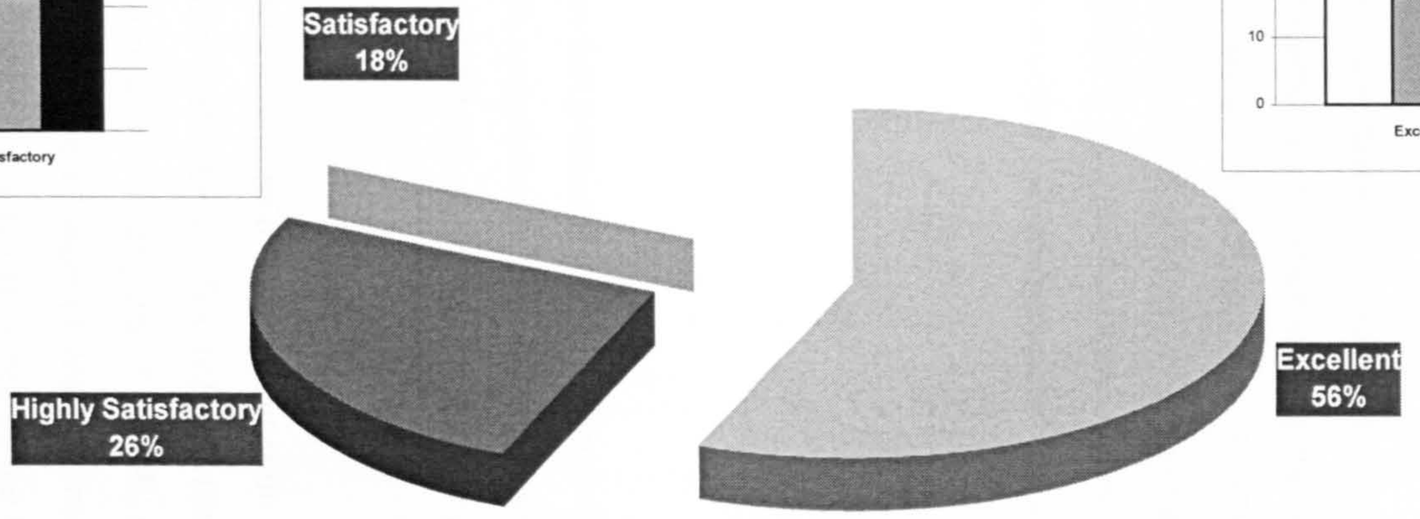
When the teaching quality assessments were introduced in 1992, the new universities, i.e. those arising from the former polytechnic sector, hoped that this would give them an opportunity to demonstrate what they considered they did best – teaching (Drennan, 1999a). Unable to compete with the more established, and better resourced, universities in the research assessment exercise, staff in the post-1992 institutions may have hoped that the TQAs would be their 'revenge'. Their dream of a level playing field on which they could compete, as equals, with the older universities was not, however, to be.

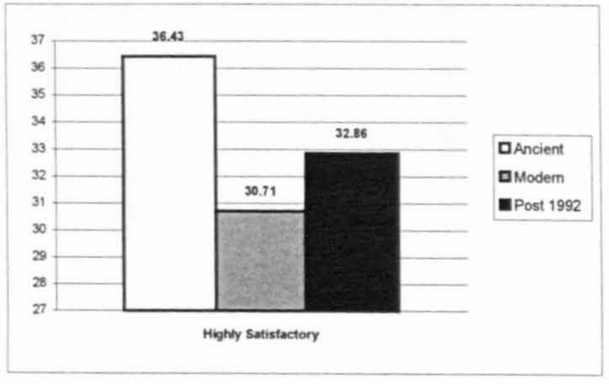
From the first round of the TQAs in 1992/93, it soon became apparent that the older universities were gaining the largest percentage of the higher grades of assessment – 64% of all the outcome ratings deemed 'Excellent' - followed by the modern universities, and with the new institutions trailing in third position. The opposite was true with regard to the lower grade of 'Satisfactory', with the post-1992 universities achieving almost 70% of the total, at this level (See Figure 1).

Figure 1: TQA Awards 1993 - 1998









In this section, we examine the TQA scores for the Scottish universities, in order to identify whether there is a relationship between the age group of the university and its score. However, age of institution may not be the defining factor. Much has been written about the need for research to underpin teaching and there is a body of opinion, which supports the view that there is a strong relationship between excellence in research and excellence in teaching. This proposition will be explored through a comparison of average RAE and TQA scores for institutions and for individual cognate areas.

Teaching Quality Assessments have taken place annually since academic year 1992/93. In that first year of operation, the scale used by the Assessors was on three points: Unsatisfactory, Satisfactory and Excellent. In 1993/94, this was changed to a four point scale, with the inclusion of a Highly Satisfactory banding, and this scale continued to be used until the 1997/98 session. For the purposes of this study, we have coded the assessment ratings as follows:

Excellent	4
Highly Satisfactory	3
Satisfactory	2
Unsatisfactory	1

The data used for this study is that produced by SHEFC in its *Quality Assessment Annual Reports*, following the completion of cognate area assessments, and is based on the five year period (1993-98) during which the four point grading scale was utilised.

While the TQAs applied to all institutions of higher education in the United Kingdom, this study refers only to the thirteen Scottish universities. Scottish higher education is distinct from that in other parts of the UK, as the period of study for the Honours degree is one year longer (4 years instead of 3). This pattern fits the broader approach to education favoured by the Scots and the Scottish 'Higher' qualifications, which are gained in the 5th year of secondary school, as opposed to the English system's 'A-levels', which are taken in the equivalent of a 6th year. In addition, as each of the universities are multi-

disciplinary, they were subject to a number of TQAs across a wide range of cognate areas. The institutions which were excluded from this study were, by contrast, specialist or uni-disciplinary, such as teacher training colleges, art and drama schools.

Unlike the TQAs, the RAE is a UK-wide assessment exercise. The first RAE took place in 1992, when four of the five new Scottish universities had only just come into existence. There was limited involvement in the 1992 RAE by these institutions and it was not until the 1996 RAE that there was sufficient data on which conclusions could be drawn about the performance of each of the thirteen universities. RAE scores range from 1 to 5*. This represents seven discrete numerical steps, which we have coded as follows:

5*	=	7
5	=	6
4	=	5
3a	=	4
3b	=	3
2	=	2
1	=	1

Our analysis focuses on a comparison of the TQA scores, averaged out over the five year period from 1993-98, with the mean RAE scores from the 1996 exercise, representing the quality of research activity over a four-year period from January 1992 to December 1995. In the second part of our investigation we examine this relationship for individual subjects, by looking at RAE scores and TQA scores, in selected cognate areas. The underlying hypothesis of this analysis is that a strong research rating of a university, and/or a subject group within a university, is a predictor of favourable teaching quality assessment outcomes. A verification of this hypothesis would imply that teaching quality outcomes are subject to similar assessment criteria as are those for research assessment. Indeed, it could be hypothesised that the expectations of teaching quality assessors are strongly influenced by their own experiences as active researchers,

as well as the research reputation of the institution or subject group being assessed.

In order to verify the relative contribution of research criteria on teaching assessment outcomes, we explore what factors, other than RAE results, might be influencing the TQA scores. To this purpose we examined the annual *Times Higher Education Supplement* league tables, which were derived from a number of published sources such as the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). In these tables, higher education institutions are assigned scores and ranked under eight headings:

- entry standards (average Higher or A-level points scores);
- student/staff ratio;
- teaching quality (mean of all TQA subject scores);
- research (average RAE score per member of staff);
- library spending (£ per FTE student);
- computer spending (£ per FTE student);
- student and staff facilities (£ per FTE students)
- firsts and upper seconds (as a proportion of all first degree honours graduates);
- graduate destinations (as a proportion of all first degree graduates taking up employment or further study / training)

Our initial analysis examines the relationship between the average TQA scores for the period 1993-98, as dependent variable, to the following independent variables:

(a) a hierarchy of institutions, as measured by the age group to which each belongs;

(b) research quality, as indicated by the mean 1996 RAE scores, for each of the thirteen Scottish universities.

The universities were classified into three age groups - 'ancient', 'modern' and 'post-1992' - with 4, 4 and 5 institutions respectively in each category, as

illustrated by Table 1 in Chapter 1. The rationale for the use of this age ranking is that we would expect reputation to correlate with the relative age of educational institution, with the new post-1992 universities faring least well. If our hypothesis of the importance of reputational effects were true, we would expect to disprove the null hypothesis that the four levels of TQA score are found in equal proportions across the three age groups. In this context we would also expect to identify a more significant variation of TQA scores between age groups, as compared to the within group variation.

The rationale for the inclusion of RAE scores is, as previously stated, that we would expect universities which achieve high RAE scores to also achieve high TQA scores, for a number of reasons. We would therefore expect to disprove the null hypothesis that RAE scores are evenly distributed across the TQA scale, with high scoring RAE universities achieving on average higher TQA scores. Such a finding would be consistent with the previous hypothesis, as post-1992 universities are least likely to have obtained high RAE results.

Whilst our analysis refers to each university as a whole and utilises mean TQA and RAE scores, these averages have been generated on the basis of a large number of individual assessment scores. This should ensure a high degree of robustness of the analysis.

In the first part of this analysis, the independent variable is the age group to which the university belongs (independent variable a). Over the period 1993-98, the ancient universities achieved higher mean TQA scores than the modern universities which, in turn, performed better than the new institutions. The mean TQA scores were:

Ancient	3.30	
Modern	3.15	
Post-1992	2.64	(See Figure 2)

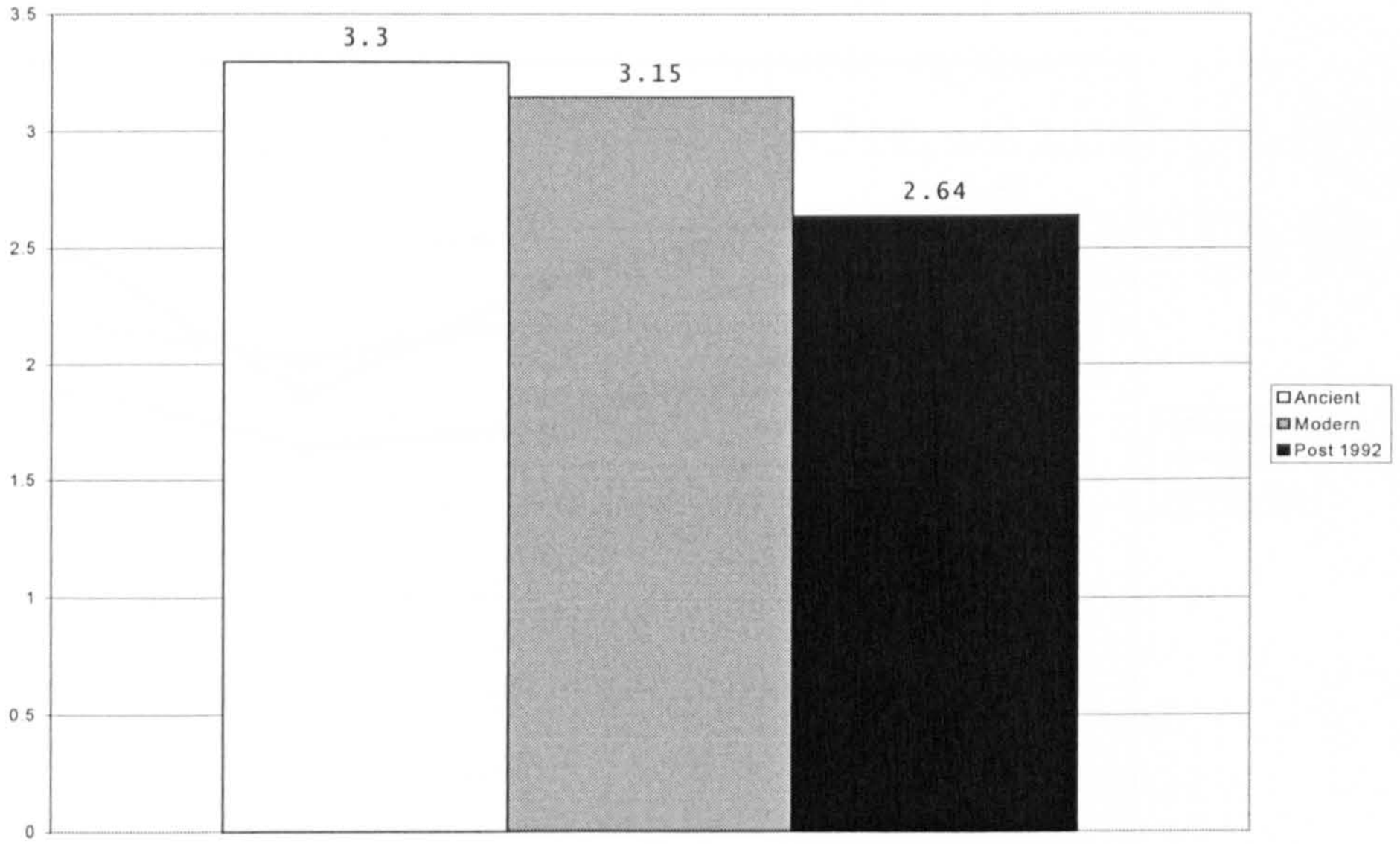


Figure 2: Mean TQA Scores 1993-1998 by Type of University

However, these results were not consistent in each of the five years under consideration (See Figure 3). In 1994/95, the modern universities scored higher than the ancients, achieving a mean TQA score of 2.83, compared to 2.63. This can be explained in terms of the types of subject being assessed in that academic year - subjects such as business and management, building and surveying and consumer studies, which were less likely to be taught in the ancient universities. Only 7 out of the 39 TQAs carried out in 94/95 took place in the ancient establishments, with 13 in the modern and 19 in the new universities.

In the final year of our study, 1997-98, the mean scores for both modern and ancient were again very close, at 3.56 and 3.54 respectively. Once again, the subjects under consideration may have favoured the modern institutions, where two out of three entered in the Psychology TQA achieved an Excellent rating, compared to two out of four from the ancient sector, the remainder receiving a Highly Satisfactory rating.

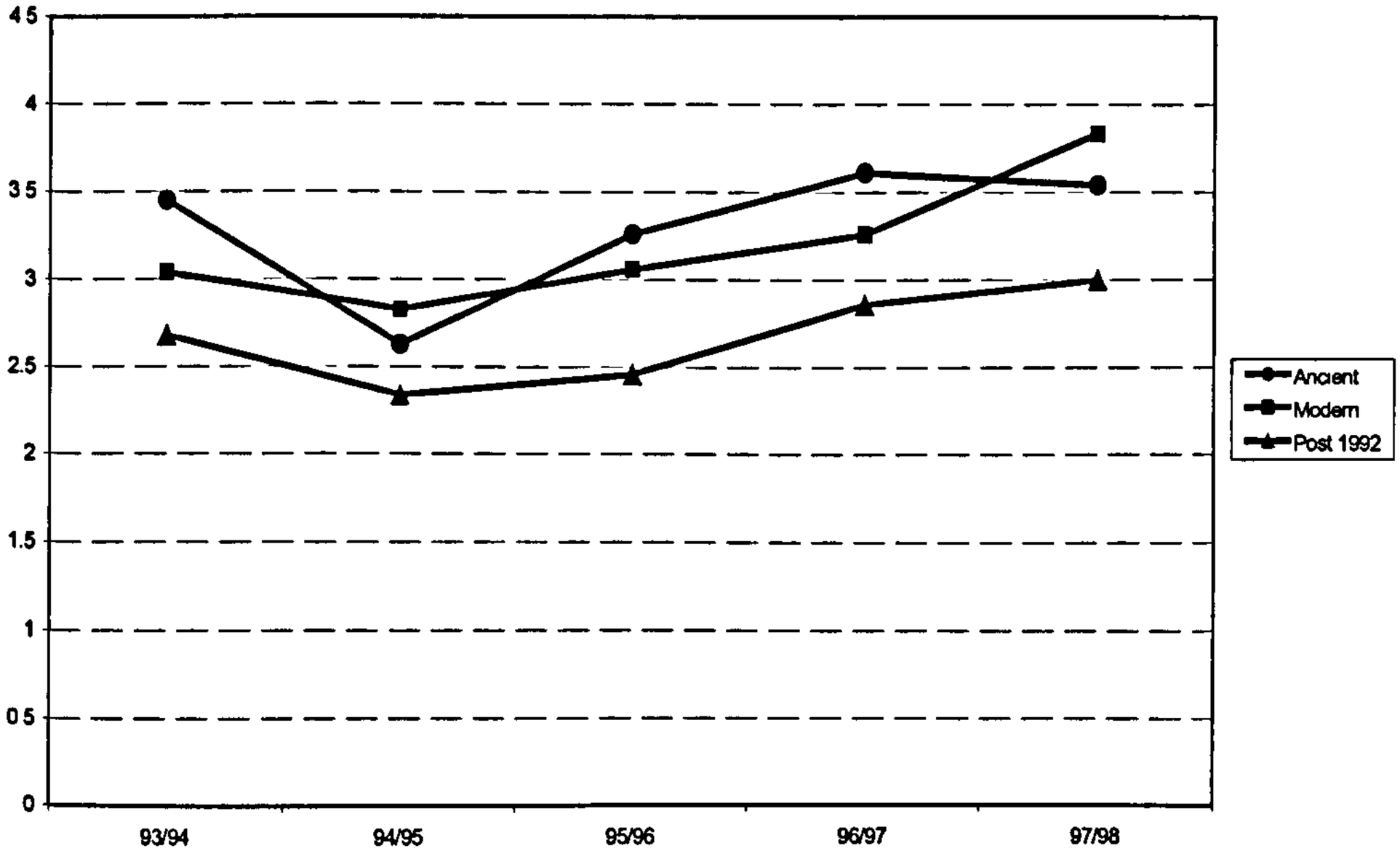


Figure 3: Trends in TQA Scores over the period 1993-1998

The ANOVA test on the mean scores for the period 1993-98 showed the Sum of Squares to be 1.014 Between Groups and 0.424 Within Groups. Age of institution is therefore a significant factor in determining the TQA scores achieved. A Chi-Squared Test applied to the same data confirmed that age of institution was a determining factor of the likelihood of achieving a high TQA score, with a Chi Square of 55.60 at 2 degrees of freedom.

In the second part of this analysis the independent variable is the mean RAE score for the institution in 1996 (independent variable b). We utilise this variable in order to examine the extent to which there may be a relationship between high quality research, and high quality teaching, as evidenced by the mean TQA score. *The Times Higher Education Supplement* of December 1996, recorded both raw mean scores and weighted scores for the RAE. The latter took into account the size of the academic department, with the totals for the institution being added up, then divided by the number of research staff to arrive at a weighted average.

Regressing the mean TQA scores with the raw average RAE scores, we found a significant positive relationship, with over 70% of the variation being explained by the independent variable. When regressing the TQA scores with the weighted RAE scores, the relationship was even stronger. The respective parameters are listed below:

Dependent Variable	AVERAGE ANNUAL TQA SCORE	
Independent Variable	RAW RAE	WEIGHTED RAE
Coefficient (unstandardised)	.248	.178
Significance probability (P)	.000	.000
R Square	.731	.750
Adjusted R-square	.706	.727

As previously discussed, there is a possibility that TQA scores are influenced by a number of factors other than those related to research output. For the purpose of this study, we decided to select three variables from the Times Higher Education League Tables, for the five year period 1994 - 1998 inclusive, and examine their relationship to mean annual TQA scores. These variables included:

(a) the entry standards of students (known as 'entry pointage');

(b) staff-student ratios;

(c) library spend.

(a) The rationale for selecting 'student entry standards' was that students are the major contributors to their own learning experience. When visiting institutions, as part of the TQA inspection, assessors would have contact with students through classroom observation of teaching and learning, and through individual discussion with selected students. One would expect those students who had entered university with high secondary school grades to be more articulate, and perhaps more confident, thereby creating a better impression with the assessors.

Regressing average TQA scores with 'student entry standards' scores yielded a highly significant positive relationship (see table below). Accordingly, over 80% of the variation in TQA scores can be explained on the basis of student entry

grades. The inference we can make here is that the better the student - as measured by mean entry points - the higher the TQA results for the institution will be. This is altogether too simplistic an explanation. An alternative is that high-scoring universities, defined in terms of their teaching and research scores, will attract high pointage entrants. Such institutions will use their individual scores, and their position in the annual league tables, as part of their publicity campaigns, in order to attract the best qualified applicants. They attract students by their overall reputation. This institutional factor demonstrates path dependency. There is no inevitable causality between entry pointage and TQA scores. A multitude of other factors can play a part.

Dependent Variable	AVERAGE ANNUAL TQA SCORE
Independent Variable	STUDENT ENTRY STANDARD
Coefficient (unstandardised)	.060
Significance probability (P)	.000
R Square	.822
Adjusted R-square	.806

(b) In relation to 'staff-student ratios', we expected to find that those institutions with low ratios of staff to students would perform better in the TQA than their more burdened counterparts. The rationale for this is that smaller class sizes allow students to benefit from more individual attention. In the Oxbridge environment, undergraduate students can expect to attend tutorials where they are the sole, or one of only a few students in attendance. At many of the newer universities, tutorials only take place in the Honours year, when the students are carrying out their dissertation work, and the more typical seminars can contain more than 20 students.

Again our regression confirms the expected negative relationship between high staff student ratios and high TQA scores, however, with less significant parameters (see Table below). Thus, staff student ratios can explain only about 37% of the variation in TQA scores. As a predictor of teaching quality, smaller class sizes and more individual contact between student and tutor was not as helpful as either the RAE score of the institution or student entry grades.

Dependent Variable	AVERAGE ANNUAL TQA SCORE
Independent Variable	STAFF STUDENT RATIOS
Coefficient (unstandardised)	-.114
Significance probability (P)	.028
R Square	.369
Adjusted R-square	.312

(c) Resources are a major concern in higher education, with many in the new university sector believing that they are at a disadvantage, compared to the older universities, when the TQA assessors visit their institutions and examine the resources available to support student learning. The ancient universities, in particular, possess library collections, which have been accumulated over many years. They also have considerable income from research, and commercial activities, which can be utilised for library spending, if necessary. We would therefore expect that institutions which were better resourced, as evidenced by the amount of money they were able to spend on library resources per student FTE, would achieve higher TQA scores.

Regressing TQA scores with mean library spend yields a strong positive result, with better resourced institutions achieving higher TQA scores. According to our analysis, over 71% of the variation in TQA scores can be explained by library spending. This a significant result, although the relationship is weaker than the one between student entry pointage and the TQA score. However, it does support some of the findings from interview data that assessors were influenced by the quality and standard of resources available to students within an institution.

Dependent Variable	AVERAGE ANNUAL TQA SCORE
Independent Variable	LIBRARY SPEND PER FTE
Coefficient (unstandardised)	.005
Significance probability (P)	.000
R Square	.714
Adjusted R-square	.688

Relationship between TQA and RAE scores in individual cognate Areas

If excellence in research is a determining factor in obtaining a high TQA score, then we would expect to see this relationship reflected not only in the overall mean scores for an institution but also within individual cognate areas. In the following section, we investigate this relationship within cognate areas in the Scottish universities, where there were published results for both the TQA and the RAE, on which analyses could be carried out.

In this context, our regression analyses present us with mixed results. As illustrated in Table 2 below, the variation in the TQA score, which can be explained by RAE results, ranges from 78% in Physics to only 20% in Accounting. Of a total of 8 regressions, only 4 yielded significant slopes at the .05 level.

Amongst the RAE subject areas which produce the worst predictions of TQA outcomes are Sociology, Accounting, Politics and, lastly, History. Amongst the subject groups, where the RAE score closely predicts TQA outcomes are Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Business and Management. This indicates that universities with poorer RAE scores may have made some inroads in achieving good teaching quality outcomes in the social sciences and in accounting, whereas it has remained difficult to do so in areas such as the physical sciences and, surprisingly, but to a lesser degree, business and management.

Dependent Variable	AVERAGE ANNUAL TQA SCORE		
Independent Variable	ACCOUNTING RAE SCORE		
Coefficient (unstandardised)	.750	R Square	.197
Significance probability (P)	.319	Adjusted R-square	.036
Independent Variable	BIOLOGY RAE SCORE		
Coefficient (unstandardised)	.280*	R Square	.614
Significance probability (P)	.021	Adjusted R-square	.550
Independent Variable	BUSINESS & MGT RAE SCORE		
Coefficient (unstandardised)	.140*	R Square	.420
Significance probability (P)	.031	Adjusted R-square	.356
Independent Variable	CHEMISTRY RAE SCORE		
Coefficient (unstandardised)	.275*	R Square	.634
Significance probability (P)	.018	Adjusted R-square	.572
Independent Variable	HISTORY RAE SCORE		
Coefficient (unstandardised)	1.050	R Square	.350
Significance probability (P)	.162	Adjusted R-square	.220
Independent Variable	PHYSICS RAE SCORE		
Coefficient (unstandardised)	1.860*	R Square	.779
Significance probability (P)	.020	Adjusted R-square	.724
Independent Variable	POLITICS RAE SCORE		
Coefficient (unstandardised)	1.200	R Square	.300
Significance probability (P)	.261	Adjusted R-square	.125
Independent Variable	SOCIOLOGY RAE SCORE		
Coefficient (unstandardised)	1.000	R Square	.273
Significance probability (P)	.478	Adjusted R-square	-.091

* Significant at the 0.5 level (2-tailed)

Table 2 : Relationship between TQA and RAE scores, by Cognate Area

Conclusion

The abolition of the binary line between universities and polytechnics and the widening of access to higher education, accompanied by an increase in overall student numbers, led the Government to seek a mechanism by which quality could be assured. In Scotland, the mechanism was the SHEFC Teaching Quality Assessment. This exercise was intended to be mission-sensitive. In evaluating quality over the eleven aspects of provision, the assessors were expected to do this in relation to the stated aims of each institution. This approach was intended to give the post-1992 universities, which were strongly vocational in orientation and whose mission was largely one of wider access, an opportunity to compete on an even basis with the ancient and modern universities, which were more involved in research activity. Our findings indicate that SHEFC failed in this respect and that assessments confirmed historical patterns.

In parallel with the SHEFC TQAs, which focused on individual cognate areas, audits of institutional quality assurance were conducted by the Higher Education Quality Council. Like the TQAs, these audits were also concerned with the quality of academic delivery and led to worries that this twin process of quality assurance and quality audit was causing undue duplication of effort on the part of the institutions concerned.

Both HEQC and SHEFC sought to encourage the dissemination of good practice in, and to generally improve the availability of information about, teaching and learning in the higher education sector. While these objectives had a developmental thrust, and were intended to facilitate enhancement of the quality of higher educational provision, analysis of our interview data, discussed further in Chapters 5 and 6, indicates that the judgmental nature of the TQAs, and the link between TQA scores and government funding, overshadowed the developmental aspects of the exercise.

In addition to its remit for the assessment of quality in teaching and learning, the Funding Council had a similar remit with regard to the Scottish element of the UK-wide Research Assessment Exercise. Our interest in the RAE lay not in the exercise itself, but in the relationship between institutional performance in

research, as measured by the RAE, and institutional performance in teaching and learning, as measured by the TQAs.

Our analysis, over the five year period from 1993 to 1998, clearly shows that the determining factors in relation to high TQA scores are age of institution and research reputation, and that these two variables are, in turn, strongly related. The older the institution, the more likely they are to achieve a high TQA score. For all institutions, the higher the RAE rating, the higher will be the TQA score. With the older universities scoring highest on the RAE, this reinforces our findings that they also achieve the highest TQA scores.

On investigating some of the factors which may be influencing these results, we found that the standard of student entering the university, as measured by mean entry pointage, was highly significant. The higher the mean pointage, the higher the mean TQA score for the institution. Good students are attracted by universities with strong reputations for high quality teaching and research. Such reputations are established over a long period of time and, in this respect, the post-1992 universities appear to be at a disadvantage.

Another aspect, which may disadvantage the new universities, is the resourcing of libraries. TQA assessors pay particular attention to the level and quality of learning resources available to students, when they visit each university department. Without doubt, the older universities are better able to resource this area, by topping up government funds with income from their research and commercial activities. Our findings show a strong relationship between level of funding and TQA scores.

Within each cognate area, however, there was much more variation in the relationship between RAE and TQA results. Some areas demonstrated a high degree of significance whereas others were not significant at all. These results require further investigation before any suggestions can be made which might explain this level of variability.

It is difficult to view any of these scores as being objective and value-free. Although ostensibly based on independent criteria, the element of peer-review and evaluation inevitably brings a subjective focus into play (Donaldson, 1994). Can assessors from an ancient university really understand and appreciate what a post-1992 institution is trying to do with a wide range of students, including many non-standard candidates? Can assessors from the new sector fail to be impressed by the research reputations and facilities of their colleagues from the ancient universities?

Moreover, the fact that the assessors were, in the main, drawn from academic departments in the ancient and modern universities, and gained their own experience of higher education as students in such institutions, cannot be easily dismissed. In any evaluation, we bring our own values and experience to bear on the judgements we make. Inter-disciplinary areas could feel that subject-based assessors did not understand them. Assessors might give credit to innovation and experimentation or give preference to well-organised programmes, taught in a conventional fashion (Clark, 1997). In the SHEFC Teaching Quality Assessments, the values and experience which were brought to bear were primarily those of the established university sector.

This leaves open the question of what was actually being assessed, when the SHEFC teaching quality assessments were being carried out (Alderman, 1995). The concern is that, in trying to compare apples with pears, judgements have been made which favour one rather than the other, instead of finding a way to value each for what it is, and for what it can offer to a diverse, higher education population. Furthermore, a system in which scoring mechanisms are used and summative judgements play a major part, is one which encourages compliance and discourages experimentation and innovation in teaching and learning. If higher education is to seek a mechanism for continuous quality improvement, then it should look to models which foster a culture in which innovation and change, reflection and improvement are encouraged. This will never be achieved by means of checking mechanisms.

In the following chapters, we examine the perception of senior academic personnel with regard to the impact of the TQAs on the management and development of quality in the Scottish universities. This analysis will rely on elite interviews with senior staff, who have responsibility for quality issues in teaching and learning, and who have themselves participated in the creation and implementation of quality-related policies within their own institutions. We explore issues of institutional quality assurance, learning and teaching staff development and the possible influence of wider managerial initiatives, such as Investors in People, British Standards and TQM. In doing so, we establish that the TQA exercise was less effective in improving the quality of learning and teaching than the government and its funding councils may have hoped. Furthermore, the influence of the parallel exercise, which assessed the quality of research, has created tensions in higher education institutions, which have been detrimental to further developments in learning and teaching.

We conclude that an alternative route to quality enhancement may be of value to higher education institutions who seek to go beyond compliance with assessors' expectations, towards an ethos of continuous improvement in all their activities.

CHAPTER FIVE : THE IMPACT OF TEACHING QUALITY ASSESSMENTS ON THE SCOTTISH UNIVERSITIES

Introduction

In Chapter 4, we noted SHEFC's intention to utilise the TQA exercise for the promulgation of good practice in teaching and learning *(SHEFC Annual Report, 1993-94)*. SHEFC expected that the published reports would serve the purpose of formative assessment of Scottish higher education provision, with quality improvement as its ultimate goal *(SHEFC Circular Letter No. 12/95)*.

In this chapter, we explore the impact of the TQAs on the Scottish universities, as perceived by key personnel with responsibility for the management and/or development of quality in learning and teaching. The questions addressed here are divided into three groups. The first concerns the management of quality.

SHEFC believed that the TQA reports would be influential within institutions. We wished firstly to explore the way in which the TQA exercise, and teaching and learning quality, in general, was managed. This led us to pose a number of questions, including how the TQA reports were used within each institution; what structures were in place with a remit for the management and/or development of quality in teaching and learning; and at the highest level, who had operational responsibility for academic quality matters. We also asked, when particular features were highlighted for praise in a TQA report, how this was disseminated within the university.

The second group of questions concerned the influence of the TQA on staff development policy. If the TQAs were to achieve their aim of quality enhancement, one would expect to find changes in the staff development policies of the universities, with an increasing emphasis on the development of teaching and learning. The specific questions investigated in this study include whether the TQAs have influenced staff development policies or strategies within individual institutions. In addition, we enquired whether a separate Educational Development or Staff Development department existed, with a remit for the development of skills in the management and delivery of teaching and learning; whether academic staff participated in regular staff development and career

review, or appraisal, and to what extent teaching and learning played a part in this process; and finally, whether the institution had considered aiming for Investor in People registration.

Our third group of questions probed further on the issue of staff development. We believed that if the TQAs were having an impact on the activities of teaching and learning, and highlighting the importance of such activities, within the individual institution, then this would be evidenced by compulsory staff development in this context. We asked the following questions: Is there an induction programme for new lecturing staff and what form does this take? Is there a requirement for existing or experienced staff to participate in staff development relating to teaching and learning? Does the institution offer a postgraduate qualification in teaching and learning and is this a requirement of new staff?

In the following sections, we address our interviewees' responses to these questions.

Managing Quality

At the start of our analysis we questioned the respondents as to how their institutions utilised TQA reports. We sought to elicit information about the reporting lines within each institution. For example, who would normally see the TQA report? What committees scrutinised them? Who was responsible for ensuring that action was taken by the cognate area in response to issues raised by the assessors? To what extent was responsibility for such action devolved to Departments or Faculties and to what extent was it centrally controlled?

Our initial interest was in the process *following* publication of the report. The majority of interviewees, however, chose also to comment on the institution's actions *prior* to publication. The beneficial effect of involving staff, who had acted as assessors in previous TQAs or who had been through the process of TQA themselves, as mentors to those who were approaching this exercise, was mentioned by several of our interviewees. However, the extent to which the institution drove, or managed, the TQA process varied considerably, with the

ancient and modern universities appearing to take a more proactive approach than their newer counterparts. The more established institutions were more likely to have dedicated quality assurance units and staff, within these units or as part of faculty administrative structures, who played a key role in the planning, preparation and response to such visits.

One of the ancient, and one of the modern, universities commented on their procedures for internal review of departments. In the former, this was a process which took place 18 months to two years in advance of the TQA and in the latter was part of a 'rolling review' which was undertaken every few years and often acted as preparation for TQA. By undertaking such internal reviews each institution sought to identify and improve on areas of weakness before an assessment visit.

The importance of gaining feedback at the post-visit meeting and on receiving the draft report, both of which provided an opportunity to clarify errors of fact, was stressed. Several interviewees commented on the lack of 'new' news in the draft reports. A Director of Quality from one of the ancient universities stated :

'We prefer not to be surprised by assessment reports and by-and-large we are not.'

This view was supported by the Head of an Educational Development Unit in a post-1992 institution, who agreed that :

'Many of the issues will not be news to the department.'

The draft reports were seen by the Principals, Vice-Principals, Deans of Faculty or School, Heads of Department and, in some cases, Quality Assurance or Educational Development Departments. This allowed widespread discussion and comment on the content. The language used by some of the interviewees in respect of this part of the process i.e. the transition from draft to final report, was interesting. One spoke of '*negotiating*' in the draft and another of '*influencing*' what happened with the draft.

One Vice Principal admitted that:

'We've negotiated in a draft and one of the key things that we pay attention to ... when we first get (the final report) is whether we've got any changes from draft

to final report, because you never know how many of your proposed changes the Funding Council will actually accept.'

Such statements may infer more to this part of the process than mere correction of errors of fact. Indeed, an interviewee from one of the new universities suggested that considerable pressure was often put on SHEFC by the older universities when a draft report appeared to be unfavourable in certain respects and that major changes were often made to such reports prior to final publication. Rumour and speculation aside, this interviewee reflects a view that the assessment exercise is not 'fair' and objective, but rather can be influenced by 'heavyweight' players in the higher education sector.

Almost all the interviewees discussed the mechanisms in place for extracting generic institutional issues from the TQA reports. In some universities this was carried out by the Quality Assurance unit or the Academic Standards Committee and specific aspects, such as staff development or enhanced computing provision addressed by relevant committees or departments. Several interviewees spoke about improvements in central services, which had been prompted by the TQA reports, and which were subsequently built into the institution's strategic planning.

Follow-up action by departments, to the recommendations in the cognate area reports, and the ways in which these actions were monitored, was less clear. When asked whether departments were required to prepare action plans in response to their TQA, the ancient universities were more likely to take a relaxed approach. A Director of Quality and a Vice Principal, respectively, commented that:

'Because we have not had any negative reports, generally the reports-back have not suggested any earth-shattering changes... where there are criticisms, we would expect those to be addressed.'

'(We have) never felt it necessary, although we have discussed it, to ask people to have a development plan in response to that ... we don't chase the departments. But frankly we don't need to.'

Such responses may be due, in part, to the fact that the ancient universities, as we have seen in our analysis of the TQA results over a number of years, generally achieve high ratings. The senior management in such institutions may find it difficult to promote quality enhancement in an environment where excellence is taken for granted, and where high scores in quality assessment exercises are the norm.

On the other hand, the majority of the modern and new universities expected departments to prepare a written response to the TQA recommendations. This generally took the form of an action plan, which responded to comments made in the report and proposed action arising out of this. Only one interviewee, in a post-1992 university, stated that it was a university *requirement* that a timely response be made. Where annual monitoring of programmes or departments took place, there was an expectation that responses to TQA would be included in these annual reports and, in one such institution, no separate action plans were therefore requested. However, the view was expressed that where the institution did carry out its own internal quality assessments e.g. through departmental review, this was a more effective mechanism for change and improvement than the external TQA report.

The Vice Principal of a modern university said:
'One of the things that departments have to do every year is to put in their academic plan to faculty level ... You are expected to build into that academic plan responses to TQA and that would be checked one year later. I would say that the incentive is the departmental review rather than the academic plan.'

We questioned the extent to which 'lip-service' was paid to these action-plan responses. It is one thing to write action plans and another to see that they are implemented. During the course of the interviews, questions on the monitoring of such activities were raised. A variety of responses suggested that Deans, or faculty committees, or quality assurance units were normally tasked with monitoring the implementation of action plans. The ancient and modern universities appear to operate more devolved structures, with faculties playing a large part in the monitoring and implementation of changes in learning and

teaching. In the post-1992 universities, this process has tended to be more centralised, although three of these new institutions were aiming to devolve more authority to their faculties or schools. This would have the effect of changing the role of central administration to one of auditing rather than control. Faculties or schools would have more flexibility in how they assured quality and a centrally-driven audit would ensure that general guidelines were being applied across the institution.

Responsibility for Quality

The second part of our analysis examined the institutional structures which were in place, with a remit for the management and/or development of quality in teaching and learning and, at the highest level, who had operational responsibility for academic quality matters. We expected that all the universities would have committees dealing with teaching and learning. We moreover expected the HEIs questioned to have assigned responsibility for such matters to a senior manager. Our particular interest was in the extent to which teaching and learning development *per se* was being separated from wider academic standards issues.

In all of the institutions visited, the ultimate responsibility for academic affairs lay with Senate / Academic Council. This, the most senior academic committee in each university, delegated the operational responsibility for managing teaching and learning quality to one of the senior management - usually a Vice-Principal or Deputy Principal. He or she, in turn, generally chaired an Academic Standards Committee which looked at a broad range of issues including programme review and validation, external examinerships, annual programme reports, departmental or faculty academic audits and other quality assurance matters.

In approximately 50% of the institutions - the majority in the post-1992 university sector - a separate Learning and Teaching Committee existed. Like the Academic Standards Committees, these reported directly to Senate. The remit of the L&T Committees was largely the formation of policy and creation of strategies for the implementation of such policies. Quality enhancement in

learning and teaching and the need for academic staff development in these areas were the focus of discussion and recommendations were made to Senate on strategies to address these.

A number of the interviewees spoke of the devolution of learning and teaching issues to Schools or Faculties, with some having their own committees to deal with these areas. In the post-1992 universities, at the time of interview, a process of devolution was currently under way. By contrast, the ancient and modern institutions were more likely to be already operating a devolved system. A Director of Quality commented:

'I think that is the right level to operate that at. Otherwise you can get into counterproductive arguments about why you have to do something in one way in science and another way in the arts. It is better that it is put into context.'

Two interviewees, both from established universities, stated that in their institutions the tradition was to leave the responsibility for quality with individual academics. They commented that development in learning and teaching was perceived to be a very 'bottom up' process and not something that could be forced on academics - although increasingly guidance was being provided from central offices such as Quality Assurance or Educational Development. One Director of Quality stated:

'You have to really do it that way round. It would not be acceptable in our culture to try and impose things from the top down the system. People just wouldn't do it ... (this is) far stronger than trying to impose a regime with us then rushing around like a police force, trying to ensure compliance.'

In summary, the responses to this question indicated that all the Scottish institutions did have mechanisms in place, at a high level in the institution, to address quality issues in relation to learning and teaching. The pre-1992 universities - ancients and moderns - were more likely to be operating a devolved system, with Learning and Teaching committees established in Faculties or Schools. The newer, post-1992 universities, on the other hand, were more likely to have established Learning and Teaching Committees at the same level as the

more traditional, Academic Standards Committees and reporting, as ASC does, directly to Senate / Academic Council.

Disseminating Results

The next question explored whether particular features, highlighted for praise in a TQA report, were disseminated within the individual university. The rationale for this question was directly derived from the TQA mission. One of the key purposes of the TQA exercise was stated as being the dissemination of good practice and the encouragement of continuous improvement in the quality of educational provision (SHEFC, 1997). This led us to review the extent to which our interviewees perceived this to be the case. We therefore queried the extent to which TQA reports were being used to highlight and disseminate examples of good practice within each of the thirteen Scottish universities.

Nine of the interviewees responded that there were no formal, or official, channels within their institutions for the dissemination of assessors' comments on areas of good practice. All of the respondents suggested that informal channels *might* exist. For example, recommendations might go to a Committee on Teaching and Learning and '*be picked up there*' or discussed at Academic Standards Committee, or Senate. These were not, however, put forward as part of the institutional response to TQA but as something which might or might not happen. Other examples of informal dissemination included situations where academic staff, who had acted as Assessors or Lead Assessors in their own discipline areas, performed the role of mentor to those whose disciplines were shortly to be assessed. This was described by one Director of Quality who stated that '*departments talk to other departments about how they got an Excellent.*'

This form of networking and cascading of information appeared to be particularly prevalent in some of the post-1992 and modern universities. However, the question arose as to the extent to which this was dissemination of good practice, for its own sake, or as one Deputy Principal remarked *'dissemination of good practice that is likely to please the Assessors.'*

This comment, of course, links with Yorke's (1992) expectation that the TQA exercise would encourage a 'compliance culture'. Yorke forecast that departments would seek to implement systems and practices, which were known to please assessors, and avoid introducing teaching and learning innovations, which might not be fully understood and might lead to a poorer outcome, in terms of the final grade awarded by the assessors.

Amongst our respondents, universities with dedicated Quality Assurance units were more likely to produce overall analyses of cognate area reports and to use this information to assist other departments approaching assessment. However, practice varied as to how these reports were used. Some QA units had picked up on generic issues such as variety in assessment methods, development of personal transferable skills and the writing of clear learning aims and objectives. A Director of Quality stated:

'Those are the kinds of things that over the past 7 years we have been ... trying to get over to staff.'

Another suggested that:

'All academics believe their discipline is quite unlike any other discipline and so they do not necessarily see generic transfers.'

Dissemination of good practice, and of innovative approaches to teaching and learning, appeared as likely to be picked up through word of mouth, as through recommendations in the TQA reports. However, the Head of an Educational Development Unit in a post-1992 institution was positive about the value which could be gained from such reports, when he stated:

'(We) run university-wide workshops which pick up on good things happening in the University, which may have been picked up in the TQA report, and disseminate in that way.'

One of the post-1992 universities had produced an analysis of the institutional strengths and weaknesses highlighted in all cognate area reports for a particular academic session and had used this to build on strengths and improve areas of perceived weakness. The institutional areas included student support, the learning environment and staff development of learning and teaching.

Institutional issues were also commented on by a Vice Principal from an ancient university, whose central services often came in for praise, but whose weakness in the area of staff development of part-time and postgraduate teaching staff was quickly addressed, following adverse comments in early TQA reports. As a result, he confidently stated that '*we are no longer vulnerable in that area.*'

There was a recognition by a number of the interviewees that dissemination of good practice, as highlighted within the reports, was probably not as good as it should have been. Indeed, several of the post-1992 universities were looking for ways to build such dissemination into their quality assurance systems. Although TQA results had been discussed in a number of forum, including faculty committees, the Head of an Educational Development Unit commented that his institution was *'really just getting their procedures in place rather than looking above the parapet and seeing how they could spread good practice'*. This view may well be likely to achieve some consensus in the Scottish higher education sector.

On the whole, there was little evidence, from the responses given, that comments made in TQA reports with regard to good practice were being systematically disseminated and used to inform practice throughout an institution. Where such dissemination existed, it appeared patchy and informal. In the majority of institutions it did not exist at all.

TQA and Staff Development

In this section we questioned respondents as to how the TQA exercise had influenced staff development policies or strategies within the institution. The Funding Council viewed the issue of staff development as fundamental to the dissemination process. To aid this process, in 1995 SHEFC launched a £1m staff development initiative, which sought to raise the profile of staff development within all the Scottish funded institutions (SHEFC, 1997). This question explored the impact of the TQAs on staff development in the thirteen universities, in some detail.

If the TQA reports were effective in drawing attention to areas of teaching and learning which required improvement, and the institutions were responsive to these recommendations, then one would expect to see this reflected in changes to the staff development policy or strategies within individual institutions. Amongst twelve respondents to this question, the responses were evenly split. Six respondents agreed that TQA had influenced staff development policy; three disagreed and a further three felt that TQA might have had some influence, but not *directly* so. For this question, there were no discernible patterns of response between the ancient, modern and post-1992 universities. In fact, the responses were evenly spread across all three categories of institution.

Of the six institutions, which agreed that the TQA reports *had* influenced staff development, three used academic support offices, such as Educational Development, Quality Assurance, or Staff Development, to highlight areas of weakness identified in the reports and to address them institutionally. The measures taken included developing programmes of staff development covering, for example, compulsory attendance at initial teaching and learning training for new staff; the development of students' personal transferable skills, and the use of technology in learning.

In the three other institutions, initiatives were taken through the office of an Assistant or Deputy Principal, who had responsibility for teaching and learning matters. Strategic change was implemented in the form of the creation of a learning and teaching strategy for one institution and, in another, the commitment to continued funding of staff development, beyond that which was already being funded by the SHEFC Staff Development Initiative.

Three interviewees were less certain in their responses. The Director of an Educational Development Unit suggested that the variability, in the TQA reports themselves, impacted on their effectiveness. He commented that *'some are detailed, others bland and therefore not helpful for staff development.'* The perception was that any changes, which had taken place, had been small and not directly related to the reports. Two of the institutions, from which these interviewees came, had established dedicated Quality Assurance units which

analysed reports and examined trends, however even within this facility, there appeared to be no direct mechanism for feeding recommendations into staff development. In both institutions, there existed mechanisms whereby the Director of Quality would regularly meet colleagues involved in teaching and learning staff development e.g. through committee structures, but the impact on staff development was itself seen as '*tangential*'. The Head of an Educational Development Unit stated that :

'We might pick up the need for staff development in a particular area from that but it hasn't been directly from systematically going through the TQA reports and saying "there is a need here".'

The view of these respondents was that staff development needs were generally identified by cognate area groups or departments, rather than centrally, and that the role of the institution was to support such needs by working with staff in departments. In this respect, the TQA reports were perceived to have had some impact but a response at the local level, rather than by the institutional offering of open seminars on learning and teaching issues, was believed to most appropriate.

Three interviewees did *not* believe that the TQA reports had influenced teaching and learning staff development in their institutions. This was qualified by one Vice Principal who said *'except insofar as TQA has allowed us to say that teaching is important'*.

The view of two of the respondents was that staff development required to be forward looking and responsive to the needs of the institution. The TQA reports were largely historical; a snapshot in time and, as previously stated, could be of varying degrees of usefulness. If a report said, for example, that teaching methods were 'traditional', this could be interpreted as either praise or criticism. Instead of being reactive to the content of TQA reports, these three institutions were reported to have taken their own line on staff development. The Director of an Educational Development Unit in a post-1992 university stated confidently that:

'Our staff development is very much forward looking. Pro-active rather than remedial and retrospective.'

A number of interviewees commented on the report, commissioned by SHEFC and produced by Moray House Institute of Education on *'The Impact of Quality Assessment on Staff Development'* (Sharp, Johnstone, McLaughlin and Munn, 1996). The recommendations of this report were that the Funding Council should reconsider the priorities underlying Teaching Quality Assessment, as the process was being perceived as summative, and not formative, by those who had been assessed, thereby inhibiting the role which TQA might play in institutional development. Moreover, the confidential 'Further Points' which each institution received were not seen as useful in informing or advising on the types of staff development which could be undertaken to build on strengths or remedy weaknesses. If the reports were not made more formative, the Moray House team recommended that they be discontinued. In general, Sharp *et al* concluded that SHEFC's aim of dissemination of good practice was not being met by the TQA process and that this required to be addressed.

Respondents' views on the Moray House report varied considerably. Some disagreed with the conclusion that TQA had *not* had an impact on learning and teaching staff development. The Director of Quality in an ancient university expressed concern at the findings, believing them to be *' wrong, as (TQA) influences policy as well'*

Others criticised the report's grasp on the realities of the relationship between TQA and staff development. The Director of Quality in one of the modern institutions commented on what could be perceived as a somewhat naive assumption :

'People seemed to think that the QA reports are what will drive staff development. Staff development is much broader than that.'

Thus our interviewees were split in their opinions as to whether the TQA reports had effected an impact on staff development policy or strategies. Some believed strongly that this was the case, while others took the view that factors, other than TQA, were the driving force for change. Of more influence than TQA, in the area of learning and teaching development, were issues such as concern over graduate employment.

A Director of Quality stated that:

'Where feedback from major employers says that students are great at knowledge but their presentation skills are poor, that is taken very seriously and departments ask themselves what they are going to do about it. If it had been said in a TQA report, I don't think it would have been changed at all.'

He went on to highlight what he perceived as the language difficulties inherent in any talk of TQA and staff development. TQA was, in his opinion, effectively a *'collective phenomena'* while staff development was an *'individual phenomenon'*. This respondent took the view that general educational development within an institution was more likely to be informed by TQA reports, than individual staff development policy. The only exception might be where generic issues, such as the development of students' personal transferable skills, identified a need for such staff development. He identified some difficulties in this respect:

'This is one of the most difficult areas to get staff excited about, in a developmental sense. People take the view that all good students do these things anyhow.'

One aspect, which came in for praise from several institutions, was the availability of funds through SHEFC's Staff Development Initiative. These funds had enabled institutions to look at areas such as student-centred learning, computer-assisted learning, student support and to run staff development workshops and seminars, in order to disseminate good practice. The extent to which these issues were addressed as a result of comments in TQA reports, or were generated for other reasons, as we have seen from the responses given above, is open to question. Some institutions, with high ratings in the TQA exercise, gained substantial levels of SDI funding and were able to use this to run faculty-based seminars. However, where these took place, the interviewees did not perceive such activity as being directly related, in any way, to the outcomes of their own institution's TQA reports. Other institutions did, however, use the funds to address specific areas of weakness, which had been identified in the TQA reports.

A final point, with regard to the *process* rather than the *outcomes* of TQA, is worth noting here. While the extent to which there was a direct, and beneficial, impact of the TQA reports on academic staff development is arguable, the developmental aspect for staff involved in the process was clearly acknowledged. One Director of Quality stated that:

'The actual process of preparing for the self-assessment part of TQA was a good developmental activity, as was the preparation for the visit - a team-building exercise.'

This benefit was perceived as being even greater, individually and institutionally, for those who had acted as assessors or lead assessors in the TQA exercise. Such individuals were exposed to a range of practice from across the sector, in their particular cognate areas, and were then able to bring a wider perspective back to their own institutions. The process of carrying out peer reviews, facilitates the sharing of good practice and can lead to genuine quality enhancement (Wicks, 1992). This appears to have been the case with the TQA assessors.

Structures for Staff Development

The next series of questions related to the extent to which staff were encouraged and supported to develop skills in teaching and learning. This support might be manifested in the form of dedicated Educational Development, or Academic Staff Development, Units or Officers. It could be encouraged through discussion at Staff Development and Career Review, or Appraisal, interviews and might form part of the institution's strategy for external accreditation of their staff development policy, through Investors in People. Specifically, we asked respondents whether there was a separate Educational Development or Staff Development department, with a remit for the development of skills in the management and delivery of teaching and learning.

In most organisations, staff development is part of the remit of Personnel, or as they are increasingly referred to today, Human Resources Departments. The employment and initial training of staff, on-going staff development and career review all generally fall within such a department's area of responsibility. Within Higher Education institutions, staff development is essential for both

academic and support staff. All staff require a basic introduction to the university, covering issues such as organisational structure, health and safety and grievance procedures. This type of generic information is often provided by the Personnel department in the form of a short course or seminar. In addition, academic staff have a specific need for induction in teaching and learning and the opportunity to further enhance their skills, as their careers progress.

Responses to this question indicated that the locus for the development of skills, in the management and delivery of teaching and learning, fell into a number of areas. In three of the institutions (1 ancient and 2 post-1992), the Educational Development unit / centre and the Staff Development department had merged, or were operating closely together as an operational team.

In a further three (1 ancient and 2 modern), academic staff development was subsumed within the remit of the Personnel department. One ancient university had appointed a dedicated Teaching and Learning Development Officer, who operated within the Personnel department. All three claimed to have an extensive programme relating to staff development in teaching and learning.

In most of the remaining universities, an Educational Development unit - operating under a variety of titles - carried out the academic, teaching and learning, staff development. Where a separate Staff Development office existed, this was likely to be involved in arranging generic induction programmes and a range of management-type courses for both academic and support staff. Not all institutions, however, operated a separate Staff Development office. Those who did not, had well-established Educational Development centres. Finally, one post-1992 institution was at a developmental stage, at time of interview, having created a new Educational Development centre within the previous year, which it was intended would be the future locus for academic staff development activity, but which was not yet fully operational.

In our next question, we asked whether academic staff participated in regular staff development and career review, or appraisal, and to what extent an evaluation of performance in teaching and learning played a part in the process.

The purpose of this question was to investigate whether a mechanism, such as the Staff Development and Career Review (SDCR), was being utilised to identify individual needs and to inform institutional strategy on learning and teaching staff development.

Of the thirteen institutions visited, eleven indicated that they were carrying out regular SDCR, while two interviewees admitted that their institutions had previously done so, but that the process was currently abandoned. Seven of those implementing regular SDCR carried this out on a biennial basis and four on an annual basis - although of these four, two had only recently moved from a biennial to an annual basis and a third was contemplating moving in the opposite direction.

Learning and teaching was one aspect considered in the SDCR process, along with a review of the individual's research and administration activities. Pro-formas were used to assist both the person being reviewed, in his/her self-assessment, and the reviewer. However, the extent to which learning and teaching was a major focus in the subsequent discussion varied and this will be commented on later in this section.

In some institutions, staff were asked to comment specifically on what learning and teaching activities they had undertaken in the past year; what features they were proud of; what they hoped to do in the future and what development they needed to help them do that. An Assistant Principal commented that :
'Heads of Department have said that (learning and teaching issues) feature in their (SDCR) discussions, supported by feedback from the student questionnaires and any notes from the student/staff consultative group.'

In one case, there was no specific section on teaching and learning, with staff being asked to comment on any and all aspects of their work. Learning and teaching was an area which this interviewee anticipated the university would wish to give *'more priority'* in the future.

Of the two institutions which had no current SDCR in place, the reason given in both instances was reluctance of departments and staff to participate. Both were ancient universities and both had originally had some form of staff appraisal in place. However, in one case, the reluctance of departments to carry out SDCR, allied to a perception that *'not a lot happened as a result'*, led to the system being perceived as ineffective and subsequently being abandoned. The Director of Quality stated :

'I think the university now wants to get something in that is a lot more performance- related and tougher, but I am not sure how it is going to do that.'

The above comment reflects a widely-held concern about the SDCR, or appraisal, process and the management intention behind it. In the second of the two ancient institutions to have abandoned the process of SDCR, the Director of Quality commented that academic staff had a *'huge amount of fear about appraisal'*. Although intended to be developmental, staff had expressed concern about its real purpose. How might the outcomes affect future promotion or salary increases? Some academics found the process useful, others less so. After only one year of operation, the system had been suspended for two years, pending a review, and subsequent national industrial action had led to a further boycott. At the time of interview, the process had not yet been restarted.

Where SDCR did exist, the emphasis was on the developmental aspect of the process. This was described by one Director of Quality as *'not so much reviewing what you have done over the past year as what your expectations are and requirements for the future year'*.

The value of this for experienced academic staff was, however, questioned by one Vice Principal, who stated that:

'One of the things that the appraisal scheme has not done, and I don't think it could, is to actually require well-established people to undertake staff development in areas that they think they are already very competent in.'

This view was supported by another Vice Principal who identified the problem in these terms :

'The trouble ... is associating appraisal with real development ... (Experienced staff need) more time, money ... There is nothing the university could actually give them and so appraisal is a bit of a problem, developmentally.'

However, the developmental aspect of SDCR was not perceived as the sole purpose of the process. Several of the interviewees mentioned the relationship of such a review to the promotion procedures in their institutions. A Deputy Principal, from a modern university commented:

'At first, the appraisal scheme was seen as purely staff development. Now, I think it is seen as part of the promotion approach.'

More directly, the Vice Principal of an ancient university stated that :

'If you haven't been appraised, you can't be promoted and you can't be appraised without displaying about your teaching.'

In one of the modern institutions, the SDCR process included two parts. Firstly, there was an 'appraisal', which examined all aspects of the individual's role and led to the creation of personal development plans. Secondly, there was a 'review' which was a more formal process, taking place once every two years, which examined *'whether you are being put up for promotion or not'*.

Here an attempt was being made to separate the developmental aspect of SDCR from the 'rewards' (or punishments) that might ensue in relation to promotion prospects. The Director of Quality stated that the appraisal element included information on all aspects of the academic's work - research, publications and teaching - and contained explicit sections on *'... what the person is trying to do in their teaching and learning; how they go about that; how they evaluate and get feedback on that ... (it) has put teaching and learning much more openly on the agenda'*.

However, while teaching and learning achievement, and development, formed part of the majority of SDCR procedures, the extent to which this aspect was emphasised in the related interview, and in the creation of subsequent personal

development plans, varied. In one of the post-1992 institutions, staff were first asked to create a profile of their contracted time and how this was used. The Director of Educational Development outlined this, as follows:

'In the review training, we make it clear that this should be a continuum. So, if 80% of my time were devoted to teaching, it would be obvious that comments on the standard of my teaching should be included'.

Where such weightings were not identified, the emphasis given to teaching and learning, as opposed to research and administration, was not always even. A Deputy Principal commented that:

'Having said that teaching and research have the same apparent weight on the form, if you actually look at the sort of programmes that are coming on, they tend to focus - particularly among younger people - more towards research.'

Similarly, a Director of Quality suggested that:

'Teaching and learning was often not a feature. Predominantly, because of the climate, I think people were talking about how you get more research money in and the administrative jobs that you might want to take over... Most of the time was spent talking about administration or research.'

The relationship, and tension, between teaching and research activities is explored further in Chapter 6. The number and quality of research publications, and amounts of money generated as research income, allow clear criteria for performance to be set and assessed. With teaching and learning, the criteria are more tenuous. Should performance be measured in terms of innovative teaching developments? How much weight should be given to student evaluations or assessment results? How can we set objectives for development in this area?

This last question was addressed by one of the interviewees, whose institution had established a Teaching Fund, which enabled academic staff with innovative ideas to access finance to assist them in such developmental work. However, the restraints surrounding such developments were clearly acknowledged by this Deputy Principal, who stated that:

'It is much less easy to talk about objectives for teaching, other than just doing it competently, because firstly, there is less freedom to decide what you want to

do... how you are going to do it (constraints of rooms, student numbers, team teaching, etc.) ... Whereas if you are thinking about objectives for research, it is a lot easier to write something down that is yours, your personal goal.'

With regard to the wider implications of SDCR, three of the interviewees referred to copies of the individual action plans, which identify staff development needs, being sent to the Personnel or Staff Development Office, in order that appropriate courses could be developed and/or offered to staff. However, the Director of Quality in one institution admitted that these sections of the SDCR very often *'come back blank, or with very little on it'*. A more productive means of identifying and providing staff development programmes was found through working directly with departments and faculties, in an effort to tailor courses to their needs.

In one institution, information on staff development needs, arising out of SDCR, was being collected on a database. This allowed an overview of needs throughout the university to be assessed but, additionally, was used to fill places on existing courses. Where, for example, a particular staff development course was not full, the Staff Development Officer was able to identify and target individuals who had previously expressed an interest in the topic area, at their appraisal interview.

This 'feedback loop' from appraisal to staff development was apparent in only a minority of the institutions. In the majority, the connection was less clear. This has led to academic staff displaying some scepticism about the value of SDCR, in a number of respects. Its value to experienced members of staff was questioned. The emphasis it placed on teaching and learning, as a major aspect of the academic's work, and the credit given for developmental activity in this area, was largely perceived as less than that given to developing research activity. We will return to this issue, and explore some of the reasons for this perception, in Chapter 6.

Investing in People

In the next section, we queried specifically whether the university had considered working towards registration as an 'Investor in People'. The Investors in People (IiP) Standard is based on four key principles : a commitment to invest in people; planning how to develop skills, individuals and teams; taking action to develop and use those skills in a way which will support the organisation's objectives; and evaluating the outcomes of training and development for individuals' progress towards meeting those goals (http://www.iipuk.co.uk).

It is a Standard which fits very well with other quality standards as it recognises that only the skill of employees will deliver what the organisation needs to achieve its goals. In this respect, achievement of IiP is not seen as an end-point but as part of a culture of continuous improvement. Nonetheless, achievement of the Standard is often viewed as an external *kitemark* of quality. Indeed, its chosen symbol of the laurel wreath implies excellence, or at least suggests that the organisation is a champion, in the area of staff development and training.

We have previously looked at the question of academic staff development in learning and teaching, in relation to both induction, and continuing professional development, and to the role of the SDCR or appraisal interview in informing this process. The perspective taken in these earlier questions was on the extent to which an external process of quality assurance, the TQA, was driving institutional staff development policy.

In this section, the focus is on another potential driver. IiP is familiar to many lay members of University Courts, or Board of Governors, and it is from this direction that some of the pressure has come for senior management to consider its implementation in higher education establishments. Interviewees from all thirteen universities reported that their institutions had discussed IiP accreditation, either formally or informally. Of these, one had already received university-wide accreditation; one had accreditation for a non-academic area only; and another three were actively working towards IiP accreditation. Three of these institutions came from the post-1992 sector, one was an ancient university and one a modern.

Five institutions, which had discussed the possibility of implementing IiP, had rejected it outright - although two suggested that there might be a need to reconsider this, especially for non-academic staff. Of these five, three were ancient universities, one modern and one post-1992. One further institution had a steering group looking at IiP and two were unsure of the current position on the issue. Therefore, although more likely to be accepted by the 'newer' sector and rejected by the 'older', the positive and negative responses crossed all categories and ages of institution

Of those universities which had rejected the idea of IiP accreditation, the main arguments given by three individual Directors of Quality were that the process was *'too cumbersome'*; that the *'costs outweigh the benefits'* and that, as a result, *'the effort involved in IiP would be high and the added value, which would result, would be low.'*

While acknowledging the difficulties that face universities who seek IiP status, such as the language issues, where talking about 'business objectives' can cause resentment in an academic environment, and tensions between the requirements of IiP and the aims of the institution, five Scottish universities had gone, or were moving, down this route.

Interviewees from these institutions highlighted the positive factors of such accreditation. One Head of Educational Development spoke of this as a means of:

'formalising good practice for us. It wasn't going to make us jump many hoops that we wouldn't think were part of good management practice, so that is part of the reason why we liked it.'

Others referred to the way in which IiP linked in with the totality of staff development and training, with an Academic Staff Development Officer commenting that:

'We are aware of the advantages of a wholesale approach as opposed to a more piecemeal one.'

However, this remark was qualified with the further comment that it was unlikely that the *whole* university would go for IiP accreditation and that this was more likely to be taken up by the *non-academic* areas of the institution. Like TQM, as we will see in Chapter 7, initiatives from the business sector are often viewed with grave suspicion by academia.

More supportive of the IiP process was a Vice Principal from one of the post-1992 universities. He spoke of the importance of creating the right kind of ethos for members of staff, one which was consultative and communicative. He believed that IiP aided this process and commented that:

'We will be a better institution in the sense of staff feeling more involved and committed, better communicated with and that will be reflected in the quality of work that we do.'

He also commented on the external perception of such an achievement :

' When we do achieve IiP recognition, then people will have an even higher regard for our work.'

However, pursuit of the 'kitemark' for its own sake was cautioned by one Director of Quality, who stated that:

'If it helps us to do things we want to do, and we get a kitemark on the way, then that's fine. Otherwise, we are missing the point. We have to develop the organisation. We have to develop staff. IiP is part of a framework that looks at this.'

In the increasingly competitive environment of higher education and post-Dearing, with its emphasis on quality of delivery, accreditation of university teaching staff and the need for continuing professional development, it may be that some of the Scottish institutions, which have previously rejected the idea of IiP accreditation, may feel obliged to revisit it. Achievement of a kitemark, in itself, may not be of value, although the external perception of such achievement can be high. However, IiP offers a means of closely examining the institution's staff development provision and, in so doing, may lead to improvement in this area, for the ultimate benefit of staff, students and the institution itself. As with

other forms of quality assurance, it is the *process*, rather than the *outcomes*, which can produce the greatest benefits.

Teaching the Teachers.

In this third group of questions, we explored the extent to which academic and research staff, with a remit for teaching within their institutions, were being supported in their own learning. How were the teachers being taught? Traditionally, in the higher education sector, an academic was employed because of his or her qualifications or research experience. Little or no training was given in the pedagogical aspects of the job. There was an almost implicit assumption that someone who was expert in their field would be a good teacher. That this was blatantly not the case, for some individuals, was effectively ignored. In this respect, the TQAs have given more prominence to teaching and learning and to the importance of developing skills in this area. We divided the developmental aspect of teaching and learning into two phases: the initial induction period; and the on-going need for continuous professional development throughout a teaching career. In parallel to this, we asked to what extent certification of such skills, by means of a postgraduate qualification, was demanded by their institution.

Our first question concerned the use of an induction programme for new lecturing staff and what form this took. All thirteen of the Scottish universities had induction programmes in place for 'new' teaching staff. These were generally defined as staff, with less than three years teaching experience, prior to joining the institution. Induction, in the form of an introduction to the university, its structures and processes, was provided centrally - usually by the Personnel Office - for all academic and support staff. In addition to this, staff with a teaching responsibility received induction in teaching and learning methods, in the form of short courses or seminars. The variation in the length, depth and mode of such courses; the extent to which they were compulsory; and their relationship to probationary periods of employment are examined below.

One of the striking features of learning and teaching induction is the extent to which universities have collaborated in its provision. Within Scotland, two

consortia - one comprising 3 universities and one with 4 - offered joint induction programmes for their new staff. This ensured that sufficient numbers were available to make such programmes viable. However, they were not without their difficulties and one of the consortia was (at the time of interview) considering separate provision, due in part to a variation in the pre-course induction which teaching staff received in each member institution.

The length of the teaching and learning induction programmes varied from 2 days to 5 days, the most common involving 3 to 3.5 days of instruction. The largest consortia, comprising one ancient and three modern universities, carried out this induction on a residential basis, as did one of the post-1992 institutions and (occasionally) one of the ancients. The reason given by one Academic Development Officer for providing a residential programme, as opposed to day-time attendance only, was that it was more likely to result in participating staff staying the course and not *'jumping in and out'* to teach their own classes or check their mail. While residential provision is obviously more expensive to resource, in terms of additional travelling, food and accommodation costs, it does send a clear message of intent, i.e. that the teaching and learning induction programme is sufficiently valued by the institution to warrant having dedicated time set aside for its presentation and for participation by new staff.

In a number of institutions, the initial induction was followed up by a second stage, and/or continuing, staff development programme during the first three probationary years. Where the first stage - the induction course - was seen as a form of 'survival guide' to teaching and learning, which would help the lecturer over the first semester, the second stage - which generally occurred six months after the initial induction and varied from 2 to 5 days in length - was seen as providing the opportunity for reflection on professional practice. Both the initial and the on-going development courses offered additional benefits in the opportunity it gave new teaching staff to meet one another and build networks. Sharing problems and experience with a peer group was perceived as a vital element in supporting and developing such staff.

Probationary periods, normally of three years duration, were referred to by the ancient, and most of the modern, universities. They were less common in the post-1992 universities, with one exception, where a one-year probationary period was in existence for permanent appointments. The increasing use of fixed term contracts was moreover reducing the numbers of new permanent staff, with probationary clauses attached to their appointments. For staff on temporary contracts, the requirement for induction and further staff development was perceived as being not so great. This raises serious questions about the quality of delivery of teaching by staff on part-time and/or temporary contracts. If the institution does not see any value in spending additional resources in developing such staff, while at the same time expecting them to present courses to the highest quality standards, then it is likely to create an anomalous situation.

Two of the interviewees, both from ancient universities, spoke of the requirement for new staff to participate in on-going, teaching and learning staff development during their probationary periods. This was expressed by one in terms of numbers of events attended (6 were required) and by the other in terms of credit points (16) from courses offered by the Teaching and Learning Service. In the other institutions, attendance at future staff development opportunities was encouraged but not required. Evidence of such participation was provided to the committees which examined probationary staff and decided on whether permanent appointments were to be made. However, a Deputy Principal commented:

'I don't think that anyone has ever been turned down on the basis of their teaching, unless it was exceptionally awful. There is not a systematic set of criteria for their teaching as there is for their research and people do not pass their probation because they have not done enough research.'

The discrepancy in the value given to research activity, compared to teaching, is apparent in this remark. While it may be 'acceptable' to be an average or even a poor teacher, to be an average or poor researcher is likely to result in an individual not having their probationary performance accepted and may even lead to the loss of their job.

The next question investigated whether there was a requirement for existing, or experienced, staff to participate in staff development relating to teaching and learning.

While induction programmes for new staff were found to be widespread in the Scottish universities, recognition of the need for *continuing* staff development in this area varied. Only two of the thirteen institutions had any requirement for existing staff, or experienced teaching staff who were new to the institution, to undertake continuing staff development in teaching and learning. The two exceptions, one post-1992 and one modern, had university policies which required (respectively) 20 hours or 3 days staff development / updating per annum. While the former had only recently adopted this policy, as a formal part of their learning and teaching strategy, the latter had been operating on this basis for some years and was now reconsidering their approach with a view to incorporating it into a more all-embracing staff development policy; one which addressed all the roles which academic staff had to play.

In both cases, there were issues regarding the interpretation of continuing staff development in teaching and learning. Some staff, and heads of department, were interpreting it as attendance at appropriate courses and conferences, and the development of teaching documentation while others wanted to include research supervision and the transfer of research findings into teaching. The latter was perceived, by a Director of Quality, to cause some *' blurring of the division between teaching and learning and other things.'*

While in most institutions, continuing staff development was not a requirement for all teaching staff, it was viewed as being valuable for staff who had already been identified as having particular problems e.g. where concerns had been raised in student satisfaction surveys or through TQA reports. Thus, it was perceived to have a remedial, rather than a developmental, part to play in enhancing the quality of teaching provision.

A number of the interviewees spoke of the role of the Staff Development and Career Review, in identifying individual staff development needs and agreeing

action plans. However, unless addressing an identified problem, attendance at the programmes of teaching and learning staff development offered by these institutions was left to the discretion of the member of staff, him or herself. Take-up on the courses was generally admitted to be low and an interviewee from one of the ancient universities commented on this aspect having been criticised in some TQA reports. In response, that particular institution was trying to take staff development into its academic departments rather than offer courses as a central provision.

When asked if they thought it likely that *compulsory* Continuous Professional Development (CPD) in teaching and learning might be introduced in the near future, few could foresee this happening. Views were expressed that this would not be popular with academic staff and that it would be difficult to require well-established people to undertake staff development in an area where they believed they were already competent. Further comments related to the prescriptive notion of set numbers of hours or days development which had to be achieved.
A Deputy Principal stated:
'I am very much against the notion of having some kind of checklist that you have done staff development.'

An Academic Staff Development Officer commented that :
'The learning outcomes are more important than the number of hours you do. I would rather not think in hourly terms, because the moment you do, that's when staff take exception to it.'
This view was supported by a Director of Quality who said :
'I think it would not be productive at the moment, nor into the foreseeable future, to say "you have got to have 3 days of training per year"'

The tension between the demands of research and that of teaching manifested itself once again, in the responses to this question. Where the institutional culture promoted research activity as being of prime importance, staff appeared less likely to want to spend time developing their teaching skills. At one of the ancient universities, with just such a culture, the Academic Staff Development Officer commented that:

'Even attendance at probationary course events takes people away from their research time, although usually the feedback is that people enjoyed being on the course. However there is a lot of resistance to begin with.'

In a similar vein, the Deputy Principal of one of the modern universities, perceived research to be the main concern of many academic staff. However, the advent of the TQAs was viewed as a means of redressing the balance between teaching and research.

'The more we have evaluation of our teaching ... then the more I think we do actually get this change going.'

Therefore, at the time of interview, the majority of the Scottish universities had no plans for introducing a compulsory element to their teaching and learning staff development programmes. The widespread resistance of staff coupled with the pressure to spend time on research, rather than teaching, development being cited as the main reasons for this.

Examples given of seminars attracting 400 members of staff, or the provision of 300 plus training days in learning and teaching, were the exception rather than the rule. The majority of institutions were seeking to 'encourage' rather than 'require' staff to develop their skills and knowledge of teaching and learning methods and to create a culture in which this aspect of academic work was given its rightful value by both staff and management. How such a culture might be developed, through the adoption of a total quality management approach, is explored further in Chapter 7.

The next question examined whether the institution offered a postgraduate qualification in teaching and learning and whether this was a requirement for new staff. Four out of five of the post-1992 universities, and one ancient, offered further development opportunities in the form of accredited, postgraduate certificates in teaching and learning methodolody. Those institutions which did not currently offer a PgC programme were, at the time of interview, awaiting the outcome of the Dearing report, which it was widely anticipated would make some form of teacher accreditation a requirement in future. Those which did

offer the PgC were also concerned as to the implications of Dearing, for example in making participation in such programmes compulsory, rather than voluntary, for new staff.

The postgraduate certificates were based on modular schemes and were normally provided on a distance-learning basis, supported by academic staff mentors. While new staff were encouraged to pursue these qualifications, their completion was not compulsory, although two institutions did expect *all* staff to complete the first module as part of their basic teaching and learning induction. One of the post-1992 institutions had recently incorporated a requirement for completion of the postgraduate certificate into its teaching and learning strategy and was in the process of trying to implement this. Such compulsion did not find favour with a Director of Quality from one of the modern universities, who reflected on the resourcing aspects of such a decision.

'There would have to be some resourcing if professional qualifications were to come into place ... some pump-priming, some transitional money, if it were mandatory.' Such resourcing was sought in the form of additional government funding, rather than out of existing university budgets.

The responses to this question clearly showed a divide between the pre- and post-1992 institutions with regard to accredited programmes of study in TLTM. The new universities, with one exception, had been offering PgC programmes for some years. These were modular, SCOTCAT-accredited frameworks; frameworks which the post-1992 universities had adopted more quickly than some of their more established colleagues. The eagerness with which such certification was embraced may be a reflection of the value placed on teaching and learning by these institutions. Unable to compete at the highest levels of research, although making strident efforts to do so, the pre-1992 institutions had sought to emphasise their commitment to excellence in learning and teaching. One measure of this could be seen as the extent to which staff were encouraged, or required, to demonstrate their own learning by means of the achievement of a postgraduate certificate in teaching and learning methods.

The Dearing Report, as expected, made recommendations for the training and accreditation of teachers in higher education and for the setting up of an Institute for Learning and Teaching (ILT). The implications of this Institute, for the status and further development of teaching and learning, is explored in Chapter 8.

Conclusion

The impact of the TQAs on the Scottish universities appears to be variable. Many HEIs manage the TQA process, before, during and after the visit, in such a way that the outcome of the assessment exercise itself brings little new advice or recommendations, on which the institution can base quality improvements. In some universities, generic issues at institutional level had been identified and attempts made to develop action plans, which would address these. In others, there was little or no institutional follow-up.

With regard to dissemination of good practice, which was a key aim of the SHEFC quality assessments, this appeared to be weak. The majority of institutions had no formal mechanisms for sharing information on innovative teaching and learning developments, although informal networks did appear to exist in some institutions. Some respondents argued that this lack of dissemination was partly due to a lack of transferability between academic disciplines. However, even if we accepted that there was an element of truth in this argument, it should not be used to prevent the transference of examples of good pedagogical practice which are generic to every subject area. In fact, one could argue the opposite; that there may be much to learn from the practice in an academic discipline which is quite unlike one's own.

With regard to the influence of TQA on staff development policy, we found no discernible pattern of response within any of the three groups of universities in this study. It did not appear to matter whether a particular institution had a separate department with responsibility for academic staff development or a senior member of staff with such a remit. The TQA reports were largely not perceived as the main drivers of teaching and learning staff development. The reports were considered too bland for such a purpose or too outdated, being in effect a snapshot in time from which the institution has already moved on. In

this respect, therefore, the TQA exercise had failed to achieve SHEFC's objective that information from the reports be used not only for dissemination but also for informing staff development training needs. However, the additional funding which SHEFC had made available to HE institutions, on a 'bidding' basis, to support staff development activity was widely welcomed.

Our respondents perceived the greatest benefit of TQA as having come from the actual involvement of university academic staff in the *process* of the TQA exercise, as assessors or lead assessors. The opportunity which this gave to evaluate self-assessment documents, and visit departments, in cognate areas similar to the assessor's own was viewed as highly beneficial both for the individual and his or her department, as well as the institution as a whole. Dissemination of good practice as a result of the final TQA report may have been limited, however dissemination as a result of participating in the assessment panel was widely believed to have taken place. In addition, panel members benefited from a considerable element of personal staff development, beyond any gains in cognate area or pedagogical knowledge and understanding. Cross-fertilisation of ideas, both within academic disciplines and across them, is essential if innovation and improvement in higher education is to take place. Whatever form future teaching quality assessment takes, peer review should form an important part of the process. It was the one benefit of TQA on which all institutions could agree.

Finally, our questions relating to the extent to which teaching and learning staff development was undertaken during the induction period, and throughout the academic member of staff's career, raised issues regarding the prioritisation of teaching as opposed to research activity, within individual institutions. From our respondents, it became clear that tensions existed between the demands of both these activities. The following chapter will explore these tensions in greater detail by examining the disparate reward and recognition structures provided to staff focusing on research as opposed to teaching. Again our analysis will rely on elite interviews with senior staff responsible for quality in teaching and learning.

CHAPTER SIX : VALUING TEACHING

Introduction

In this chapter, we explore the extent to which the Teaching Quality Assessments are perceived to have achieved their aim of raising the profile of teaching and learning; of enhancing quality, and disseminating examples of good practice throughout individual institutions or the HE sector as a whole. We also explore the perception of key personnel with regard to the value given to teaching, as an activity within their own institutions. While initially we did not intend to discuss the Research Assessment Exercise, the responses generated by the interview questions indicated that it was difficult to ignore the often competing demands of this assessment in an exploration of the value accorded to teaching and learning. This was especially the case when we explored the issues of rewards for individuals, in terms of promotions and prizes for excellence in teaching. This drew comment from the interviewees on the current bias which exists in favour of research activity, in the context of appointment and promotion of academic staff.

General Impact of TQAs on Teaching and Learning

With regard to the general question as to whether the TQAs had achieved their aim of quality enhancement in teaching and learning, and dissemination of good practice, the interviewees agreed, without exception, that there had been a positive impact on attitudes towards teaching and learning in their institutions. TQAs were perceived to have raised the profile of teaching and learning and provided some kind of balance for the pressures of the Research Assessment Exercise. A Director of Quality in one of the ancient universities stated :

'With the advent of the RAE, if there had been no TQA then teaching could have been viewed as secondary to research.'

However, he went on to express the view that :

'The RAE has biased the system more towards research.'

A similar opinion was held by his counterpart in another of the ancient establishments:

'The effect of the RAE has been potentially damaging to teaching and learning ... I think what the TQAs have done is to address that balance quite a lot.'

A Deputy Principal meanwhile agreed that :

'It has put a focus on teaching that it is difficult to think it would otherwise have, because the RAE has been such a dominant force in the older universities.'

Commenting that the tension between the demands of research and the demands of teaching and learning was being further compounded by the difference in the rewards available for the highest categories of excellence in each field, this Deputy Principal stated *'the real problem with TQA is that it gives you virtually no reward ... the only way you can improve (institutional finances) is through the RAE. So it is hardly surprising that people put so much emphasis on it.'*

This was a view supported by a Director of Quality who felt that the TQAs could be seen as *'too much work without much reward.'*

While acknowledging that TQAs had led to improved procedures and practices, several interviewees questioned whether widespread quality enhancement had actually taken place. With the self-assessment documents forming part of a public process of quality assessment, the possibility existed that institutions would not be truly self-critical. An Assistant Principal was of the opinion that :

'The methodology has led to defensiveness in terms of the self-assessment document and defensiveness in terms of the conduct of the TQA.'

Two Directors of Quality meanwhile commented on the dangers of institutions adopting strategies which would achieve high ratings, rather than seeking the best means for improving quality. They stated, respectively:

'Assessments have led to people doing things better but equally it has introduced a kind of conformist / compliance culture.'

and

'They buy into it as a game, where they want to play and win.'

The way round such difficulties would be to put more emphasis on internal self-evaluation, which could be more open and honest in its criticism and targeted more for *enhancement* of quality rather than judgement of it. This would appear practical as it was the judgmental aspect of the TQAs which was perceived by

many of the interviewees to be the greatest stumbling block against quality enhancement. One Director of Quality said:

'Take the judgmental component away and I think you can focus much more on the enhancement... keep the two there and you have to accept that there is going to be a trade-off.'

A view commonly expressed was that departments would tend to play safe, i.e. to stay with tried-and-tested teaching and learning methods rather than risk being too innovative and finding themselves with assessors who did not fully understand or appreciate the innovation.

While one of the main aims of TQA was to encourage quality enhancement, the judgement of each of the 11 aspects as Excellent, Highly Satisfactory, Satisfactory and Unsatisfactory, and the allocation of an overall quality judgement, led to the creation of league tables in each cognate area and fed into wider league tables, such as that of *The Times* newspaper. It therefore became important for institutions to ensure that they achieved high ratings. In the older universities, an Excellent rating was expected and nothing less than a Highly Satisfactory was acceptable. While the post-1992 institutions had been used to CNAA quality procedures, and to regular validation and review of their programmes, the more established universities had, in the words of the Head of one Educational Development Unit, *'a steeper learning curve to go up.'* If that was indeed the case, the TQA results discussed in Chapter 4 appear to indicate that they learned very quickly.

With regard to dissemination of good practice, this was not perceived to be widespread or particularly effective. A number of the interviewees commented on the lack of substance in the TQA reports, particularly in the confidential section which each institution receives. A Director of Quality expressed dismay that:

'The confidential section of the reports now say "no comment, no comment" which we complain about at each post-visit meeting, because we feel that while, quite properly, there is a judgmental aspect, the developmental aspect is at least as important as that and we would have liked to have had more advice on some

of the detail. There is a lot of potential there which the Funding Council has missed out on, for enhancement.'

While the overview documents produced by SHEFC, for each cognate area assessed, were considered to be *'helpful'* they were not seen to have led to the level of quality enhancement which the Funding Council and the institutions may have hoped for. Indeed, there was a great deal of criticism of the methodology and process of TQA. However there was also support for the exercise as a catalyst and as a lever for change. Several institutions now have, or are in the process of setting up, centres for learning, teaching and assessment. While this may have taken place in the absence of TQA, it has undoubtedly speeded up the process. The opportunity exists for cognate areas to critically evaluate and benchmark their own performance. A Director of Quality supported the use of periodic quality assessment in this way :

'You can talk about continuous improvement but it is extraordinarily hard to do continually, all the time, with a whole lot of different people. Episodic events are always going to be essential ... If we can get everyone to buy into that, then there is a genuine enhancement opportunity...'

This indicates that the TQAs received a cautious welcome from the Scottish HEIs. TQA appears to have raised awareness of the importance of learning and teaching and acted as a balance, to some extent, against the pressures of the Research Assessment Exercise. There have also been developmental benefits for staff involved as either assessors and/or as those whose cognate areas were being assessed. However, the reports themselves were not perceived to be helpful to institutions nor to aid the wider dissemination of good practice.

Teaching, Research and Rewards

Our final series of questions sought to elicit the extent to which teaching was overtly, or explicitly, valued and rewarded, in terms of promotion or by other means.

As concerns promotions, our respondents indicated that while the universities' stated policies are to assess a candidate for promotion on the basis of his or her

ability in three main criteria - teaching, administration and research - it was the latter which appeared to be attributed the greatest weighting. The general view appeared to be that if you were an average researcher but an exceptional teacher, you would not get promoted, however if you were an exceptional researcher but only an average teacher, you would. Our interviews give some indication as to why this may be the case.

A Director of Quality Assurance stated :

'In terms of the promotion process, we give equal weighting to teaching, research and administration. The problem is that nearly everyone gets close to the average score for their teaching and a very wide spread for research, and so research tends to be the discriminator.'

An Assistant Principal voiced the widespread view in his institution that:

'It is the researchers who are getting the promotions and the enhancements. That isn't true but there is that perception around.'

A similar view was expressed by the Head of an Academic Staff Development Department:

'It is certainly the perception that research is what is rewarded most, or conversely, if you are not strong in it, that's the one you will get "kicked" for most.'

Although most universities' income derives from the per-capita funding which they receive from the funding council for teaching students, the perception exists amongst academic staff that it is not teaching, which is the most valued activity in the institution, but research (Colling, 1993). This view has been reinforced by the results of a survey carried out for the Association of University Teachers in 1998. Questionnaires sent to a sample of 2,000 AUT members found that the importance of research, as one of the appointment criteria, had increased in recent years and that this was now perceived as the prime factor in determining the careers of academic staff, with teaching coming second, or even third, behind administration (Court, 1998).

One of the main problems in rewarding excellence in teaching and learning appeared to be in obtaining clear evidence of outstanding achievement.

Elton (1987) highlights a difficulty in the very nature of the two key academic activities. Research is largely conducted in the public domain, is visible and can be evaluated, whereas teaching is perceived as a fairly private activity, where quality is less easy to define and assess. In theory, every university lecturer should be 'excellent'. So what makes one individual stand out in comparison to another and how can this be evidenced?

A Director of Quality Assurance suggested that the assessment of teaching quality was a near impossibility :

'The real difficulty of this is in evaluation. You can measure a research grant in pounds and count the number of research papers - and probably see an innovation as well - but the person who is just an extremely good teacher ... it is difficult to get the evidence.'

A few institutions have tried to address this issue by means of 'teaching portfolios' or 'teaching profiles' which can be used in making a case for promotion from Lecturer to Senior Lecturer. The use of these teaching portfolios tends to go beyond mere recording of teaching experience and includes the opportunity to demonstrate innovation and forward thinking. In one of the post-1992 institutions, the developmental aspect was emphasised and the teaching profile was used as a measure in awarding Teaching Fellowships. The Director of the Educational Development Unit of this institution described the goals of this scheme as follows :

'The scheme is not just based on retrospective achievement. One of the things we are looking for Fellows to indicate would be how they would promote and enhance teaching and learning development in their department and faculty...'

This particular institution aimed to award approximately ten Fellowships a year for a five year period. The financial reward was an incremental upgrade in salary, with the possibility of two further increments if the award was renewed. In order to accommodate continuing development in teaching and learning, the expectation was that the Head of Department would reduce the individual Fellow's administrative load. This, it was hoped, would allow the Educational

Development Unit to expand their work by having *'... arms and legs out there in departments and faculties.'*

Teaching Fellowships are a type of reward which has been applied in other institutions in the UK and overseas. Perhaps more controversial, has been the creation of Readerships for teaching and learning development. The title 'Reader' has traditionally been awarded for excellence in research and, in the majority of Scottish universities, this still appears to be the case. Thus a Head of Educational Development stated unambiguously that :

'Readerships recognise excellence and achievement in research.'

Similarly, a university Vice Principal argued that :

'Beyond senior lecturer ... then published work; national and international recognition - becomes more important for both Readership and Professorship ... (Readerships) are more influenced by publication and research.'

This was supported by another Vice Principal who suggested that :

'If you look at the criteria for promoted posts, for Readership, they tend to talk about administration, teaching and research. The folklore is that you have to be first-class in two of them, but one of them has to be research.'

The last statement suggests that criteria for Readership may be broadening out from research alone. The report from a Director of Quality similarly noted that his institution's Senate had approved the awarding of Readerships *'... on the basis of scholarship, including the scholarship of teaching ...'* However, when explaining this policy, he stated that :

'They will not be entitled to Readerships in Educational Development, as they would in other universities. These are simply Readerships in which one of the criteria could be scholarship in teaching. But it must be capable of being evidenced to a committee and to external assessors.'

In the AUT study, 78% of the respondents selected 'research' as the most important factor in promotion to Senior Lecturer / Reader, with 'teaching' in fourth place on 1.8% (Court, 1998).

While the awarding of the title Reader, on the basis of excellence in teaching, was seen as problematic by most of our interviewees, this was less so with the title of 'Professor'. Professorships, especially in the post-1992 institutions, were based on the criteria already stated - teaching, administration and research - with the possible addition of external income generation. The Head of an Educational Development Unit, himself a Professor, stated that :

'You would make your case, whether it be in research or teaching. You would make it combining your strongest areas.'

However, it was not only the newer institutions which considered more than research activity alone, in deciding whether a professorship should be awarded. The Vice Principal of one of the ancient universities, said that the requirement in his institution was that:

'You have got to be as good as currently is required in three areas and outstanding in two, and these are teaching, research and being organisationally active, i.e. administration.'

While, a Director of Quality from a modern university also agreed that a broad range of criteria were included and stated that there were:

'No hard and fast rules ... other than it has got to be able to go to external assessors and to be evaluated in that way ... e.g. officerships of learned societies, editorships of journals ... especially international journals, as well as people creating materials.'

Other interviewees meanwhile were more sceptical about the part which teaching achievement played in promotion to Professorship. One interviewee commented that people may have been promoted on the basis of their teaching before the advent of the RAE in the 1980s, but that this was much less likely now. Another Director of Quality - having acknowledged that promotion from lecturer to senior lecturer, on the basis of teaching innovation, rather than teaching performance, had happened - was less confident that this was the case with Professorships. He stated that :

'It is claimed that some people were promoted to Professor for the same reasons, but I am slightly sceptical of this.'

While the stated criteria for a Professorship may include teaching and learning, the perception within the Scottish universities appears to be that this aspect is given far less weighting than research, and other activity, which may lead to the development of an international reputation. In the AUT survey, 75% of respondents chose 'research' as the most important factor in promotion from SL / Reader to Professor, with a slightly increased emphasis on 'administration and management' at this level, on 4.7%, and a decreased emphasis on 'teaching' at 0.9% (Court, 1998).

Another means of recognising and rewarding excellence in teaching and learning is through the award of prizes for innovation and achievement in this area. Such awards highlight developmental activity within an institution and can be used as a mechanism for the sharing of good practice. However, while the majority of the Scottish universities appear to have considered the possibility of prizes, few have decided to pursue this route. One Director of Quality stated that:

'When the idea of prizes was floated, it was rapidly rejected.'

Another concluded that:

'There has never been a great deal of enthusiasm for it, even though it is done in some of the most distinguished universities in the world.'

Furthermore a Vice Principal commented that the issue of awarding prizes had been discussed within his institution but the decision had been made not to proceed. He stated that each time the matter had been discussed :

'There has been resistance... We don't do it and we should do it.'

It is difficult to find evidence that excellence in teaching and learning is being overtly rewarded in the Scottish universities. Many interviewees saw the issue as a *sensitive* one, which would require the setting of clear criteria for the type of evidence, which would need to be submitted, in making a case for a prize.

Two of the Scottish universities (one modern and one post-1992) have offered annual prizes for innovation in teaching. The former set six criteria and submissions were considered by a committee. A cash prize was awarded and information on the winning entry disseminated through the university magazine

and web pages. The latter held this as part of a Learning and Teaching Poster Event - again with a cash prize for use in staff development. Information on the winning, runner-up and commended entries was disseminated via the institution's web pages. However, the issue of awarding 'prizes' has recently been questioned in this institution, with concerns raised over the contradictory nature of this policy. If the main aim of a Poster Event was to *disseminate* good practice, then why award prizes? The two satisfy different needs and are not necessarily complementary.

Our interview responses indicate that the recognition and reward of excellence in teaching and learning is a complex issue and one which, while acknowledging its importance, institutions appear to have difficulty in addressing. Criteria for promotion from Lecturer to Senior Lecturer can include performance in teaching and learning. However the criteria for promotion to Reader, or to Professor, appears to remain based on research reputation. A fact which is also borne out in the AUT survey results (Court, 1998).

One question which has been raised in the context of rewards for teaching is how the promotion 'gap' between Senior Lecturer and Professor can be bridged for those whose main interest and activity lies in the area of teaching and learning. Teaching Fellowships may be one way forward, as would awarding the title 'Reader in the Teaching of (Academic Discipline)' which has been adopted by a few UK institutions, although not yet in Scotland. Without such overt recognition, it is understandable that staff may perceive research as being the valued activity, with teaching as something of a 'Cinderella' service. Changing such perceptions will require commitment on the part of university senior management to examining not only their promotion criteria, but the weighting given to each aspect and the ways in which they can ensure that excellence in teaching and learning is being given its due reward.

Broadening the Question

The issue of promotions and rewards is, of course, only part of a wider question - namely, the value in which teaching is held, compared to research. To elicit personal responses on this issue, we questioned all the interviewees along the

following lines. We asked to what extent, in the broadest terms, teaching was valued in their institution, compared to research. Interviewees in ten of the thirteen institutions stated outright that research was more valued, and more highly rewarded, than teaching. Thus, a good RAE rating of 5 or 5* was considered a more worthwhile achievement than an 'Excellent' in the TQA. This preference for good RAE results was based on the view that a high RAE rating brought more money to the institution and greater personal reward and recognition to the individual academics.

A number of interviewees remarked that, at the highest, strategic levels within their institutions, teaching was not valued as greatly as research. They commented that teaching was viewed as not bringing in money, compared to research, despite the fact that the bulk of the Scottish universities' income comes from per capita funding of students by SHEFC and not from research income. We cite a number of similar responses.

A Director of Quality from one of the ancient universities stated :
'There is a perception that anybody can teach but only few can do outstanding research.'
This opinion was supported by another Director of Quality, who perceived a stronger bias in this direction as a result of the RAEs in recent years. He said :
'Research has always been the activity which brought status among academic colleagues and rewards in terms of promotion. The RAE has possibly made this worse.'

It is a sad reflection on the standing of the main activity of higher education institutions when a Deputy Principal says *'nobody gets famous for their teaching.'* This low standing in which teaching appears to be held was also reflected by a Director of Quality, from one of the modern universities, who commented :
'The image of teaching is much lower in most institutions in Scotland ... We are trying to do something about that, but in trying to do so, we are emphasising the problem.'

This latter comment relates to the perception of a 'Catch 22' situation as regards the positioning of teaching amongst academic management priorities. If there is a perception that teaching does not currently have the same status as research, within higher level academic institutions, how can you address this problem without drawing further attention to it? The awarding of prizes for innovative teaching, or promotion of a staff member to a 'Teaching Fellowship', may be perceived as a form of 'consolation prize', given instead of the rewards which follow excellence in research.

Some interviewees remarked that there was an ongoing dynamic and that the culture was changing within Scottish higher education institutions. However, they were equally split as to whether this was in the direction of teaching - where moves towards accreditation of teaching in higher education was seen as a potential driver - or in the direction of research, because of the financial rewards arising out of the RAE.

In this context, a number of senior managers commented on the extent of the RAE rewards to the institutions, compared to the rewards for an Excellent rating in the TQAs. A Director of Quality from one of the ancient universities stated that :

'5 gets you millions, while an Excellent gets you 5% extra funded numbers. Teaching accounts for 75% of income, the other 20-25% is variable and depends on research outcome, which the university sees as something it can influence. So they put effort into that.'*

His counterpart, in one of the modern universities agreed that :

'Substantial amounts of money come because of your performance in the RAE - or don't come because of your performance. That matters. Basically, the teaching money doesn't change ... the extra money for an Excellent rating is argued by some to be a penalty rather than a prize ... and it is trivial compared to the money you get as a 5 or 5 in the RAE.'*

This imbalance in the rewards available for teaching and research were also highlighted in the Higher Education Quality Council's report, *Learning from*

Audit (1994), in which the authors commented that, in critical areas of teaching and learning, the money and time needed to encourage new and better ways of doing things had not been forthcoming. The report's conclusion was that this was made more difficult by the continuing dominance of a research culture in higher education, which gives much greater status and reward to research than to teaching excellence (HEQC, 1994b). In this respect, we share similarities with colleagues in universities in the United States, whose time spent on researching has increased in recent years, while their time spent teaching, supporting students and taking part in academic committees has declined (Dill, Massey, Williams and Cook, 1996).

A study of geography teaching by A. Jenkins (1995) similarly suggested that quality audit and TQA may have raised the profile of teaching, but concluded that the much stronger impact of the RAE had had an overall detrimental effect on it. Jenkins found that more teaching was being done by postgraduates and part-timers and the general pattern in appointments and promotion gave greater emphasis to research productivity and potential, vis-a-vis teaching. Jenkins suggested that, as rational economic maximisers, individuals, departments and institutions recognised the financial rewards for improved research rankings as being much higher than the extra funds which could be obtained from improved teaching. Therefore, universities tended to concentrate resources on improving their research output. Jenkins' view was that this was, most definitely, to the detriment of teaching in higher education.

Jenkins argument was based on the assumption that teaching delivered by postgraduate students, or staff on short-term or part-time contracts, was inherently poorer than that delivered by full-time academic staff. This view is certainly supported by a comment from the Vice Principal of one of the ancient universities who said :

'One of the characteristics of a research-led environment is that you have the "pleasure and privilege" of being taught by an untrained postgraduate student. We had to protect ourselves from that.'

However, experience in the USA, where postgraduate students play a large role in teaching at elite universities, suggests that this need not be the case. Perhaps the issue is not so much the employment of postgraduates and part-timers, in a teaching capacity, but the level of training which they receive to equip them for the job. Indeed, the Vice Principal quoted above admitted that, following criticism in the first rounds of TQA, his institution had had to address this problem. He stated that '*we have put in train an amazing amount of effort in controlling recruitment of, training and support for, all part-time staff*' and went on to report confidently that *'we are no longer vulnerable at all in that area.'* The RAE may have caused a shift in emphasis towards research activity amongst full-time staff, however there is no need for this to have a detrimental effect on the quality of teaching and learning, so long as the staff development issues are addressed.

Some Tentative Links

Analyses of recent RAE and TQA results do appear to suggest a strong relationship between high research ratings and the award of 'Excellence' in teaching (Hughes and Tight, 1995). In a HEFCE report into the English TQA results for 1992-1995, the top 20% of higher education institutions were shown to have achieved 80% of the 'Excellent' ratings, while the bottom 20% achieved only 11% of the ratings at this level (Booth, 1996). These findings are supported by our own analysis of the results for the Scottish universities, reported in Chapter 4.

Commenting on the decision by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, to set up a fund for the development of teaching and learning, explicitly linked to high achievement, Sanders (1995) noted that this was likely to disadvantage the former polytechnics, which generally achieved lower TQA grades than the older universities. According to Sanders, the correlation between an 'Excellent' score for teaching and an RAE rating of 'five' had hardened in the course of the assessment rounds. Thus while 71% of cognate areas gained both a 'five' in the RAE and an 'Excellent' in the TQA, in the first two rounds, this increased to 97% in the third round. However, the reasons for this correlation were less than clear.

Elton (1995) proposed that the correlation between RAE and TQA could be attributed to the recruitment of TQA assessors from amongst 'eminent' academics and the fact that such eminence was more usually associated with research, than with teaching, excellence. Moreover, assessors from older universities may also have been more likely to favour 'traditional' teaching methods than the more adventurous, innovative approaches. Elton suggested that the rule changes of the 1992 RAE, which allowed all universities to bid for funding based on the quantity, and assessed quality, of the research of its staff, had led to a deterioration in motivation and effort in teaching innovation. Individuals were more likely to perceive that their promotion and career prospects would be progressed by being in a high ranking research department than by being an excellent teacher (A. Jenkins, 1995).

A situation where research is more strongly rewarded than teaching would, of course, be unproblematic if there were a strong positive link between the two. However, as concerns the evidence for a link between *individual* research and teaching excellence, the picture is mixed. Brew and Boud (1995) highlight studies in which a small correlation could be identified between publication counts and teaching effectiveness. However, when citation counts were used as a measure of research quality, no relationship to teaching effectiveness was found. Brown (1995) has suggested that while there is little empirical evidence of a link between research and teaching excellence, there is a growing body of evidence that the funding of research, through the RAE, is having a negative impact on teaching and learning, and in particular, innovative developments. To counter this situation, Elton proposed the introduction of a teaching research and development fund, from which resources would be available to researchers who wished to enhance and develop quality in higher education pedagogy (Elton, 1995). However, guidelines established for the next RAE in 2001 indicate that discipline-based pedagogical research will still face difficulties in being accepted as valid by subject-based panels. This is likely to discourage such submissions and force academics, who may have an interest in pedagogy, to concentrate on their subject-based research, which they perceive will bring more benefits to themselves, and to their institutions.

Even if TQA results were rewarded more effectively, and the imbalance between the rewards for TQA and the RAE was reduced, there is the further question of whether the TQA itself gives the right incentives and encourages developmental work in teaching and learning (Drennan, 1999b). Thus a Director of Quality expressed concern that the TQA process might militate against *'risk taking'* in the development of innovative approaches to teaching and learning. He said :

'What worries me is that a climate may be developing - which TQA fosters, even though it may not wish to - against taking risks. You could argue that what you should do now is ... go for a very safe strategy. That's dangerous. If you felt the same about research, it would come to a grinding halt in no time at all.'

Conclusion

While the general consensus of those interviewed in this study was that the Teaching Quality Assessments had raised the profile of teaching and learning, there was an overwhelming agreement that it had not raised the esteem, or value, of teaching as compared to research. Promotion criteria of all higher education institutions in Scotland included performance in teaching, research and administration. However, perceived difficulties over the evaluation of excellence in teaching, and a prevailing notion that research performance was the true discriminator, were commonly held views. Amongst our interviewees, few believed that staff could move beyond a Senior Lecturer position, without high profile research activity. Only one institution had introduced posts which indicated that excellence in teaching and learning development was being highlighted and rewarded. Prizes for innovative development were contentious and adopted by only two of the thirteen universities in Scotland.

This perception of a dominance of research was reinforced by comments on the discrepancy between financial rewards available from the Funding Council for high research ratings, arising out of the RAE, and 'Excellent' ratings in the TQA exercise. The fact that studies failed to show a clear correlation between indicators of research quality, and teaching quality, raises questions about a possible bias which may exist within the groups of assessors. The majority of the assessors are drawn from the older universities and may hold preferences for more 'traditional' approaches to teaching and learning. The differential

resourcing of the old and new universities, as a result of research funding from both the private and public sector, which impacts on the level and standard of facilities for students, may also influence the TQA outcomes.

This part of our study demonstrated that academic staff perceive research as the main route for career advancement. If teaching is to be given equal value with research, then institutions must be more explicit in their recognition, and rewarding, of the excellent teacher. This will require defining what we mean by excellence in teaching and some mechanisms to record and evaluate teaching performance, and innovative developments. Teaching portfolios are one mechanism, within which a variety of forms of evidence can be collated, including peer and student evaluations. Prizes for particular teaching and learning developments, with the opportunity this gives an institution to highlight and disseminate good practice, are to be commended. Nevertheless these should not be used as consolation prizes, to be awarded to those who chose to demonstrate their excellence in pedagogy rather than in subject-based research, and who are thereby denied the opportunity for real advancement, from Lecturer to Senior Lecturer and beyond, to Reader and Professor. So long as the Funding Councils favour large institutional awards for excellence in research and much smaller rewards for excellence in teaching, individual academics will chose to concentrate their activities in research, to the detriment of teaching. Only when the rewards are equalised will staff believe that the core task of teaching students is truly valued.

As we have seen, the TQAs have had limited success in achieving their objective to raise the profile of learning and teaching, and to facilitate the dissemination of good practice throughout the sector. Furthermore, tensions have been created between the core activities of teaching and research, through the differential reward systems for each. The question remains, therefore, how universities can achieve quality enhancement in the area of learning and teaching and thereby enhance the overall student experience. In the next two chapters, we explore the philosophy of Total Quality Management and consider whether this may hold the key to the achievement of continuous quality improvement in higher education.

CHAPTER SEVEN : TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT

> *Total Quality Management (TQM) is an approach to improving the effectiveness and flexibility of businesses as a whole. It is essentially a way of organising and involving the whole organisation; every department, every activity, every single person at every level. For an organization to be truly effective, each part of it must work properly together, recognizing that every person and every activity affects, and in turn is affected by, others.*
>
> (Oakland, 1989, p.14-15)

Introduction

In previous chapters, we discussed the perceived impact of the TQAs on teaching and learning. We noted concerns that quality assurance procedures might lead to a compliance culture, wherein academic staff sought to follow a 'safe' strategy; one designed to satisfy the supposed requirements of the TQA assessors. We argued that the funding council in Scotland (SHEFC) had not achieved its aim of widespread dissemination of good practice, and that the TQA exercise did not encourage enhancement of quality in learning and teaching. One explanation for this was that the Teaching Quality Assessment mechanism was largely historic and retrospective in its approach. For *real* quality enhancement to be achieved, a more pro-active approach is necessary.

In this chapter we examine the philosophy of Total Quality Management (TQM). Our analysis starts with a discussion of the work of leading quality 'gurus', such as Deming, Juran and Crosby. In this section, we explore the implementation of TQM in a higher education context. This analysis includes a discussion of the pre-requisites for TQM in higher education and the issue of identifying customers and objectives. The final section of this chapter then utilises the interviews with senior HEI personnel, discussed in the previous chapters, in order to explore the extent to which TQM and/or BS5750 have impacted on the Scottish universities. In this regard, we note that many academic staff have considerable difficulty in accepting the business-type language and concepts associated with TQM, within a higher education environment. This may go some

way to explaining the limited implementation of both of these management systems.

Whereas this chapter focuses on past experiences with TQM, the following chapter will explore the possibilities of adapting TQM to the needs of the higher education sector and, specifically, to improving the quality of teaching and learning in the Scottish universities.

Total Quality Management (TQM)

Total Quality Management is a philosophical approach to the management of organisations, and in particular, to the management of *change* within organisations (Doidge and Whitchurch, 1993). Although originally developed by American management specialists including W. Edwards Deming and Joseph M. Juran, TQM was first successfully applied to production management in Japan, after the Second World War. Deming and Juran believed that most quality problems were caused by management, rather than by the workers. Their stated aim was to *empower workers* and involve them in decision-making; to *improve communication* between management and employees, and to encourage a *team approach*. This section surveys the work of three leading TQM theorists, namely Deming, Juran and Crosby, and explores how their work relates to higher education.

While the concepts of 'academic freedom' and 'academic autonomy' may lead us to infer that staff in HEIs are more empowered than the average 'worker', the management / worker model which Deming and Juran were familiar with, still has resonance in higher education, particularly in the post-1992 universities. A university's senior management may take major decisions, which impact on the ways in which teaching, and learning can be delivered. Such decisions may raise questions about empowerment, involvement in decision-making, a team approach and communications which are very similar to those faced by industrial or commercial organisations.

Although the origins of TQM were grounded in statistical analysis of performance, with Statistical Quality Control being the principal tool for verifying the success of TQM measures, TQM laid importance on the *human*

element of an organisation (Deming, 1986; Juran, 1988). At its root, TQM represents a belief that it is better (and cheaper) to do things right the first time, than not to do it right and have to fix it later (Eriksen, 1995). Central to the TQM philosophy is the idea of *'continuous improvement'*. Unlike the ISO9000 / BS5750 approaches to quality standards, which we will discuss later in this chapter, TQM does not require the documentation of standards, against which the product or service will be judged time after time. Instead, it seeks to inculcate an attitude in all employees, which prioritises customer satisfaction. Although management-led, writers on TQM emphasise the need for the wholehearted commitment of employees. Continuous improvement has been described, by proponents of TQM, as a never-ending journey (Taylor and Hill, 1991); a never-ending journey which involves the participation of all relevant parties in the process.

Interest in TQM grew when Japanese industry rose from the ashes of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to outstrip its American and European counterparts. In a highly competitive, global marketplace, Japanese goods developed a reputation for quality and reliability, while still remaining competitively priced. Companies around the world tried to emulate this success by implementing TQM programmes. By the late 1970s, major international organisations, such as IBM, were asking 'who is my customer' and attempting to build a sense of team spirit and responsibility, which would ensure a quality product and a satisfied consumer.

Deming (1986) summarised his approach to quality management in his 'Fourteen Points'. These statements were intended to guide organisations and are summarised as follows:

1. Creating constancy of purpose to improve the product and service;
2. Adopting a new philosophy to meet changing conditions. In a more competitive environment customer satisfaction had to become the main objective and management had to be aware of their responsibilities in attaining this;
3. Ceasing dependence on inspection to achieve quality; eliminating the need for mass inspection by building quality into the product;

4. Ending the awarding of business on price. Instead, minimising total cost and moving towards a single supplier for any one item on a long-term relationship of loyalty and trust;
5. Improving constantly and forever the system of production of service to improve quality and productivity and to decrease costs;
6. Instituting training on the job, which would ensure the employee fully, understands his/her total job;
7. Instituting leadership. Supervision should be to help people do a better job and there is a need to overhaul the supervision of management and production workers;
8. Driving out fear so that all may work effectively for the organisation;
9. Breaking down barriers between departments: research, design, sales and production must work together as a team to foresee problems in production, and use, that may be encountered with the product or service;
10. Eliminating slogans, exhortations and numerical targets for the workforce, such as 'zero defects' or new productivity levels. Such exhortations are diversionary as the bulk of the problems belong to the system and are beyond the power of the workforce;
11. Eliminating quotas or work standards, and management by objectives or numerical goals. Substituting leadership;
12. Removing barriers that rob people of their right to pride of workmanship. The responsibility of supervisors must be changed from stressing sheer numbers to improving quality. Eliminating annual or merit ratings and management by objectives.
13. Instituting a vigorous education and self-improvement programme;
14. Putting everyone in the company to work to accomplish the transformation. The transformation is everybody's job. (Deming, 1986)

While not all fourteen of Deming's points translate easily into a public sector environment, and particularly not one such as higher education, we should not be too ready to entirely dismiss them as inapplicable within HEIs. For example, Deming's emphasis on *'constancy of purpose'* (Point 1) can be interpreted as the need to have a clear set of goals for the organisation, such that everything the

organisation, and its members, does is designed towards meeting those goals. This fits well with the mission-oriented universities of today, some of which seek to provide wider access and flexible provision, others putting more emphasis on research prominence.

Adapting to change and placing *'customer satisfaction'* as the main objective (Point 2) is critical to success in the manufacturing sector. However, it may also be viewed as important in the highly competitive higher education marketplace, within which institutions now operate. Performance indicators such as placement of graduates may create a reputation for a higher education institution, just as factors such as durability will for a manufacturer's product. Nevertheless, the idea, and definition, of the 'customer' has provoked a debate in the higher education sector, to which we will return later in this chapter.

While academics may not see the need to *'cease dependence on inspection to achieve quality'* (Point 3) this is not entirely removed from the idea of quality assurance, with which those in HEIs are familiar. Quality assurance procedures in higher education are designed to prevent mistakes being made. They may outline, for example, the procedures to be taken in moderating examination papers, or in marking scripts. Within Deming's 3rd point, we might also include the increasing emphasis on academics' developing skills in teaching and learning, to the point of achieving postgraduate qualifications in teaching methods, and with a view to improving the quality of delivery which the student (as customer) experiences.

Deming's 4th point *'end awarding business on price'*, is less applicable in the teaching and learning environment. However, the creation of good relationships with suppliers is as important in terms of the daily operation of a higher education institution as it is in the private sector. A balance must be struck between quality of resources and price, and the search for 'best value' - an increasingly important concept in the public sector. The aim for every HEI should be to *'improve constantly'* (Point 5). Quality assurance of teaching and learning is vital but only as part of a wider approach leading to continuous quality improvement. How can such improvement be achieved? One

mechanism, as we have seen in previous chapters, is through staff development. This is essential if individuals are to be fully effective in their roles. Thus, *'instituting training on the job'* (Point 6) is an essential element if HEIs wish to ensure high standards of teaching and learning, and prepare staff to carry out other activities or roles.

To be effective, Deming argues, senior management must *'institute leadership'* (Point 7). Managers should lead by example and seek ways of assisting their staff to do their jobs better, e.g. by identifying and providing for individual staff development needs. It is vital not only that individuals develop but also that HEIs are themselves 'learning organisations'. Deming's 8th point, about *'driving out fear'*, can also be relevant in a higher education environment. Deming stresses the importance of creating a 'blame-free' culture; one in which learning from a mistake, rather than the allocation of blame and punishment, is the outcome of an individual's error. Innovation in higher education requires an environment in which individuals are able to experiment without fear of blame.

The TQM approach generally emphasises the importance of everyone in the organisation working together towards a common goal. Thus *'breaking down barriers between departments'* (Point 9) may represent a challenge to an academic environment in which there are both formal barriers of departmental dividing lines, as well as the informal barriers of professional or academic allegiances. This issue of 'academic tribes' (Becher, 1989) is one to which we return in the following chapter, when we examine the potential rather than the experience of TQM in a higher education environment.

Deming argues against the use of exhortations to employees to work harder / better / faster. His 10th point is to *'eliminate slogans ... and numerical targets'*. This statement is, in part, criticising some of the other key authors in the TQM field, such as Crosby (1979, 1996). While accepting Deming's view that exhortations alone will have little or no impact, many authors applying TQM to higher education suggest that there is a place for target setting within higher education, e.g. on student recruitment or research income, and for statements

which remind staff of the key aims of the organisation and department to which they belong.

Deming's 11th and 12th points, *'eliminating quotas'* and *'removing barriers ... to pride of workmanship'*, do not easily apply to HEIs. However, there is a case to be argued in favour of identifying individual achievement in research and teaching in higher education, if only to foster individual commitment to the institution. Deming's penultimate point, which stresses *'instituting a vigorous education and self-improvement programme'* (Point 13) echoes our findings from the research interviews, that staff development is an essential feature of quality improvement in teaching and learning. In line with Deming's views, such staff development should not be confined to academic staff alone. As we will argue later, it is essential that everyone within the organisation works together to *'accomplish the transformation'* (Point 14). In proposing that HEIs take a TQM approach to the management of academic quality, comprehensive involvement is vital. The quality of a student's experience is not determined by the academic staff alone, but by everyone involved in university administration, management and maintenance. Quality is not simply the responsibility of a Director of Quality or a Vice-Principal. It is everyone's responsibility and improving quality, or as Deming puts it, 'accomplishing the transformation' needs to be supported by the appropriate institutional culture. How this might be achieved is addressed in the next chapter.

Juran (1988), another leading writer in the field of TQM, supports some, but not all, of Deming's views. Like Deming, he abhors exhortations that lack substance. In Juran's opinion, emphasis should be put on the results to be achieved and the 'recipe' for action should consist of 90% substance and only 10% exhortation. Otherwise, he suggests, managers are in danger of being perceived less as a leader than as a cheerleader. Juran's approach to quality management is typified by his 'trilogy' of *'quality planning, quality control and quality improvement'* (Juran, 1988, p.11). Juran developed his ideas further, creating a quality planning 'road map', which contained the following steps :

- Identifying whom the customers are;

- Determining the needs of those customers;
- Translating those needs into our language;
- Developing a product that can respond to those needs;
- Optimising the product features so as to meet our needs as well as customers' needs;
- Developing a process that is able to produce the product;
- Optimising the process;
- Proving that the process can produce the product under operating conditions; and
- Transferring the process to the operating forces.

(Juran, 1988, p.14)

Today, higher education institutions are operating in an increasingly competitive marketplace. Each HEI endeavours to create specialist niches, or develop reputations in particular fields, which will attract students and funding. There is a possibility that Juran's 'road map' can be utilised in developing innovative approaches to teaching and learning, for example, by distance learning delivery. This would involve a process whereby the 'market' would be identified; the 'product' created and the 'process' by which this would be delivered, refined.

Much of what Juran advocates could be considered as common sense, or simply good management. The danger, as we will see, is that managers and their staff may perceive TQM not in those terms, but as something 'extra' which is imposed on them and which actually hinders them from doing their jobs.

Another important strand of TQM is critical of statistical evidence and monitoring. This strand is represented by Philip B. Crosby (1979, 1996) who is best known for his advocacy of the concept of 'zero defects'. Crosby promotes a system based on *prevention* of errors, as opposed to one based on quality *control*, which relies on a series of post-production, or post-delivery, checks. Crosby, whose best known books include *Quality is Free* (1979) and *Quality is Still Free (1996)*, acknowledges that Deming's criticisms of 'exhortation of the workers' are largely directed at him - criticisms which he does not accept.

Crosby claims that his theories of quality management are based on personal experience from the grassroots up, in a number of organisations. It is Crosby's use of the term *'Absolutes'* to describe his approach, which has drawn criticism of 'sloganism'. These 'Absolutes' call for conformance to requirements; an emphasis on prevention; an aim of zero defects and measurement of the cost of non-conformance to these objectives. Some of these features would be difficult to apply in a higher education context and, as we will see later in this chapter, the language used can, itself, become a barrier to the implementation of a TQM approach.

However, Crosby should not be dismissed so readily. In higher education today, quality assurance mechanisms within individual institutions are designed to prevent error. Mistakes can be costly and prevention is usually better than cure. This does not mean that HEIs should avoid experimentation and innovation, i.e. 'play safe'. However, it does suggest that quality standards must be clearly thought through and measures put in place, which will allow the level of quality to be monitored, evaluated and improved. 'Zero defects' is not very far from another TQM concept, that of 'right first time', which some HEIs have chosen to adopt in their quality management strategies. It is worth noting that, from the early days of TQM in the 1950s, the approach has moved from one heavily based on statistics and process control towards one which takes a more systematic view of the organisation, with a strong internal and external customer focus (Lin, 1993). It is this latter approach which we will examine further in advocating a TQM-type approach to quality management for higher education institutions.

Although Deming, Juran and Crosby variously disagreed with each others' approaches to quality management, the Department of Trade and Industry's (DTI) examination of the work of a number of 'quality gurus' identified several common features in these writers' definitions of TQM (DTI, 1991). These commonalties include a strong emphasis on *management leadership* and on *top management commitment* to such a policy. Top management commitment alone is perceived to be insufficient and a *company-wide approach* is advocated, with all employees being made aware of their responsibilities with regard to quality, and being motivated to do their best. According to the DTI, there is also a

common view that company policy should be guided by the *prevention of errors* and faults rather than through detection and correction and that to achieve this a *cultural change* is required, from an inspection to a prevention approach, and to one of involvement. Moreover, it is thought that this cultural change would require *organisational change*, with a strong emphasis placed on meeting external customers' requirements and identifying internal customers' needs, as well as on developing good supplier relationships. *Data acquisition* is perceived as an essential element for facilitating and measuring this process of change, including the gathering of information on employee, customer and supplier attitudes and opinions. Finally, there is agreement on the importance of *ascertaining the costs of poor quality* (DTI, 1991). The Department also found that most TQM programmes rely on teamwork to ensure better planning analysis and problem-solving, good communications, strong motivation and a sense of collective responsibility amongst the workforce.

In the course of this chapter, and the next, we will assess the debate on the appropriateness of these key elements of TQM in a higher education context. Specifically, we will focus on the question of whether a management philosophy such as TQM, initially created to deal with the problems of manufacturing industry, can or should be applied within higher education institutions. We start by surveying literature on the applicability of TQM and move on to a discussion of the pre-requisites for successful implementation of such initiatives

The Higher Education Context

Previous studies have suggested that higher education is a sector in which individual autonomy and academic freedom are highly valued and where management from the top down, with the implication that personal responsibility might consequently be diminished, is viewed with deep concern (Barnett, 1992a). Implied in this characterisation of higher education is the partial or complete rejection of TQM methods within HEIs. At the opposite end of the spectrum, some observers have described TQM as a means of managing change, in order that innovations can be implemented, while still preserving the traditional values of higher education (McCulloch, 1993; Winter, 1994).

Much of this debate is based on concrete concerns about the competitiveness of higher education institutions. HEIs have come to face pressures increasingly similar to private sector organisations and are no longer immune from market forces. Since the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act, and the UK Government's drive to increase participation rates in higher education, more universities and colleges than ever before are competing for the same 'pool' of students. Interest in quality issues and quality management has grown, as each HEI aims for delivery of high quality programmes, and achievement of the highest ratings in the research and teaching quality assessment exercises. These grades are often used in promotional material for departments and institutions, in order to attract high calibre student applications. They have, in many ways, become critical to the overall success, if not survival, of the organisation.

To achieve high ratings in the teaching quality assessment exercise, HEIs need robust monitoring systems as well as the total commitment of all their staff, and a culture which supports the idea of continuous quality improvement. This has become one of the incentives for the introduction of TQM-type measures (Crawford, 1991). An additional aspect favouring a TQM approach is the fact that universities are currently under pressure to deal with increased student numbers, while at the same time suffering from a reduction, in real terms, of per-capita funding (Williams, 1993). Hence, efficiency in dealing with large numbers, cost reduction, accountability and value for money have become key issues for today's HEI.

Williams (1993) suggests four possible routes by which TQM initiatives may enter an HEI. Firstly, members of university governing bodies, who have experience of TQM in the business world, and seen the benefits which it can bring to an organisation, may have stimulated discussion at the highest levels of institutions. These individuals may perceive the key elements of TQM as applicable in diverse working environments and can therefore see no reason why it could not be applied in HEIs. Secondly, academics who teach the principles of quality management in business schools and engineering faculties have brought this expertise to bear in developing their own institution's quality policies and mechanisms. They may do this through participation in their institution's quality

committees or by direct application of a TQM approach within their own departments or faculties. Williams' third suggestion is that explicit pressure from the Government, may have led institutions to pay more attention to quality issues, especially as these relate to funding. While this is undoubtedly true, Williams' proposition could result in the increasing implementation of mechanistic quality assurance procedures, and not necessarily to a TQM approach. Lastly, Williams proposes that existing quality assurance procedures may have proved inadequate in coping with the increasingly competitive, market-driven environment in which HEIs now operate. It is to counter this that Williams advocates a TQM approach.

TQM tends towards a human resource-centred approach and, as such, may be viewed as fitting in with higher education institutions' values and needs. Bolton (1995) has argued that an approach which takes, as its central tenet, the notion of continuous improvement, is one which can be nurtured at the individual level and fits well with the normal appraisal and staff development processes, which are in place in most higher education institutions.

Pre-Requisites for TQM in Higher Education

Proponents of TQM have identified a number of pre-requisites for the implementation of this method (DTI, 1991). Accordingly, TQM in higher education, and elsewhere, has to be *management-led*. If the senior management of the institution is not committed to this approach, how can they expect to persuade their academic colleagues? In other words, management must be able to see a clear benefit to the institution and effectively communicate this to their staff (Crosby, 1996).

Moreover, TQM will only work if there is total *workforce commitment* to it (Taylor and Hill, 1991; Williams, 1993; Seddon and Rowlands, 1994). This involves not only the academic staff but also the support staff, who contribute to the running of the institution and to the overall student experience.

Such a project will require *cultural change* (Cousins, 1994). Often this will imply a move away from a quality control approach where staff members react to

things once they have gone wrong, towards a more proactive approach, where staff seek ways of continuously improving the quality of their work. It may also require a change in the way service provision is perceived, both internally and external to the institution, i.e. viewing students and other stakeholders as 'customers' - an issue which we shall see later in this chapter can be problematic for many staff in higher education. These three key components of a TQM approach will be explored in more detail in
Chapter 8, when we discuss the potential of TQM in aiding quality improvement.

The final pre-requisite for the successful implementation of TQM is robust *data gathering* and analysis, as a means of monitoring quality and measuring change (Ashworth and Harvey, 1994). The value of recording and analysing a variety of performance indicators has been noted previously in Chapter 3. An organisation must have some means of measuring where it is now, and deciding where it would like to be in the future. However, as argued previously, performance indicators should not become an end in themselves. Within a TQM approach, performance indicators are used not to control quality but to assist the process of enhancement, and in this context, their use is to be commended.

Lewis and Smith (1994), while agreeing that the implementation of TQM is more difficult in an HEI, argue that its emphasis on quality-based systems and processes provides a positive framework for integrated institutional decision-making and problem solving. It is integrated in the sense that TQM aims to take an *holistic* approach to decision-making and to involving everyone within the organisation in achieving successful outcomes for the institution as a whole. Lewis and Smith's view is that student learning is the core function of universities and that all discussions on quality and quality assurance should be based round this. But student learning is only one function of a university. Research, and the income which can be generated from such activity, is also critically important. This illustrates that TQM approaches, as they exist, may still require some refinement.

As the TQM approach became more widely known, it was adopted by the service and public sectors (Morgan and Murgatroyd, 1994). Banks, insurance

companies, hoteliers and retailers sought to improve their customer satisfaction levels by implementing TQM within their organisations. If we perceive teaching as a form of 'service delivery' within the public sector, then there are strong reasons for also advocating a TQM approach in this environment. Academics may, as we will see from the analysis of our research interviews, have some difficulty in accepting general business terms, such as 'markets' and 'customers', in the higher education context, however this should not present a barrier to the implementation of a TQM approach.

In discussing the applicability of a TQM approach to higher education, we can draw parallels with its development in the private sector. TQM was initially implemented in manufacturing organisations, with the aim of improving production processes and ensuring that the final product was fit for its purpose. However, this application was not an end in itself. The TQM approach advocated *continuous improvement*. In this respect, innovative research and development was critical to the process. Without experimentation and innovation, products could not be improved. What TQM brought to this process was the idea that the individual, and the organisation, should think very carefully about the purpose of the new development; for whom it was being designed; how it might be used; and how costly mistakes might be reduced. Such thinking could be transposed to the teaching and research activities of a higher education institution.

Yet the current discussion, surrounding the application of these concepts, is by no means unanimous. Barnett (1992a) acknowledges that there can be little disagreement with the notion that a culture of quality should be developed in an institution of higher education, so that everyone is aware of his or her part in maintaining and improving the quality of the institution. He does, however, sense risk in this approach. Barnett believes that, in order to *ensure* that each individual is acting appropriately, procedures will have to be put in place, which offer a real assurance of quality but which ultimately lead to a 'checklist mentality'.

But do TQM procedures inevitably lead to a checklist mentality? Barnett makes a statement that none could disagree with - of course, all institutions will claim

that they want to achieve a culture of quality. However, he continues by criticising the quality assurance type of approach. His inference is that this will almost inevitably lead to a narrow view, in which the necessity to 'tick the box' on a quality checklist, becomes paramount. A checklist mentality would certainly be 'misguided' and 'ineffective', if one's aim were quality enhancement (Barnett, 1992a, p.118). It would be possible to argue that Barnett's interpretation is based on an overly narrow understanding of the TQM approach. Barnett, perhaps, fails to appreciate the dimension of TQM which stresses the importance of every person within the organisation having a shared vision; a vision which seeks to empower individuals and encourage them to strive for excellence in their own work (Rippin, White and Marsh, 1994).

In its purest, most philosophical form, TQM would have no need for checking mechanisms. Everything would be done 'right first time' - course aims and objectives would be clear; classes well taught; assessments appropriately chosen; marked courseworks returned in a reasonable time, etc. However, human actions are rarely 'right first time' - nor should we expect them to be, in an environment where experimentation and innovation are not only encouraged, but expected. Human beings are not automatons. They do not do the same thing exactly the same way every time, as a well-tuned machine might do. Therefore, both the individual and the organisation need to have some feedback on how well they are achieving the quality standards they have set.

For this approach to be applicable, data would have to be gathered in the form of performance indicators, both qualitative and quantitative, which would be used to monitor and evaluate the successful achievement of those standards. Such indicators should not, as we have previously stated, be ends in themselves. If this were to happen, then Barnett's criticisms would have some foundation. A checklist mentality would reflect a very narrow view of quality management. A TQM approach, on the other hand, would seek to broaden that view - well beyond checklists - and encourage a continuous search for ways in which quality can be enhanced. Quality assurance procedures are a necessary element in the TQM process. Without feedback, we cannot know if our attempts to improve on elements of our teaching, and the students' learning, have been successful.

Barnett's analysis suggests that quality assurance will become a mere 'tick box' procedure; something which we are required to be *seen* to be doing, rather than having a wholehearted commitment to doing, for its own intrinsic value. In this respect, Barnett is right to argue that what may often be missing in a quality assurance approach is a real commitment to quality. Such a total commitment is one of the key goals of the TQM approach. Quality assurance will be no more than a series of checking procedures, unless it is part of a process that puts emphasis on continuous quality improvement and customer satisfaction. Possibly, the main benefits of TQM may arise from its promotion of organisational learning and its support for the process of managing change.

Academic staff, who perceive quality assurance as an unnecessary burden, often fail to understand the essential part it plays in not only assuring but in enhancing quality. Quality assurance is not solely about checking what has, or has not, been done well but should enable learning from both successes and failures and using such information to further improve the quality of learning and teaching. Williams (1993) suggests that one of the most persuasive features of TQM lies in its emphasis on the individual's contribution to the success of the entire organisation. He accepts that academic staff may have divided loyalties – to the institution, their students and fellow scholars – and that these need to be borne in mind when implementing a TQM approach. However, Williams decries the use of the principle of 'academic freedom' as a means of refuting such an approach and of escaping from a measure of accountability for the method or content of what is taught or researched.

In the next chapter, we will explore possible benefits, resulting from a successful implementation of TQM within higher education institutions, in more depth and, in doing so, support Williams' view that academic freedom and accountability need not be diametrically opposed.

Identifying Customers and Objectives

A major criticism of TQM in higher education revolves around the question of identifying one's 'customers'. Most organisations, and particularly those established many years ago, tend to evolve to suit their own purposes.

Organisational theorists would suggest that it is far easier to meet the goals one sets oneself than to seek to meet those of ones' customers (Marchese, 1993). Yet, the new approaches to quality assurance demand that customers' voices are heard and that their needs are met. In a TQM context, quality is defined in terms of whether a product or service meets the specifications of the customer (Green, 1994). This can require an attitude change with regard to 'who' that customer might be. In a higher education context, there are several possible answers. Is the customer the student or the employer of graduates? Parents or Government paymasters? Sponsors or professional bodies? Or is it society as a whole? (Lin, 1993)

In the manufacturing sector, where TQM was first introduced, there is also a multitude of customers. To define the term 'customer' merely in relation to the final purchaser of the product is inappropriate. Of course, the purchaser of the product is the customer but so too is the retailer, the wholesaler and the distributor. Yet, every person involved in the manufacturing process who depends on someone else, within the company, carrying out their function without mistake, in order that the next step in the process can be effectively accomplished, can be viewed as a 'customer'. On visiting an IBM plant in 1990 with a group of students, we observed that a notice with the question 'who is my customer?' was attached to every workstation and was answered with the name of the next workstation down the line, until the finished product left the factory. These notices were intended to reinforce the importance of teamwork, and of paying attention to the needs of one's internal customers, as well as the final purchaser of the goods or service.

Lin (1993) has asked whether the customer is the student or employer, parents or government, sponsors or professional bodies. In higher education, we do not have to respond to this question with a single answer. Our reply can be that the customer is *all* of these. However, just as in the manufacturing sector, each customer demands something slightly different from us. The student demands interesting, well-taught courses, which will lead to relevant, professional employment or prepare them for further study. Employers of graduates demand a high degree of knowledge and skills in order that the graduate can swiftly

become an effective member of their workforce. Parents, and the Government - who are funding the individual student's higher education - will seek value for money in terms of the resources and facilities which support their studies; reassurance that the quality of teaching and research is of an acceptable (if not, exceptional) standard and a guarantee that jobs will be available for qualified graduates. Sponsors and professional bodies will seek verification that particular knowledge and skills have been acquired, which will result in exemption from professional examinations, or allow entry to a particular profession.

The student is undoubtedly the client, or customer, of the university. But to relate this in terms of a production process, the student can also be seen as the *raw material*, which undertakes certain transformations, eventually passing the programme of study and being transformed into the *product* of the system i.e. the graduate. These various perspectives of the student, as customer, raw material and product, pose interesting ambiguities for higher education and, depending on which predominates, may influence the development and impact of a TQM programme. However, if we can accept the notion of multiple customers of higher education, we may also accept that, at various times, the student plays more than one role within the system.

Certain individuals and organisations have, nonetheless, sought to identify the *primary* customer of higher education. The Engineering Professors' Conference in 1992, for instance, took the view that the primary customer was the student, and that the service which was provided was education (Burge and Tannock, 1992). However, this view left out the important element of the student's own contribution to her development, for she is not merely a passive recipient of the service, but an active participant in the process. This factor has been overlooked even by those proponents of the student as raw material, who view the transformation element as the application of a value-added service and the final output, the graduate, as the student after exposure to the value-added service. Within this perspective, society has been identified as the primary customer, defined directly as the employer and indirectly as the funding council (Eriksen, 1995).

An additional difficulty in adopting an 'industrial' model, and attempting to apply it in higher education, is that certain aspects do not easily translate into such a different environment. If a manufacturer requires certain raw materials in order to make the product, he will ensure that each input meets the quality standards on every occasion. In higher education, students come from a wide range of backgrounds and with a wide range of qualifications. The raw material, in this context, is not standardised at a certain level of quality and the academic member of staff cannot reject a student for not being well enough prepared by another lecturer (Forsyth, 1994).

This may be a characteristic in the higher education sector, which makes it quite unlike any other environment in which TQM operates. However, it should not unduly affect the HEI, which traditionally sets out certain parameters for entry, both informally and formally. One way to tackle these difficulties may be better diagnosis, at point of entry, of a student's capabilities and potential (Williams, 1993). Such diagnosis allows adequate support and, if necessary, remedial action to be taken in order to ensure the student's success on the programme. Such action may be particularly necessary for mature students, or those entering from a family background which has had no previous experience of higher education, and can take the form of additional academic and personal counselling or 'bridging' courses, such as those provided in HEI summer schools.

However, success is ultimately predicated on the student's own commitment to learning and may benefit from a specific form of contract, or understanding, between the university, lecturer and student as to what each can expect from one another (Williams, 1993). Clarification of rights and responsibilities has been increasing, in the public sector generally, with the introduction of Charters and, additionally in higher education, learning contracts. These reinforce the view of student as customer. At the same time, they highlight the importance of the two-way relationship between teacher and learner in higher education. It is how the student responds to the process, which will determine the final outcome and quality of the product.

This reflects a much more market-oriented attitude on the part of HEIs. The emphasis is on what the institution can do for the student, rather than what the student can do for him/herself. Yet, if the HEI wishes to ensure continued improvement in its student retention and progression rates, or the level of awards or type of employment, which the student achieves at the end of their period of study, then an explicit compact may have to be made between the student and the institution.

Muller and Funnell (1991) agree that the student is central to the process and that TQM can be used not only to improve the student experience, but also to facilitate the student from passive recipient to active learner. They identify five key areas for improving student learning and the student experience. Firstly, they advocate that there should be a focus on the processes involved in learning and on the centrality of the learner in obtaining successful outcomes. Secondly, they highlight the need to facilitate the learner to take ownership of the learning process herself. Thirdly, that the learner should take responsibility for developing and deciding the style of delivery, in consultation with the provider. Fourthly, that the process of learning should empower the learner to innovate, experiment, reflect and learn from relative failure, as well as from success, and finally that the learner should be encouraged and supported to be a self-motivated, lifelong learner.

Muller and Funnell recognise that quality assurance procedures, such as course review, are primarily *reactive* tools as they focus on what has gone wrong in the past and how it might be corrected. This contrasts with more *pro-active* approaches, such as those advocated in TQM, which aim to focus on the process and to seek ways of continuously improving service delivery. Ideally, TQM relies on continual monitoring, evaluation and review of quality and does not depend on summative checks.

Reactive approaches also ignore the notion of the internal customer (Taylor and Hill, 1991). Within a TQM environment, as we have seen, the contribution of every member of the institution is critical to its overall success. If administrators do not give academic staff their class lists or timetables, this can create

considerable difficulties. Likewise, if academic staff do not submit their assessment marks in time for the administrator to prepare examination board papers, this can lead to increased pressure of work and delays in students receiving their results. TQM experts advocate the use of process flow charts, as a means of illustrating all the links in the quality chain. We do not have evidence of the use of these in an academic environment, yet it is a simple technique which makes relationships and dependencies clear and reinforces the importance of satisfying internal customers' needs, as well as those of external customers.

As previously stated, in order for a TQM approach to work, it requires to be supported from the top. Senior managers must have a basic understanding of quality and how this can be improved. As in any management decision-making, good information is essential and in the case of TQM, this information is likely to take the form of statistics, ratios and other quantitative data, which indicate how a programme of study or HEI is operating (Ashworth and Harvey, 1994). Examples would be information on student entry points, progression and failure rates, employment destinations, etc.

As discussed in Chapter 3, these performance indicators have often been utilised to compare one institution with another. *The Times* league tables of higher education institutions are a prime example of this type of use. However the choice of performance indicators, and the value attached to them, both by the provider and the consumer, is critically important. High rankings in teaching quality assessments may be valued by academic staff and their senior management, however they may bear no relation to graduate employment statistics, a performance indicator which will be of great interest to students. Apparently objective, performance indicators are in fact value-laden. *The Times* higher education league tables themselves weight teaching and research indicators differently, and more heavily, than the other measures in their tables. Such performance indicators tell us nothing about the *processes* operating in our higher education establishments. In the corporate world, 'management by fact' requires specific statements on the level of quality which is expected and systematic tracking to ensure that these are being met, if not exceeded. It is the apparently increasing need for data gathering which many academics find

difficult to accept (Marchese, 1993). Quality assurance mechanisms can be seen as an extra burden, if the TQM message has not been accepted throughout the institution. Their credibility is further undermined if external or internal assessment scores themselves lack plausibility or rigidity. While this may endanger the outcome of TQM efforts, it is not inevitable if the process is effectively led and implemented.

Pollock and Sutcliffe (1992) suggest that to get a better picture on current provision, the views of the institution's customers - in this case, students - should be actively sought and this feedback used to further improve quality. This would form part of the essential data gathering necessary to support continuous quality improvement. However, such feedback needs to be used with care. Students in the early stages of a degree programme may be unable to put their learning into perspective and may question the judgement of staff in relation to curricular matters. They may favour more populist approaches and condemn the more challenging. As one tool, in the search for an overall evaluation of quality in learning and teaching, student feedback has an important place but it must be interpreted in the context of other quality indicators, such as progression rates, mean assessment marks, etc. Total Quality Management depends on achieving a comprehensive picture of existing quality of provision, in order that improvements can be sought.

A Scottish Viewpoint

One of the most obvious problems in implementing TQM in a higher education context is that the approach itself is often misunderstood and misconstrued. As part of our field study, we examined the understanding, and perceived applicability, of TQM in higher education institutions in Scotland. We investigated views on issues of quality assessment and management, by conducting interviews with senior personnel, with responsibility for aspects of quality management in teaching and learning. The interviewees were asked whether they believed that a management philosophy, such as TQM, had a place in academic institutions and whether their own institution had gone down such a route. They were also asked a similar question with regard to the more standardised route of quality assurance, accreditation to BS5750 / ISO9000,

which some universities in England had already implemented (Storey and Doherty, 1993). The responses are divided into general views on TQM, and the relationship between TQM and BS5750 / ISO9000. The primary purpose of these questions was to identify the barriers to the successful implementation of TQM approaches in the Scottish universities and to triangulate these views with those expressed in the literature.

(a) General Views on TQM

When asked about their general views on TQM and its applicability in the higher education context, some of the interviewees indicated sympathy for such an approach. These sympathetic responses included the statement of a Director of Quality who said that he did *'not think that there is anything about TQM as a philosophy which is inimical to it being in higher education'*.

A Vice-Principal similarly agreed and said *'the principles of TQM ... that everyone has a responsibility within the institution. I certainly believe in that'*.

Another Vice Principal expressed the view that *'the aspects of TQM which tend to go quite well in universities are the parts which say that you must put the quality checking systems down to the lowest levels, and that has worked quite well'*.

Despite these favourable predispositions, all of the interviewees expressed concern about the operation of TQM in an academic environment. This concern manifested itself in two key areas - the language of TQM, as a perceived threat to academic freedom, and the culture of the executive body.

(i) The language of TQM

One of the problems associated with the implementation of TQM in higher education is the commercial undertone of the language, or jargon, which is utilised. Kohn (1993) has suggested that this jargon can have disturbing pedagogical implications. It may invoke fears of increasing managerialism and declining academic autonomy within higher education institutions. These issues centre around the concepts of 'the customer', 'accountability', 'value for money',

'fitness for purpose' and 'right first time'. We explored this issue in the context of our interviews and received a number of revealing responses which highlighted the mixed attitude of the interviewees towards TQM. One Director of Academic Development expressed this in the following terms:

'Academics have gigantic problems about thinking of students as 'customers'. I don't think students are solely customers but I have no difficulty thinking, at times, that students will behave exactly like customers. The more they pay, the more likely they are to behave like customers'.

Customers, and customer satisfaction, can seem too commercial and simplistic a concept to describe the relationship between the institution and the student (Lewis and Smith, 1994). Not only are students one of the customer groups but they can also be viewed as 'partners', 'apprentices' or the 'product' of the system. A Director of Quality stated that :

'These are all quite different things and ... that is extremely difficult to operate as a Total Quality situation. Marks and Spencer don't try to say that all their customers are also apprentices to M&S and they will run their quality on the basis of these multiple roles. It makes it more difficult to articulate a coherent, clear quality philosophy'.

Yet, if the institution does not clearly identify its 'customers' in its mission and objectives, then it is unlikely to be able to create a sense of common purpose amongst its staff.

'Accountability', 'value for money' and 'fitness for purpose' are further examples of business language, which is now commonplace in higher education institutions. Yet, these concepts are often strongly opposed by academics, implying limits on academic freedom and creativity and a drive towards standardisation and uniformity (Lewis and Smith, 1994). Again, a statement by the Head of Academic Staff Development, at an ancient university, highlights the problems of transposing this language into academia:

'There is pretty wide acceptance of quality assurance, which has come from academia itself, but I think that these more management-originated schemes would get a poor reception here. I find a lot of it jargon-ridden and not so appropriate for universities.

The problem with the language and jargon of TQM is that it is a complete turn-off'.

Such a view fails to take into account the fact that higher education is no longer a privilege for the elite few, but is now a reality for almost half the school-leavers in the UK. As *per capita* government funding has decreased, in real terms, over many years and under governments of different political persuasions, universities have had to seek increasing levels of funding from external sources, for example from consultancy activities and fees charged on full-cost courses. Higher education *is* big business and, as such, we should not be surprised that business jargon has crept in. The argument against business jargon, attitudes, and practices such as TQM are that they threaten academic freedom and encourage a compliance culture. Such a reaction is unnecessary. There is little disagreement that higher education institutions *should* be 'accountable' for the spending of public funds. They *should* provide 'value for money' in the use of resources. Furthermore, HEIs need to put in place mechanisms for monitoring quality that will assist them in reviewing and further enhancing their provision.

The language of TQM need not act as a barrier to this. However, it may act as a convenient excuse for those who would rather not be required to systematically and continuously reflect on the quality of their output; those who value academic freedom for the freedom it gives to do as one pleases, without reference to others' needs, far less those of ones' customers (Drennan, 2000a).

A further mainstay of TQM, the notion of 'fitness for purpose', evokes considerable debate as to its relevance in higher education. Leaving aside the question of fitness for 'whose' purpose, Doherty (1994) sees it as a necessary, although insufficient element in the quality debate. In Doherty's view, 'fitness for purpose' does not go far enough, as it implies that it is enough just to provide the customer with what she wants, instead of seeking to exceed her highest expectations. However, the TQAs organised by the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council were based on a 'fitness for purpose' approach, requiring subject areas to make explicit statements of aims and objectives and relating everything in their self-assessment document back to those.

The intention was to judge institutional quality in learning and teaching against each institution's mission. The outcomes of those assessments indicate clearly that the age and research reputation of each of the Scottish universities were strongly correlated with the awarding of high TQA scores, as we have seen in Chapter 4.

These findings may be taken to support the view of Barnett (1992a), who believes that 'fitness for purpose' has less to do with the quality of academic delivery in HEIs and more to do with legitimating and defending an institutional hierarchy. The institution may be fit for the purpose it sets out in its mission statement, but some purposes may be perceived to be more worthy than others. Like comparing oranges and apples, comparisons of high levels of achievement in widening access with high levels of achievement in research are meaningless. At the heart of Barnett's argument is the idea that there must be something *higher* about higher education. This was described in Chapter 3 as a transformative experience; one in which the critical faculties of a student is developed. Barnett's view is rooted in a particularly elite type of university and does not fit well in the former polytechnics, now post-1992 universities. 'Fitness for purpose' is a laudable aim and one that has been largely embraced by the new university sector. In embracing this aspect of TQM, higher education institutions are asking to be judged against their stated missions and not against some kind of 'gold standard'.

Unfortunately, experience has shown this not to be the case. *The Times* higher education league tables use common criteria on which to make a judgement about every HEI in the United Kingdom, with a view to informing student choice. The criteria favour institutions with a long tradition in academic work, particularly in the research field. These are institutions which also tend to be better resourced, from donations, private and public research funding and commercial consultancy earnings. The plain fact is that the older universities generally have strong, established reputations in their fields and are able to attract both funding and students, while the newer institutions are working hard

to improve their ratings and compete against their well-established rivals. It cannot be described, in any sense, as a 'level playing field'.

Yet, when the TQAs were first launched, the Funding Councils stressed the importance of assessing the quality of provision within the context of the institution. Taking a cognate area like Law, for example, we might find that this was being taught as part of an LLB degree, in preparation for a graduate entering the profession as a solicitor or barrister, or as part of a BA degree for legal administrators. The content of law which would be taught, and the ways in which it might be taught, could vary tremendously between these two different degree programmes. Fitness for purpose, or contextuality, should be an essential element in judging whether quality teaching is being delivered and quality learning being achieved by the students. Barnett does not explicitly support academic hierarchies, yet much of his writing appears to favour this view. His vision of 'higher' education is one which few HEIs could match.

Arguably the most contentious of expressions in the TQM vocabulary is 'right first time'. Advocates of this approach argue that the more an institution can achieve this, the better will be its quality, and the more time can be spent on addressing those aspects the HEI has not yet got right (Ashworth and Harvey, 1995). Adopting a 'right first time' approach, helps ensure that the objectives and methodology have been clearly thought out, to minimise time wasting and prevent unnecessary mistakes (Taylor and Hill, 1991). Critics sometimes interpret this approach as being detrimental to creativity, experimentation and research. The quest for improvement in knowledge is based on experimentation which, by its very nature, does not get it right first time, and therefore many academics can see little practical application of a TQM approach in their environment. A Director of Academic Development suggested :

'There is an important balance in higher education, which is the need to put in place sound, fair, sensible systems for staff and students and their relationship, while at the same time allowing for high levels of tolerance, high levels of diversity and trying to encourage higher levels of individuality and creativity. How do you stop the one thing being the dead hand on the other? And how do you stop the other being a complete destroyer of any reasonable, even-

handedness and fairness? ... I would be unhappy if we neutered all innovation and all creativity in universities by going down the quality routes'.

This statement has resonance with the view that quality assurance procedures can lead to a 'checklist mentality' (Barnett, 1992a). However, this does not have to be the result of introducing a TQM approach. By encouraging ownership of quality, at grassroots level, we should be encouraging self-reflection, innovation and improvement and not stifling it, as our interviewee suggests might be the case.

Deciding what actually constitutes 'getting it right' is, however, a fundamental issue (Withers, 1995). Whatever approach is adopted, it needs to be one which accepts that the organisation and the individual will make mistakes – they will not always get it 'right first time' – but they will learn from their mistakes and seek to continuously improve the quality of whatever service they are delivering.

Without mistakes, there is no learning. An organisation which focuses on mistake prevention will ossify. While it is vital to monitor quality and to put in place systems, and train staff, in a way which will minimise the potential for mistakes being made, we must accept that human beings are not error-free. The important element of this is that we must be able to accept our mistakes and learn lessons which will help improve the situation for the future. This can only take place effectively if we have encouraged an organisational culture which does not seek to blame, but instead seeks to learn. In this way, we can ensure that changes take place which lead to continuous, gradual improvement of our quality. Continuous improvement is the key aim of TQM.

Thorn (1991), writing for managers of industrial organisations, but expressing views which are equally applicable to managers of HEIs, stated that 'total quality itself is concerned with the realignment of the activities and culture of an entire workforce towards a belief in continuous improvement' (1991, p.10).
While highlighting concerns about the jargon of TQM, several of the interviewees used language, which would be easily recognised as falling within this managerial domain. One spoke of *'your approach to your clients and to*

delivery of service' and to *'commitment to excellence'*. Another referred to the mission statement of the institution and reference to its *'strive for excellence'*. Therefore we should perhaps look beyond the language of TQM for an explanation of why this has not be adopted in the higher education sector to the same extent as it has in the industrial and commercial sectors.

(ii) The culture of the executive body

In the UK, there has been one notable instance of an academic body endorsing TQM. At the Engineering Professors' Conference (EPC) in 1992, delegates supported the adoption of a TQM approach which would be based on the fundamental principles of quality assurance, but which would also incorporate the idea of continuous improvement. The EPC acknowledged the level of commitment and motivation which was required for successful implementation of TQM and argued that it should not be undertaken purely to satisfy the requirements of legislation or funding. In the EPC's view, TQM would yield substantial efficiency and morale benefits within an HEI and avoid the need for much of the time-consuming fire-fighting which is the consequence of non-existent or poorly defined systems and procedures. The Conference was also of the opinion that commitment to a TQM continuous improvement process should have the effect of involving staff and empowering them to strive towards the quality objectives of the institution.

Not all academics supported the EPC view. Chaston (1994) criticised their recommendation, that UK universities should adopt a TQM-based approach, on the basis that there were numerous internal barriers to be overcome. In Chaston's view these included a lack of inter-departmental trust and a lack of co-operation within the internal environment. Forsyth (1994) opposed the adoption of TQM for other reasons. He argued that attempting to follow industrial standards of quality control was inappropriate and denied the value which already existed in academic quality assurance procedures such as curriculum evaluation and course review. In industry, the process started with the raw materials. If they were not up to standard, they were rejected. But in higher education, where the student is the raw material, the variation in 'quality' can be quite considerable, yet rejection is not necessarily an option. Teachers, as

professionals, review and improve the effectiveness of their programmes of study. They have resisted 'the need to resort to number crunching, or taking body counts as a justification' (Forsyth, 1994, p.119).

In Forsyth's view, industrial models of quality are being imposed unnecessarily on a profession which already practices good quality assurance. This represents a very narrow view of TQM and its benefits to higher education institutions. The EPC were emphasising the benefits of a total organisational commitment to TQM, with staff who were motivated and empowered to make changes, which would improve the quality of their own delivery of teaching, and other academic activities. The EPC were emphatic in their view that this should *not* be something forced on the institution, or on individuals, as a result of legislation or funding. They were aware that TQM would not work unless the staff understood the need for this approach and, collectively, bought into it. To achieve this, the institution would need to develop good communications with its staff. If the lack of inter-departmental trust and co-operation, believed by Chaston (1994) to exist in HEIs , was a barrier to the implementation of TQM then consultation and communication would be the means by which such barriers could be overcome.

Within the Scottish context, few attempts to change the institutional culture, according to the TQM model, have been made. The extent to which each of the Scottish universities operated a centralised, or alternatively a devolved, management structure was perceived by the interviewees to be a major influencing factor in the acceptability of TQM. The pre-1992 institutions appeared to operate a more devolved system, with departments and faculties having responsibility for many aspects of academic work. The post-1992 were perceived as being more 'managerial' in their approach and, in this respect, one might assume that a TQM approach would have received more sympathy and support in such an environment.

Our own interviews showed that out of a total of thirteen universities, three had attempted to be proactive in their approach to TQM. All of these were from the post-1992 sector. One had set up a special department with the aim of raising the concept of quality, in its widest sense, with both academic and supporting staff.

This operated for a couple of years, assisting departments, if invited to do so, but not attempting to *'bully people to take part'*. This department was subsequently absorbed into a larger department and its 'champion' retired. Another had tried the TQM approach within a non-academic area and reported that it had *'operated reasonably successfully for a couple of years, before it began to disintegrate'*. The third had taken a whole institution approach in committing to TQM, but as in the previous example, had seen this decline and disappear in recent years.

One of the reasons given for the lack of progress in the implementation of TQM was the commitment by senior management to the process and the conflict which might arise as staff were increasingly empowered. The Head of an Academic Development Unit stated :

'I think one of the things is that it has to be owned and have enthusiasm for it from the very top and the implications that go with it have to be conceded by the very top. Some of the aspects which they might lose, on their bits of control of power, might be one of the influences that go against giving every player in the system their full responsibility'.

A similar Head, with experience of an attempted implementation of TQM within his own institution, supported this view with a suggestion as to why the implementation had failed. He stated that *'the culture which they tried to introduce through TQM was at slight variance with the executive culture which operates through the university'.*

Retrospectively, it appears that the intention to adopt a TQM approach did not follow the basic guidelines for successful implementation, which as we have seen demands both grassroots acceptance and empowerment, and top-level commitment and example. Trust in the institution's staff, and the willingness to devolve both responsibility and power downwards, was a key missing element.

(b) TQM versus BS5750 and ISO9000

The interview data clearly demonstrated that key personnel were confused about the various industrial models of quality, especially between TQM and the British or International Standards (BS5750 / ISO9000). The interviewees' accounts prompted us to further investigate one of the key arguments against the applicability and successful implementation of TQM in the Scottish universities

- its perceived mechanistic nature. In response to a question on TQM, a Vice-Principal stated that:

'The culture would be utterly hostile to British Standards and all that kind of stuff. I wouldn't dream of using those terms. We have other ways that are slightly more acceptable when talking about these things. My objection to TQM is that the system may be wonderful but the product is rubbish'.

It is clear from this statement that the language of TQM again presents a problem. Indeed, downright hostility is provoked by the use of such business jargon within a higher education environment. Once again, we see a dissonance between academic values and market values. The approach of TQM was also criticised by the Head of an Academic Development Unit who said *'I am very much for accountability but the mechanistic approach which TQM has offered hasn't seemed to be very helpful'.*

Both these views represent some misunderstanding of the approach which TQM takes towards developing holistic, institutional attitudes towards quality assurance and enhancement. The respondents confuse TQM with the very different approach which has to be taken if an organisation wishes to achieve a kitemark for the quality of their systems under British or International Standards. BS5750 is a series of national standards, prepared by the British Standards Institution (BSI), which are used in all types of industrial and commercial organisations. The BSI ensure that the British Standard is equivalent to its international and European counterparts, ISO9000 and EN29000, and that its registration mark indicates that the quality systems, which have been described and documented, are adhered to. Obtaining registration requires the organisation to analyse each step of the 'production' process and document the procedures to be followed, in order to ensure that the product will be 'fit for the purpose'. ISO9000 and BS5750 were widely adopted in industry, however there was scepticism as to their applicability in higher education institutions. One perceived difficulty was the achievement of product consistency, when the product was educational, rather than engineering-based, and could be interpreted in a number of different ways, e.g. the product might be the learning process, student learning or student entitlement (Ashworth and Harvey, 1994). However,

BS5750 / ISO9000 does have its advocates in higher education. Day (1990) suggested that the discipline of having to document one's systems was essential for any attempt to create a quality culture, and that this could usefully be used as a marketing tool in higher education. Hale (1991) also saw advantages in the adoption of BS5750 for all university activity, including research and teaching.

Another advocate of the utilisation of external standards was Doherty (1994). Doherty identified 'fitness to purpose' as one of the elements of good quality and believed that this could best be assured by auditing the institution's systems through an external standard like the ISO9000 series. He argued that existing HEQC methodology allowed for a high degree of control by the auditee, whereas an independent audit to international standards would be more objective. Such an audit would be client-based, would be carried out by professionals and would seek clear evidence of the system in control. It would be less easy for academics to influence the result, through their favoured methods of dialectics and evasive argument. Because such an audit was less easily influenced, Doherty believed that academics tended to dismiss it as 'shallow'. This would partly explain the low take-up rate of BS5750 in UK higher education institutions.

Some institutions have nonetheless experimented with this approach. BS5750 was applied to short course provision at Leeds Metropolitan University (Solomon, 1993). In reviewing this experience, Solomon advocated implementing the standard *in spirit*, but not necessarily to the letter. She suggested that most of the benefit came from the analysis and documentation of the process, rather from achievement of the standard itself. Solomon's observation is an interesting one and it is worth remembering that BS5750 only assures the quality of course provision, and not the quality of the course itself. It is not the standard, but the critical review of *process*, which is key to quality assurance and quality enhancement. In order to ensure the latter, the wider approach of TQM is necessary. This is a more radical agenda, which Solomon argues usually requires a paradigm shift from our present state of mind to one which views both internal and external customers as the driving forces for the way we run our organisations.

Storey and Doherty (1993) also advocate that an institution's customers play a central role in determining the specification for the 'product'. If one is to fully satisfy ones' customers, their views have to be taken carefully into account and will help shape the systems which BS5750 or the ISO9000 series seek to audit. In this way, they argue, implementing a Standards approach is not a simplistic mechanism for regressing to the mediocre but a means for ensuring consistently high quality. Like Solomon (1993), Storey and Doherty believe that the main benefit is achieved by going through the process of considering and documenting systems, rather than by achieving the badge of an external standard. In achieving ISO9001 registration for its quality management system, the University of Wolverhampton based its approach on the Crosby model, because of its concepts of error prevention and 'right first time'. Wolverhampton viewed ISO9001 as a firm base on which they might move further towards a TQM approach (Storey, 1993; Stott, 1994), Doherty, 1995)

The different management systems were divided by Freeman and Voehl (1994) into 3 categories: undocumented, documented and ISO9000(QA) type systems. Undocumented systems are not really systems at all. They are *laissez-faire*, allowing people to do what they want, how they want. While one would not wish to advocate quality assurance systems which create heavy administrative burdens on academic staff by requiring extensive documentation, undocumented systems leave the way open for *inaction* as well as action. They cannot provide the reassurance, either internally within the institution or to an external body, that quality is being adequately assured.

In a documented system, methods are laid down as to how each task should be done. However, these are not always adhered to, or checked, and there may not be a built-in mechanism for review and improvement. In Freeman and Voehl' s opinion, this latter point can be overcome by ISO9000. However, there is no reason why a documented system of quality assurance cannot include mechanisms for regular review and improvement. Indeed, while ISO9000 requires extensive documentation of procedures and regular review to ensure that these are being implemented, it does not, as we will see later in this chapter, encourage quality enhancement.

Nonetheless, Freeman and Voehl strongly advocate the ISO9000 system and highlight three key features in this approach. Firstly, as a method for monitoring adherence to the system. Secondly, as a method for correcting mistakes and, finally, as a method for changing the system if it has become obsolete. These systematic procedures ensure that standards are monitored, reviewed and improved. In order to implement ISO9000, Freeman and Voehl suggest that four 'building blocks' are essential. Firstly, the institution must consider its 'mission', in terms of what type of university it aims to be, what it wishes to achieve and where it wants to be in ten or twenty years time. The second building block is the 'methods' by which the institution assures its own quality, with consideration being given as to how this is documented and by whom. Thirdly, there are the 'interface points', i.e. those critical points in the process where the actions of one person impinge on the ability of the next person to do their job effectively, and the issues of how these could be monitored and continuously improved. Finally, there are the 'standards' which the customer should expect to receive.

The question is whether a Standards approach can be utilised in all aspects of higher education provision. Peters and Wills (1998) argue that there are certain aspects of educational process delivery, which they describe as static variables, which can be isolated and made subject to documented QA disciplines. These include student registration, staff recruitment and training, and finance. The more dynamic variables, such as staff / student interaction, which are perceived as the essential elements of higher education, cannot be assured in this way. In fact, Peter and Wills' solution to quality assurance of delivery of teaching is not achieved through BS5750 but involves ensuring that staff have the information, training and rewards to do the job well. A TQM approach, with its emphasis on the human dimension, would sit well here.

The disadvantage of a BS5750 / ISO9000 approach lies primarily in the length of time required to fully analyse and document all procedures and the danger that, once documented, staff might cease to review their ongoing effectiveness. This reflects Barnett's (1992a) view that BS5750 is a signal example of quality

assurance, where the implementation of systems, regulations and procedures leads to a checklist approach to maintaining quality. While the aim of every higher education institution should be to ensure that everything it does - both academically and administratively - is to the highest quality, they should not rest on their laurels. By adopting a TQM approach, such institutions will embark on a never-ending quest for improvement and thereby ensure that the quality of all their operations is systematically reviewed, evaluated and enhanced, within a culture which values teamwork and empowers the individual.

None of the thirteen Scottish institutions in this study had adopted BS5750 for any academic area, and the majority conceded that it had not been considered. Where active consideration had taken place - in two of the post-1992 universities - it had been rejected. One reason given was its perceived incompatibility with the TQM approach, which one institution was trying to introduce at that time. Another criticised its 'mechanistic' nature. In fact, both these criticisms are similar. In a TQM approach, the creation of a culture of quality is far more important than extensive documentation of quality assurance procedures. Such a mechanistic approach may engender considerable hostility from academic staff who perceive the initiative as an additional burden, which will add little to the quality of their delivery. The standardised route to quality assurance was more likely to have been discussed in relation to non-academic, or support, areas such as estates and building, print design services or the university's commercial arm and, in two institutions, had been adopted by such divisions.

A few interviewees also commented on this route being considered by their Engineering departments, particularly in relation to Government research contracts, and one spoke of the need to consider moving towards ISO9000 accreditation for wider commercial reasons. A Director of Quality stated that : *'Some research contracts from industry are asking "are you ISO9000?" If we start losing research contracts because we are not ISO9000, then we will certainly move very quickly in that direction'.*

However, one of the disadvantages of such accreditation can be its perceived rigidity. The standards route is designed to ensure that set procedures are followed in order that quality may be consistent. It does not encourage the type

of experimentation which might lead to quality improvement and, as we have seen in the response to previous questions, there are concerns about the impact which such managerial approaches might have on academic freedom and innovation. If this view persists, in relation to the implementation of TQM, it exists even more in the case of BS5750. In the words of one interviewee, a Director of Academic Development :

'You are not addressing the issue if you are just producing the manual. You have a law-abiding population because people actually want to abide by those laws. If you don't have that, you will never have a law-abiding population. Some people see opportunities out of not abiding by them - and then you are in a policing situation'.

It remains to be seen whether external influences, such as the need to acquire commercial contracts for research or consultancy, will force institutions to look more closely at the accreditation of their quality assurance procedures, in relation to academic work. However, at the moment, there appears to be no enthusiasm for going down this route.

Conclusion

This chapter has noted that the literature on TQM in higher education is divided with regard to its potential applicability. On the one hand, proponents advocate TQM as a useful means of achieving improved quality in the delivery of teaching and the quality of the student experience. On the other hand, many leading educational theorists are sceptical of such an approach, fearing that this might lead to further imposition of bureaucratic, quality assurance procedures. These concerns are mirrored by the senior academics in Scottish universities, interviewed in our study. Here too we note strong reservations towards TQM which are based on difficulties with the language of this management approach and, in part, on a misunderstanding of it.

The fact that some of the literature, and the majority of our interviewees, are critical of TQM does not preclude that a TQM-based approach has a valuable role to play in the management of quality in higher education institutions. Much of the negative perception of TQM may be based either on a misunderstanding of

its core principles and related, negative experience with existing or earlier quality assurance initiatives, such as those arising out of the Teaching Quality Assessment exercise. As has been shown previously, it can be argued that whilst the TQA may have aimed at encouraging continuous improvement, it resulted in institutions adopting relatively mechanistic approaches to quality assurance, which did not encourage a culture of continuous improvement, along TQM lines.

The following chapter discusses how a TQM approach might be used to accomplish some of the goals which TQA failed to deliver. In this discussion, we rely heavily on an examination of potential barriers to continuous quality improvement and explore how they could be overcome.

CHAPTER EIGHT : TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

In the previous chapter, we examined the key features of Total Quality Management and the extent to which this approach to managing quality might be appropriate in a higher education context. We identified certain pre-requisites for its successful application, including management leadership, workforce commitment and cultural change. We shall now explore these three features in more detail, examining the difficulties in implementing a TQM approach within differing academic and institutional cultures, and in the context of a changing higher education system.

Higher education values the individual and individuality. Without individual academic freedom there would be no innovation in teaching and in research. Creative individuals, working alone or in teams, are responsible for developing new areas of research and new programmes of study, or means of delivering such programmes.

However, such individuals are also part of wider communities - departments, faculties, institutions - to which they contribute and whose reputations they enhance. Thus, the TQM approach does not necessarily conflict with an academic environment, which seeks to encourage innovation. The theory and set of practices surrounding TQM can make explicit the importance of the individual's contribution to the entire organisation. The challenge for higher education institutions is to create a culture in which both individualism and commitment to quality standards can flourish together, and TQM-based approaches may become instrumental in facilitating this process.

The first section of this chapter examines the changes that have taken place in the higher education sector over the past decade and the challenges these posed to higher education managers and academic staff. This is followed by an exploration of three conditions for successful implementation of a TQM approach to quality management, namely management leadership, workforce commitment and culture change. In each of these contexts, we note that

carefully adapted TQM-based approaches can make a contribution to the quality of higher education.

The Move Towards Mass Higher Education

The past decade has seen considerable changes in the UK higher education system. Firstly, the increase in student numbers has changed higher education from a privilege of the elite few to an opportunity for the masses. This notion of 'mass' systems of HE stems from Trow's (1970) formulations of 'elite' (up to 15% of the Age Participation Index), 'mass' (up to 40%) and 'universal' (more than 40% participation). The British system became a 'mass' one when the Age Participation Index reached 15.1% in 1988 (Radford, *et al*, 1997). In the year 2000, it is closer to being a 'universal' system.

Not only has the size of the student body increased, so too has the variety in its composition. There are more mature students, more female, more from the lower socio-economic groups and more undertaking programmes in part-time, or other flexible, modes. At the same time, the resources available from public funds to finance an expanded HE sector have been declining, in real terms. Clark (1998) has described this as universities entering an age of turmoil, for which there is no end in sight, and where demands on universities outrun their capacity to respond.

This expansion in the system has led to increased competition between HEIs for funding and therefore for students. Decision, and policy-makers, in higher education must now take cognisance of its stakeholders' or customers' needs. TQM may be one means of facilitating this process of change. Higher education, once a privilege of the elite few, is now available to almost half the Scottish school leavers. This expansion has brought with it a move from homogeneity to diversity, with students drawn from a wide range of socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds; from tradition to innovation, with increasing emphasis on the needs of the student and on flexible delivery of teaching; and from individual autonomy to a more team-based approach, which collectively attempts to assure the highest levels of quality. Such moves require a system of management which will empower staff to deal with change.

While the underlying values of higher education - those which value creativity, critical thinking, hard work and personal reflection - remain important, the nature and purpose of higher education has been subject to unstable and changing demands. During the time of the Conservative Government, under Mrs Thatcher's leadership for instance, there was an increasing emphasis on vocationally oriented higher education. Science and engineering programmes were differentially funded in an attempt to encourage HEIs to enrol more students on such courses. Blue skies research was discouraged in favour of applied, industry-related work. Higher education was no longer perceived as a matter of individual benefit but as a benefit to society as a whole. Government would use 'carrots and sticks ... to achieve the desired outcomes' (Trowler,1998).

This interference has been accompanied by the introduction of formalised quality assurance procedures, via the Teaching Quality Assessments. As we have discussed, imposition of quality assurance systems *per se* may not necessarily have improved quality. Indeed, such systems may have led to a compliance culture in which staff 'play safe' and do nothing which may upset the quality assessors.

Whatever the impact of these government policies may have been, it is clear that they have taxed the ability of higher education institutions to manage and implement change, as well as to assure performance within reasonable constraints. The following section examines the scope of management-led, workforce-centred approaches towards cultural change in higher education.

Management Leadership

There are, undoubtedly, problems with any initiative in higher education institutions which can be perceived as *management-led.* Amongst experts in TQM, there is widespread acceptance, that top management must demonstrate serious commitment to its implementation. Yet, if the implementation of TQM results in senior managers of HEIs trying to *impose* TQM philosophy and practice, without engaging fully in consultation with their staff, such an endeavour is likely to fail (Bolton, 1995). Moreover, according to TQM

proponents, it is necessary for senior management to clearly demonstrate their commitment to change through TQM by leading others in its implementation (Cowles and Gilbreath, 1993)

Management requires leadership, and leadership means setting an example to others and indicating the standards to which everyone in the organisation should aspire. There is no single perfect style of leadership, or management. Different organisations have different cultures and require different styles of management. However, successful leaders have a number of traits in common, not least a strong vision of the organisation's needs and an ability to communicate with others. Senior management need to get their 'internal customer' relationships right, i.e. with their own staff, if they are to provide excellent quality for their external customers. This often requires leadership by example (Hart and Shoolbred, 1993). In management-speak, they must 'walk the talk' and lead by example. TQM is about the personal responsibility of everyone in the organisation, from top to bottom and in every job function.

According to the TQM literature, for a TQM approach to be successful, employees need to believe that management understand the problems they face each working day. Many senior managers in higher education will not have taught undergraduate classes. They may find it difficult to appreciate the full impact, on academic teaching staff, of larger class sizes and increasing staff / student ratios. Academic staff, on the other hand, may feel that this lack of understanding has led to their managers continually asking them to do more, with less. As a result, they may perceive management initiatives with suspicion. If the senior staff seek better communications throughout the institution, they must excel at communicating with their colleagues and employees. If they want to aim for higher quality performance, they must look to their own performance first.

If a TQM approach is to work in higher education, management must fully demonstrate their commitment to it through explicit action, rather than mere words. Only when staff see that their senior management are actively involved in the process, and are gaining results from their involvement, will they be

sufficiently convinced to commit to it themselves. Managers therefore need to carefully balance the 'walk' (demonstrating quality management and service quality themselves) and the 'talk' (Liston, 1999). At one extreme, they need to develop a shared vision with their staff and help them develop strategies, through training and staff development, which will enable them to achieve the desired outcomes. At the other extreme, the 'walk' focuses attention of the completion of pilot projects, which can generate early success and encourage further action.

Even where such success has been documented, academics may be put off by the evangelical fervour of some TQM proponents and especially when TQM is perceived as bringing in more committee work with no direct professional benefits for individual staff (Brown and Koenig, 1993). Additional problems can arise from the reluctance of staff members to disregard existing departmental boundaries.

Most, if not all of these problems are documented in a study by the US educationalist, Entin, of the implementation of TQM in 10 colleges and universities around Boston. Entin (1993) found that while senior management were often extremely enthusiastic about the initiative, the reluctance of academic divisions to adopt it was alarming. This represented a serious disjunction between market forces and the academic enterprise. Entin concluded that it was essential that both academic managers and faculty were able to see the benefits of adopting a TQM approach, both for themselves and for their students and other customers.

At the root of the problem observed by Entin was the academic staffs' perception of what academic enterprise was about. This points to a crucial problem. An academic enterprise, here as in the USA, cannot exclude the importance of market forces on the higher education sector. A large percentage of HE funding comes from the fees of students – whether paid by the government, in whole or in part, or privately by the individual. What academics do, within their enterprise, will affect their attractiveness to the market and their ability to attract students. Similarly, changes in market demand - for example increasing demand from employers for IT-literate graduates - must impact on the types of courses

offered by the HEI. Aside from the desire to improve efficiency and effectiveness, it was the belief that more students would be attracted to the university, which drove South Bank to adopt a TQM initiative in 1992 (Chadwick, 1995a). A mere awareness of these changes, however, does not suffice. Rather, they require specific responses which may involve the participation of a large number of staff.

The market for students is, nonetheless, only one of many markets in which HEIs operate. There are multiple markets, e.g. the market for research grants, for private consultancy and for public reputation. In each of these areas, competition and marketisation has grown. It is interesting that the staff in Boston's universities and colleges, whom Entin studied, had not made this connection. Chadwick (1995) saw the attitudes and behaviour of staff – particularly academic staff, who were loathe to allow scrutiny of their teaching quality – as a major obstacle in the implementation of a TQM approach.

An alternative explanation for the disjunction between market demands and staff perception of academic work may be poor communications between senior management of the institutions and the rest of the academic staff. Management is responsible for the bigger picture of the organisation and its relationship to the wider environment. If a TQM initiative is to be adopted, this approach must be fully explained and communicated throughout the organisation, if it is to be adopted wholeheartedly and effectively.

Entin's study suggests that it is not enough for management to enthuse about the concept, and then expect everyone to follow suit. In many cases, a cascading programme of communication and training may be essential if TQM is to work (Chadwick, 1995b); a point we will examine in greater detail later in this chapter.

Like Entin, Fry (1995) found a major obstacle to the implementation of TQM measures in the lack of ownership by individuals, and institutions, of the changes brought about by the quality movement. In addition, she noted an attitude of cynicism with regard to the motives behind the introduction of TQM and a perceived conflict with traditional ways of operating, long cherished by academic

staff. This analysis closely mirrors the concerns expressed by Barnett (1992a). According to Barnett, the idea of management *for* quality may be both appropriate and desirable in a higher education environment, however the idea of the management *of* quality is one which many academics distrust. Barnett states:

> 'Academic management is more like that of the leadership and direction exerted by an orchestra's conductor than by an army's general'.
>
> (Barnett, 1992a, p.80)

In an environment where so much depends on individual interaction – with students, parents, employers and the like – 'ownership' of the quality agenda, by employees, is essential. To use Barnett's analogy, are orchestras and armies really so different? An orchestra contains a number of people, in different roles, all working (playing) together to achieve a single goal, to make the right sound. If one member of the orchestra makes a mistake - does not 'get it right first time' - the whole sound of the orchestra and quality of the piece of music is affected.

An army also needs people with different specialist skills - cooks, medics, drivers, and maintenance engineers - as well as ordinary foot soldiers and generals. Each has to be in the right place, at the right time, and with the proper training to do the job correctly. Just as the orchestra needs all its different instruments, and players, so does the army need all its support mechanisms to be able to carry out its main purpose and achieve its goal.

It is also worth noting that there are good conductors and poor conductors just as there are good generals and poor generals. History is littered with the disastrous outcomes of poor decision-making or leadership by army generals. So, if Barnett is saying that one should lead / direct / influence, rather than dictate to the workforce, then that is a point of view with which few might disagree. However, in the context of quality initiatives, the standards to which everyone is aspiring will most likely have to be set by the senior management. They must commit to excellence and lead by example. They must understand, and value, the role of everyone in the orchestra, army or higher education institution. A good conductor demonstrates to his orchestra what he wants. The signals are clear,

unambiguous and effectively communicated. The players trust him and have been trained to respond to his direction. Where he leads, they will follow.

A general too needs trust if he is to maintain legitimacy. He will have difficult decisions to make and needs support. Not blind, unthinking obedience but the trust and belief of his men that his judgement is right and that the action which is about to be taken is in their, or their country's, best interests. Once the decision has been made, good communications are again essential. General, orchestra conductor or university principal, the issues are often the same. Good leadership involves communicating your message and gaining the trust of your colleagues and employees.

Barnett distrusts the concept of the management *of* quality. If, by this, he means that you cannot manage quality from the top alone, then he is right. The responsibility for quality has to be accepted by each individual within the organisation, for his or her particular sphere of operation. According to the TQM imperative, management's role is to convince, motivate and lead by example. Those at the top of the organisation must set the tone *for* quality, expressed in everything they do, and aim for continuous improvement of their own performance. However, quality is too important an issue to be left to individuals alone and the appointment of a Vice-Principal with a remit for quality matters, or of a Director of Quality Assurance, ensures that an overall strategic view can be taken.

Workforce Commitment

This takes us on to the next main requirement for a successful TQM initiative, namely *workforce commitment*. The organisational theorists have recognised that the higher an individual rises in the management structure, the more remote she becomes from the actual point of delivery of the service. In higher education, most teaching is delivered by lecturers or postgraduate teaching assistants. Senior lecturers, Readers and Professors will have less class contact time, due to their responsibilities for programme management and research. The Research Assessment Exercises of the 1990s have added to this split between non-teaching senior staff and unpromoted teaching staff, as both individuals and

institutions seek to maximise gains from the RAE by focussing on well-rewarded research activity, rather than 'bread-and-butter' teaching. At the highest levels of the institution, Deans, Vice-Principals and Principals may have no direct contact with students at all.

The potential alienation between senior management and front-line staff in the higher education sector makes it essential that front-line employees are motivated to always deliver their best. Sallis (1993) has suggested that training and staff development are critical factors in the success of a higher education institution. However, the importance of support staff has often been overlooked. In the front line of student contact are the HEI's telephonists, receptionists, security staff, finance and admissions office staff. Before the student has stepped into a classroom, they are likely to have gained an impression of the institution from the way in which its representatives have treated them. One of the main benefits of adopting a TQM approach, within higher educational institutions, may be its emphasis on the role which *all* staff play in the enterprise and the way in which the actions of one affect the other and ultimately impact on the success or failure of the entire organisation (Harris, 1994). This is an integrative approach to service delivery, not currently visible in higher education institutions (Taylor and Hill, 1991; Williams, 1993).

Lewis and Smith (1994) see difficulties, within the higher education sector, in terms of developing a focused, institution-wide quality initiative. These difficulties arise from the way in which academic and administrative structures have developed, such that there is clear separation of areas of responsibility, which may create difficulties in finding a shared sense of mission or vision throughout the organisation. Additionally, academic departments can develop their own cultures and become compartmentalised and inward looking. They can seek to maintain boundaries, while TQM is looking to break these down in order to achieve maximum cross-departmental and cross-institutional collaboration, in the best interests of the institution as a whole (Cousins, 1994).

Tony Becher (1989) has described the differing cultural identities, ascribed to discipline groups, in terms of 'academic tribes and territories'. Becher sees these

groups as having distinct cultural identities, manifest in both physical form – such as artifacts on desks, pictures on walls and books on the shelf – and less tangibly in:

'Their traditions, customs and practices, transmitted knowledge, beliefs, morals and rules of conduct, as well as their linguistic and symbolic forms of communication and the meanings they share. To be admitted to membership ... involves not only a sufficient level of technical proficiency in one's intellectual trade but also a proper measure of loyalty to one's collegial group and of adherence to its norms' (Becher, 1989, p.24).

Becher highlights the fact that 'academics' are not a homogenous group. They are in fact extremely diverse. Indeed, this diversity and variety is the essence of a scholarly institution, but it creates significant implications for senior management, not least one which wishes to introduce TQM-type initiatives. Becher argues that too forceful an imposition of accountability measures or quality control procedures on academic groups may lead to 'intellectual subservience' and even to 'academic sterility' (p.169). These heavy-handed types of approach to quality management may lead to the kind of compliance culture, which we have discussed previously. Diversity within the academic body needs therefore to be recognised, and appropriate measures taken in communicating with these various groups, and in developing any new approaches, across the institution.

Yet, despite this diversity in academic disciplines, academics themselves have much in common. They share common working conditions, including recruitment, assessment and promotion procedures, and are managed (and judged) by committees and other structures, which draw from a wide range of disciplines (Fulton, 1996). They are, in Becher's words, tribes which 'share the same ethnicity; the territories they occupy are part of the same land mass' and for whom 'an enhanced recognition of mutuality could serve as a better defense against intrusive managerialism' (p.171).

One potential advantage of a TQM-based approach is that it highlights the need for a team ethos (Taylor and Hill, 1991), while stressing the requirement for

training of all the workforce in quality assurance, problem-solving and communication, in order to encourage the involvement of all parties in attaining quality through teamwork (Pollock and Sutcliffe, 1992). Teams do not come to operate efficiently overnight. They often need to be trained both in the skills of team working and in the techniques, which they will require to utilise, in their quest for quality enhancement. A cascading programme, starting with senior management and working down the organisation to the final points of delivery, can be essential and, at all stages, reviews of progress may need to take place (Pollock and Sutcliffe, 1992). The idea of training for senior management is controversial in an environment where training is generally seen as something for the lower level staff. However it may be critical to the successful implementation of a quality culture, based on TQM. According to Pollock and Sutcliffe's view, the timing of employee training is also critical. Bringing employees in too early, training them and not allowing them to utilise their new-found skills for a while, has led to teams floundering, a decrease in motivation and the whole TQM initiative running out of steam (Brigham, 1993).

Because of the importance of teamwork, it may be easier to envisage a TQM approach working in administrative, and other support areas, than in academic departments. Although university staff involved in research activities often collaborate with one another, this is less the case in the area of teaching. Lecturers generally work as individuals in creating material for their courses and in delivering these. Despite all the goodwill, talent and effort of individual members of the academic staff, there is not necessarily a collective sense of obligation towards improvement of student learning. This presents a difficulty for the implementation of continuous quality improvement, since the bulk of the advice from TQM initiatives in industry centres on teamworking as the key to success (Roffe, 1998).

In higher education therefore, mechanisms may have to be put in place which will allow academic staff to work with colleagues, to improve the quality of teaching and learning. These mechanisms may include programme boards or subject groupings, which pursue a more collective approach to quality enhancement. A grouping of staff who teach in related subject areas, for

example, could act as the forum for discussing the development, amendment or abandonment of modules within their remit. Such discussion would be informed by feedback from students and external assessors; by an evaluation of student performance in coursework assessments and final examinations; and by the recommendations from any internal processes of quality audit which may have been carried out. While the individual academic could carry out such a review him or herself, the benefit of conducting this within a group of colleagues is that there is the opportunity to discuss fresh approaches, which may not have been previously considered.

While case studies of TQM demonstrate the need for a champion at the top of the organisation, leading by example and cascading the TQM approach top-down through the entire workforce, they also show the need for grass roots involvement, employee empowerment and a bottom-up approach (Fry, 1995). The natural suspicion which many academics have of management-led initiatives, and the hierarchical nature of most of the higher education establishments in the UK, indicate that the implementation of TQM initiatives may require a major shift in attitudes. It is this cornerstone of TQM which we will address next.

There are many fears surrounding perceived, management-led initiatives. The main one must be that individual academic freedom will be threatened in the process. But academic freedom can mean many things. It may refer to the freedom to pursue academic excellence and innovation. It can also be used as an excuse to hide academic mediocrity and laziness. In this respect, there may be a fear that such initiatives will expose individual academic weakness. What is needed, therefore, is an appropriate balance between autonomy and accountability (Thorne and Cuthbert, 1996). This balance is perhaps best achieved where academic goals are clear and organisational policies are transparent.

There may also be fears that more work will be expected, for example as a result of new quality assurance procedures, without more time being made available for this activity. Staff may see new quality controls as an unnecessary diversion

from their core activities: quality control which damages quality, by detracting from the time available to do the job properly (Thorne and Cuthbert, 1996). This can be exacerbated by a suspicion that it is the workforce who are always blamed for any poor results or poor quality, while management are somehow blame-free in this respect. These fears can be aggravated where staff perceive TQM as another trend into which effort will be put for a certain period of time, after which management will get bored and move on to the 'next big thing' or management 'fad'. Indeed, if an organisation has a track record of starting and then abandoning projects, this will be very difficult, if not impossible, to undo. In such environments, the implementation of TQM initiatives may be futile.

Higher education institutions are hierarchical in the sense that they have a pyramidal structure with a Principal / Vice-Chancellor at the top, followed by Deputy or Vice Principals, Deans of Faculty and Heads of Department. However, the extent to which HEIs are managed centrally varies from institution to institution. Traditionally, the older universities have operated decentralised systems, with power and responsibility devolved to Faculty and Department level. Heads of Department and Deans were often elected positions from amongst the academic body and such posts were rotated on a 3 or 4 year basis. The newer universities, by contrast, were more likely to have a centralised administration and management with senior posts appointed, following interview, on a permanent basis.

It is the permanency of these management positions which has led to accusations of a more 'managerial' culture existing in the new university sector. However, during the interviews carried out as part of this research, staff from the ancient Scottish universities suggested that their own institutions had moved towards a much more centralised, managed structure and that this was, in part, a response to national initiatives such as the TQAs and the need for these exercises to be managed. This view is reinforced by the findings of a study of universities, carried out by Clark in the mid-1990s, in which he found that such institutions usually operated a locally unique combination of centralised and decentralised managerial structures, which he described as 'a centralised decentralisation' (Clark, 1998).

It is likely that it is not the hierarchical nature of the institution, or the extent of centralised management, which militates against the successful implementation of aTQM approach, but the ability of the senior management to effectively communicate the need, and provide the training, for its introduction. TQM initiatives require both top-level commitment and top-down cascading. Involvement of the academic staff is crucial, if the university is to avoid being perceived as operating 'hard managerialism' and too heavy a top-down approach. If the institution is to effect the transformation it desires, then management and faculty have to work together. 'Transformation requires a structured change capability and development of an overall internal climate receptive to change' (Clark, 1998).

TQM initiatives require the empowerment of staff at all levels and the encouragement of a bottom-up approach, whereby those at the sharp end - the people who have direct, first-hand contact with students - can identify problem areas and seek to offer their own solutions, before serious mistakes are made and the reputation of the institution for high quality service and delivery is affected. This may require a considerable shift in attitude, from one in which mistakes are viewed as the fault of others, to one in which *personal responsibility* is accepted in a mature and blame-free environment, in order that improvements can be made. It may also require an institutional culture in which staff share a number of attributes, such as a common understanding of the problem and of the environment or market in which the institution is operating; a common understanding of the mission and aims of the organisation and of the importance of achieving excellence in the goals which they have set; acceptance of individual personal responsibility in achieving such success and a commitment to the goal of quality; and encouragement to reflect on one's own practice and to make a personal commitment to the goal of continuous quality improvement.

TQM and Culture Change

The TQM literature argues that trust and co-operation are essential elements in a successful TQM strategy and it is therefore important to create a *culture* within the organisation, which will support such activity. Cousins (1994) suggests that an appropriate organisational culture has many elements, including the

internalisation of quality and continuous improvement as a goal of all activities; more open communications; the greater involvement of a wider range of people in the decision-making process; the creation of high-trust social relationships; a systematic and rational approach to quality issues; the absolute priority of customer satisfaction; and, finally, the adoption of an employee relations perspective which can reconcile the implications of a quality driven strategy with other conflicting trends.

In many organisations, such a culture would take a number of years to develop. There may be mistrust of management to be overcome and questions over the 'hidden agenda' which the TQM approach might be disguising. There may also be a predominant culture of blame, in which staff are reluctant to admit to areas of weakness, and seek resolution of these, for fear of criticism or recrimination. Marchese (1993), for instance, has argued that if TQM is to work, then senior management needs to drive out blaming and fear and remove obstacles in the way of continuous improvement of quality. Management need also to realign the activities and culture of the organisation towards a belief in continuous improvement as a goal for the entire workforce (Thorn, 1991).

This task may have been made more difficult during the last decade, on account of the massive changes which have taken place in the higher education sector. These changes have often meant an increased bureaucratisation in quality procedures. During 1995/96, Martin (1999) surveyed over 160 members of academic staff in the UK and Australia, regarding their experience of how academic work had changed over the previous five to ten years. His analysis focused on four issues, which were most emphasised by the staff in his study. These issues were closely linked to the changes in higher education, during the early 1990s. Firstly, staff in non-leadership roles (75%) felt they were not sufficiently *consulted* on important matters, and that bad, unworkable decisions were being made, as a result (Martin, 1999, p.15). In their defence, academic leaders cited time constraints as an explanation for this lack of consultation.

Secondly, those in non-leadership roles (80%) complained about increased *accountability*, or more specifically about the battery of accountability

mechanisms getting in the way of their real work (p.17). This is similar to Thorne and Cuthbert's (1996) point about quality control damaging quality, by putting the emphasis on control and checking mechanisms, rather than enhancement of quality.

Martin's third point related to 'vision', or lack of it. Both staff in non-leadership roles (72%), and their leaders (65%), commented that senior leaders in the university did not demonstrate adequate or appropriate *vision* (p.19). They expressed concern that universities were often going from one crisis to another, rather than working towards their goals in a purposeful way. Such a perceived lack of management leadership is unlikely to inspire belief, or confidence, in new initiatives.

Finally, 77% of leaders and 88% in non-leadership positions commented on feeling *undervalued*. Staff morale was low, with academics feeling disempowered and despairing in the face of what they saw as 'unreasonable demands' (p.21). In the face of such rapid change, Martin proposed that universities had to be able to adapt, and adapt quickly. 'Staff in universities are characterised by their leaders as being reluctant to adapt to the new conditions and the new environment, while those in leadership positions are often characterised by staff as being unable to guide or lead' (Martin, 1999, p.49). This analysis would suggest that there is a high overall degree of staff dissatisfaction in the HEIs, which in part can be attributed to a mix of lack of leadership and a lack of involvement.

The TQM literature would suggest that senior staff cannot 'manage' culture. Instead they have to try to 'cultivate' the ethos they seek for their organisation. Creating an institutional culture involves encouraging a set of shared beliefs and attitudes amongst all the employees. It requires consensus and clarification of the values of the institution - what is and is not acceptable - for example, a shared understanding that all academic staff will be active in research as well as in teaching. In other words, what is needed are explicit statements about the expectations which the institution has of its staff in their relationships with one another, as colleagues, and with their students, funding bodies and employers.

It is essential that this shared vision is built on the personal visions of individual staff. If it is simply 'imposed' on staff it will not work. Martin has stated that 'organisations need commitment not compliance with a vision' (p.59). Imposed visions, as with imposed systems of quality assurance, can result in people doing what they *have to* do, and no more. On the other hand, shared visions can excite and enthuse staff, leading them towards genuine improvement in the quality of their provision.

The culture that prevails in an institution will depend to a large degree on the tone being set from the top. In higher education, as elsewhere, we should ask whether senior management are open and communicative, or closed and secretive? Is this a pattern replicated throughout the organisation? What is the work ethic and is there a sense of being part of a team? Do the senior management, deans and department heads lead by example?

Changing an institutional culture is an inherently slow process. The new universities, i.e. those formed since the 1992 Act, have gradually been building up their research profiles from a very low starting point. The majority of their funding still comes from registered student numbers, supplemented by externally generated income from consultancy activities. However, post-1992 universities are now competing for a share of the funding available to all universities, based on research quality. For some academic staff, this is a difficult transition, as the job for which they were employed, perhaps twenty years ago, has now changed out of all recognition.

It is possible that a TQM-based approach to policy making can assist with the process of managing change by making explicit the need for the institution to deliver the highest quality output in teaching, research and applied consultancy, and by training and supporting staff in their altering roles. In this way, change can take place gradually, as staff accept the need for continuous improvement in all aspects of their performance. Some organisational structures may hinder such an approach. Where decision-making is centralised and bureaucratic, this may prevent the institution from dealing effectively with environmental change (Taylor and Hill, 1993). If responsibility for quality is to be transferred down to

the point of delivery, then decision-making and accountability must follow (Middlehurst and Elton, 1992). However, for management to loosen the reins of power takes a great deal of faith in the workforce. And for employees to accept responsibility, requires training and support.

Storey and Doherty (1993), writing about the experience of the University of Wolverhampton with regard to TQM and BS5750, stress that a strong *learning culture* is essential for an organisation which is seeking to improve its quality. It is only by reviewing the success (and failure) of initiatives that the institution can learn and move forward. A learning culture is one in which both individuals, and the institution as a whole, utilise appropriate feedback mechanisms and performance indicators to make judgements about the extent to which they have achieved their objectives. This information can then be used as a basis for reflection on ways of enhancing the level of quality, and achieving greater success, in whatever aspect of provision is being considered. This is, in itself, a continuous process which involves the monitoring, reflecting on, changing, and reviewing of those changes.

As previously mentioned, a learning culture supports learning from mistakes and does not seek to allocate blame. Without risk there can be no innovation. However, risk-taking will not always be successful. Mistakes will be made and must be accepted as part of the change process. If academic staff were discouraged from attempting innovation, higher education would rapidly become stale and unable to respond to changes in the external environment.

Storey and Doherty accept the view that there are multiple customers of higher education and that these customers all have a part to play in determining the outcome of the 'product'. They suggest that while the institution may respond to the student's desire for a 'qualification', it may also have to take into account the standards of its validation committee, the requirements of a professional body, the needs of employers, and the expectations of society as to what constitutes 'graduateness'. As we have seen previously, it is this lack of clarity as to who the customers of higher education are, and how assessments of quality should be conducted, which can be a main stumbling block to the adoption of a TQM

approach. However, it is not inevitable that these problems should limit its applicability in the higher education environment.

In general, advocates of the application of TQM to higher education believe TQM to be a necessary and sufficient means of improving customer service (Taylor and Hill, 1991). In TQM, it is not simply the content of what is being delivered which is important, but also the way in which it is delivered. A TQM approach is more concerned with the learning process, than with curriculum content and hence may be more responsive to changes in both the internal and external environments (Muller and Funnell, 1991).

Higher education operates within a changing political and financial climate. This is particularly true in contemporary Scotland, where the first parliament in 300 years was elected in May 1999, with higher education as one of its areas of responsibility.
The link between quality and institutional funding is much to the fore, and external quality assessment seems likely to continue into the foreseeable future. While quality assurance procedures are formalised, and to an extent reactive, a TQM approach offers a less formalised alternative which may encourage a proactive approach that can anticipate changes in the environment and respond quickly to them. As customer expectations change, the institution needs to adapt and design services which will not only meet but exceed these expectations (Sallis, 1993; Winter, 1994).

Taylor and Hill (1991) argue that a number of benefits can accrue to higher education institutions from the application of TQM. These include a continuous and sustained organisational improvement, increased levels of external customer satisfaction and tangible and significant cost savings, around 5 to 10% of operating costs. TQM may, in their view, also lead to a greater focus on the importance of inter-disciplinary teams, comprising academic and administrative staff; improvements in employee morale, commitment and motivation; and new ways of managing the organisation which promotes company-wide goal congruence, accountability and involvement.

A TQM initiative may emphasise a teamwork approach, with both academic and administrative staff working together for a common goal - that of increasing the satisfaction levels of their customers, both internal and external. Exactly how this might be achieved is something which is not clearly demonstrated in the UK literature. We can look, however, to the United States for several examples of successful implementation of the principles of TQM. For the purpose of this analysis we focus on the experiences of Northwest Missouri State University, a state-funded regional university with over 6000 students.

Dean L Hubbard, President of the University, speaking at the *11th International Conference on Assessing Quality in Higher Education* at Manchester, in July 1999, described how Northwest had launched a 'Culture of Quality' program in 1987. While the primary goal of this initiative was to provide a superior education for students, the 'Culture of Quality' was designed to pervade every aspect of campus life. The process began with the refining and sharpening of the University's mission statement, from which a set of mutually supporting 'best practice' goals were developed, through a benchmarking process. These were continually evaluated, using key quality indicators, with a view to continuous quality improvement in all the University's activities.

The measurable results for Northwest have been greater student satisfaction than the national average, in every dimension of student life, as measured by an external scale (the Noel-Levitz survey); students achieving above average national scores on tests and competitions; parents expressing high satisfaction with their perceptions of career planning and academic counselling, for their sons and daughters; and increased student enrolment (http://www.nwmissouri.edu).

Furthermore, Northwest has received several awards and recognition for its quality efforts, including the 1996 NACUBO Award for its 'Culture of Quality Plan for Improving Undergraduate Education' programme - an award which recognises initiatives in universities and colleges which have resulted in improvements in quality and a reduction in costs – and, in 1997, the Missouri Quality Award. Writing in the University's web pages, Hubbard states:

'A commitment to continuous improvement is working at Northwest ... The bottom line is, continuous improvement is just that, continuous. It never stops. No organisation will succeed using this approach unless the employees truly seek to be the best... (our staff) hold themselves to high standards.' Northwest's web site describes, in detail, the elements of this continuous quality improvement process, which includes all areas of higher education activity, ranging from student and library services to virtually every aspect of undergraduate and postgraduate teaching and learning (http://www.nwmissouri.edu/northwest/mqa).

The principal lesson from TQM may not lie in all of its specific tenets, but rather in its emphasis on continuous quality improvement. Neither the 'Standards' approach, nor that of the Teaching Quality Assessment exercise, encourage or effect the type of quality improvement, which is essential for the future well-being of the higher education sector. Harvey and Knight (1996) advocate the development of a quality culture of continuous improvement, which shifts the primary focus towards internal effective action, rather than external scrutiny. They seek greater trust in the professionalism of the academic workforce, with an external quality monitoring (EQM) system facilitating this process, rather than creating a bureaucratic burden of accountability.

While admitting that their approach bears some similarities to TQM, Harvey and Knight are swift to disassociate themselves from such a notion. While both approaches emphasise teamwork, delegated responsibility for quality, commitment of senior management to facilitating quality improvement, and developing a quality culture, it is in regard to TQM's concern with 'fitness for purpose' that the two approaches diverge. Harvey and Knight find TQM's fixation, with the product or service supplied to a customer, incompatible in a higher education system which is, by its very nature, a participative process. Their view is, nonetheless, based on a notion of higher education which is an ongoing, *transformative* process,which in turn requires a flexible, responsive, institutional framework.

The transformative perspective of the purpose of higher education is but one of the many viewpoints which we may adopt; some of which were discussed in

Chapter 3. These multiple purposes are *not* mutually exclusive. Higher education can, at one and the same time, produce graduates needed by society and prepare individuals for their futures, as lifelong learners. Within the ethos of TQM lies a belief in continuous improvement, in every respect. In higher education, what this can result in is improvement not only in the content of programmes, and how they are delivered, but also in the qualities of the student for self-reflection and personal development.

TQM has moved on from its industrial, manufacturing base of the 60s, 70s and 80s and has been adapted successfully in a number of service environments. It should not be perceived as a set of tenets to be rigidly imposed on higher education institutions, but as encompassing principles and encouraging attitudes which can be adapted to a collegial situation. Most importantly, TQM can be considered a processual approach that can help organisations deal with the rapid rate of change being experienced today. As Liston (1999) puts it, for some higher education institutions survival may be at stake. 'The constant is change, and the continual search for improvement is the *norm* in modern society. If individuals fail to look for opportunities, are not prepared to change old ways and adapt to grasp them, then chances are they will not survive' (p.148).

Conclusion

Entin (1993) identified a lack of commitment by the senior management of institutions, allied to a lack of understanding on the part of administrators and academic staff that TQM was related to their concerns, for its failure in the 10 Boston colleges. While accepting that a number of factors make the implementation of TQM in higher education difficult, Lewis and Smith (1994) argue that the underlying philosophy, values and norms of total quality and continuous improvement are appropriate in higher education. They see the main impediments as being organisational, cultural and linguistic. Our own interviews would support this view. Solomon (1993) identifies similar barriers and concludes that although implementation of TQM is likely to be slow, we should not let this prevent us from moving forward on the issue.

Our analysis would suggest that TQM's philosophy, values and norms can be appropriate in a higher education environment. The organisational, cultural and linguistic impediments which Lewis and Smith believe hinder the implementation of TQM in HEIs, need not apply. Organisational barriers can be overcome by senior management, who ensure that a common understanding of the problems facing the institution has been created, and that staff have been trained and empowered. Cultural barriers can be overcome by nurturing a common commitment, amongst academic, administrative and support staff, towards overcoming quality problems, and seeking continuous improvement in everything they do. Encouragement of team working and improvement of internal communications are essential. Instead of restraining academic freedom, the language of TQM can be liberating. It encourages innovation and individual responsibility. It devolves power down to the individual and gives each person responsibility for the quality of his/her own areas of work.

If TQM has not been successfully implemented in HEIs, it is largely because management understanding of, and commitment to, the approach has been inadequate. Senior management may have failed to 'walk the talk' and to lead by example. Managers may have failed to communicate the fundamental principles and philosophy of TQM throughout their institutions. Our interviews highlight a general misconception, that TQM is about systems and procedures and checking; a misconception which has been allowed to take precedence. Staff, meanwhile, have come to see quality assurance procedures as burdensome, time-consuming and adding no value to their academic work. This has created a mind-set that places QA procedures as an end in themselves, when they should be seen as an essential part of a TQM approach.

Quality assurance procedures allow us to gain feedback on our academic provision, in order to enhance and improve its quality. However, our interviewees reflected the view that the existing Teaching Quality Assessment exercise had not had an impact in this respect. Like the Standards approach, with its carefully documented systems, TQA ran the danger of producing a checklist mentality. Quality standards might be assured but innovation would be discouraged. A Total Quality Management approach, on the other hand, may

well fit better with higher education's values. It is an approach that can be utilised as part of a culture change, in which HEIs gain a clear focus on their markets and their missions, strive to be the best they can be, and seek to continuously improve on the level of quality they deliver to their many different customers.

CHAPTER NINE : CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

In this chapter, we highlight our main conclusions regarding the impact of the TQA exercise on the Scottish universities and briefly examine recent proposals for change in the way quality in teaching and learning is to be assessed, in higher education.

The abolition of the binary line between the former polytechnics and the established universities, in 1992, was accompanied by a steady increase in the percentage of school leavers accessing higher education. Both these initiatives were promoted by the Government as a means of providing wider access to universities and colleges, particularly from under-represented groups of the population. The expectation was that this would result in a more educated workforce; one equipped to deal with an increasingly service-oriented and technological environment.

The widening of access, and increase in overall student numbers, brought with it concerns as to how the quality of higher education might be assured. It also generated considerable debate over what was meant by 'quality' within a higher education setting. In this dissertation, we have argued that *quality is multi-*dimensional and requires to be defined within the different contexts in which it is being considered. It must also address the needs of the various stakeholders, or customers, of higher education – not only the needs of the student but also those of the employer, the funding bodies and society as a whole. Performance indicators can be utilised as part of a monitoring process, which will ensure that high quality outcomes are being achieved, but there is a danger that these indicators may become an end in themselves. Such outcome measures, however, can also be used to make inter-institutional comparisons that were never intended by the funding councils. Often such comparisons completely disregard the context in which the respective performance indicators were achieved and are therefore fundamentally flawed. We would suggest that more essential to successful quality management appears to be the organisation's ability to change and learn.

In order to address concerns over quality in the newly expanded higher education sector, the Government established funding councils whose remit was to put in place mechanisms for the assessment of quality in both teaching and in research. These funding councils were furthermore tasked with the allocation of funding to the higher education institutions, on the basis of the quality assessment findings. The means by which the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council sought to assure the quality of teaching and learning in the institutions under its control were the Teaching Quality Assessments. However SHEFC defined its remit as more than mere quality assurance. It sought to assist institutions in the dissemination of good practice throughout the sector and in promoting quality enhancement. In this respect, data from our interviews with senior personnel in the Scottish universities indicates that the SHEFC TQAs failed to make much of an impact. This view is based on a number of factors.

Firstly, our research shows that the reports produced, following a TQA visit, were not considered to be helpful, nor to highlight areas in which improvements might be gained. Furthermore, they did nothing to encourage departments, whose cognate areas were already considered to be 'Excellent', to continue to improve their quality of provision. Dissemination of good practice was poor, or non-existent, with a view being expressed, by our interviewees, that information in the reports was not easily transferable from one academic discipline to another. This view, we would argue, is invalid, as elements of good practice in teaching and learning should be transferable both within, and between, higher education institutions. Secondly, staff development in learning and teaching was 'patchy' and not considered to be directly influenced by the TQAs.

Nonetheless, our interviewees considered the *process* of being involved in a teaching quality assessment to be beneficial, particularly for those who were involved as assessors. This benefit was believed to derive from the detailed consideration which individuals and departments had to give to their existing practices; a requirement, in the TQA documentation, for self-reflection and self-assessment. Furthermore, for those acting as assessors, there was the opportunity for exposure to the practices in other institutions and for bringing back new ideas

to one's own department. In this sense, some dissemination undoubtedly took place.

The extent to which the TQAs raised the profile, and the esteem, of teaching and learning was, however, questioned by our interviewees. The overall perception was that, had the TQAs not been in operation, then the activity of teaching would have had even less of a status, compared to research activity, than it currently enjoyed. Although promotion criteria in the Scottish universities generally included performance in teaching, the prevailing belief was that performance in research was the critical determinant of promotion to Senior Lecturer and beyond.

We were surprised at the extent to which the Research Assessment Exercise was perceived to dominate the higher education discourse, at both individual academic and institutional levels. The main reason for this appeared to be the differential levels of reward and recognition given for excellence in research, compared to excellence in teaching. This was compounded by a perceived difficulty relating to assessment of individual excellence in teaching; the difficulty and sensitivity of which had persuaded most of the Scottish universities not to attempt to overtly reward high performance in this aspect of academic work. While excellence in research could be measured in numerical terms, for example the numbers of academic papers published or amount of research income generated, the measurement of excellence in teaching did not lend itself to similar forms of accounting. Rather than attempting to find a solution to this, most of the universities had simply shied away from the issue, with those offering prizes or enhanced titles such as 'Teaching Fellow' or 'Reader', remaining in the minority. We would suggest that until institutions tackle the perception of academic staff, that teaching is not as valued an activity as research, by utilising evaluative mechanisms, such as teaching portfolios, and providing real rewards, in terms of promotion, for those who can demonstrate excellence in this respect, teaching will continue to be seen as a second-class activity; one which does little to enhance an academic's career prospects.

The influence of the Research Assessment Exercise, both in terms of institutional reputations and resources, was apparent in our analysis of the results of the Teaching Quality Assessments. Far from being mission-sensitive, the Scottish TQA results followed a historical pattern of path dependency. Thus, a strong correlation was found between the age of the institution, where reputations and resources had been built up over many decades, or centuries, and high scores in the TQAs. Furthermore, we found a strong correlation between high institutional scores in the Research Assessment Exercise and high scores in the TQAs, with the ancient universities again demonstrating the strongest relationship, followed by the modern universities, with the post-1992 establishments trailing in third position.

When disaggregated into individual cognate areas, we found a variable pattern, with some subjects demonstrating a high correlation between RAE and TQA scores and some a low correlation. The high correlations occurred in what might be considered more traditional academic disciplines, such as in the physical sciences, whereas the low correlations were mainly in the newer disciplines, such as the social sciences. We infer from this that the opportunity does exist for some of the newer institutions to gain high scores for their teaching, while still in the process of building their research reputations. Indeed our analysis would indicate that, in the one year of the TQA exercise when the modern universities outperformed the ancient establishments, the predominance of less traditional academic subjects, favoured by the newer universities, was a factor in their success.

Institutional reputation is a complex issue and is based on many contributing factors, of which research reputation is only one. Our analysis sought to identify a number of factors, which might be influencing the outcome of the TQAs. We found that the qualifications of student entrants into higher education, and the *per capita* spending on library resources, were both significant factors. Students with high entry points were attracted to the older, established universities, which were able to draw on resources from research, and other external income generation, to supplement their library resources. The quality and quantity of such resources were commented on, by our interviewees, as a factor in the

assessors' judgements on the overall quality of academic provision within an individual institution. Thus those universities which had yet to establish a strong research base found themselves at a disadvantage. Their generally low scores in the RAE were minimally rewarded, or achieved no award whatsoever from the Funding Council, and their ability to supplement their teaching resources with income from research was consequently limited.

The extent to which the assessors – drawn in the main from the established institutions - were influenced by the research reputations of individuals, and individual departments, they visited and by their own experiences of higher education, as students in the older universities, remains an important but unanswered question. What can be said is that quality assessment procedures, such as the TQAs, which are basically an audit of historic practice, are more likely to encourage compliance with what is perceived to be necessary to satisfy the assessors, than to stimulate innovation and enhancement. This is particularly the case where summative judgements are linked to funding and new developments, with their associated risks, may be perceived to be strategically unwise.

Having acknowledged this tendency to compliance, and the possible creation of a 'checklist mentality', we would argue that a Total Quality Management approach offers much to senior management in the higher education sector, wishing to manage the quality of learning and teaching, and enhance the overall student experience. TQM has, however, been criticised for its use of language, which is considered by some academics to be inappropriate in higher education institutions. It has also been described as a management tool, designed to increase the burden on academic staff and reduce their individual autonomy and academic freedom. Our research interviews highlighted this type of confusion and misunderstanding over TQM initiatives.

Ideally, a TQM approach relies on a commitment by senior management and the creation of common goals amongst university staff. In a developed TQM culture, the institution fosters an ethos where learning from mistakes, instead of the allocation of blame, predominates. Within such a culture, personal reflection,

self-assessment and continuous improvement are expected from all staff. The emphasis is on a proactive, as opposed to a reactive, approach to quality and its enhancement and as such, TQM's values and norms can fit within the higher education environment. Where existing approaches to the management of quality in higher education suffer from a number of limitations, such as an over-reliance on checking mechanisms and an inability to take sufficient account of institutional mission, a TQM approach encourages innovation and development related to diverse institutional aims.

Much has been learned during the years that the teaching quality assessments have been in operation, and amendments made to the process, as the cycle of assessments progressed. As discussed in Chapter 4, one feature to emerge was the perceived duplication of effort on the part of institutions which were subjected to quality assessments by the funding councils and quality audits by the HEQC – both of which had a focus on teaching and learning. In this next section, we will outline some of the changes, which have been proposed to streamline these processes, and explore their potential impact on the higher education sector.

Recent Reviews and Changes in Higher Education

This thesis represents a snapshot in time; a perception of the impact of quality assurance in teaching and learning, during the period 1993 to 1998, in the Scottish universities. However, quality assurance systems are themselves subject to development and change. Whilst we cannot foresee what effect the new proposals will have, we believe that our analysis is relevant to a discussion of their likely impact.

Since commencing this study in 1993, a major review of the purpose, shape, structure, size and funding of higher education has taken place (THES, 25/07/97). The National Committee of Enquiry into Higher Education, chaired by Sir Ron Dearing, published its report in the summer of 1997. The Dearing Report, as it became known, also incorporated a report from a committee, chaired by Sir Ron Garrick, which examined particular issues relating to the Scottish higher education sector.

It is worthwhile examining elements of the Dearing Committee's terms of reference. Included in these was the requirement for the Committee to make recommendations on the maintenance and assurance of standards of degrees and other higher education qualifications, and the effective enhancement of teaching and learning. The over-riding proviso was that any such recommendations should be made with regard to the constraints of the Government's other spending priorities, and affordability. This section highlights key aspects of the Dearing Report, as they relate to this study, and discusses the extent to which these focus on enhancement, or control, of quality in higher education, given our analysis of previous developments in the Scottish universities.

Dearing envisaged the continuing expansion of the higher education sector, accompanied by a commitment to widening participation and the enrolment of students from disadvantaged localities. However, he acknowledged concerns that arrangements for quality assurance, as existed at the time, were not sufficient to ensure comparability of standards in such an enlarged sector. Consequently, in the area of quality in teaching and learning, Dearing had a number of recommendations to make, relating to the Quality Assurance Agency. One recommendation was for the remit of the Agency to be amended to include 'standards verification'. Dearing wanted the QAA to work with institutions in establishing small, expert teams which would provide benchmark information on standards - in particular threshold standards - operating within the framework of qualifications, in each subject area (Recommendation 25).

The Committee further recommended that academic staff be adequately prepared to deal with the changing higher education environment, through the provision of teacher training programmes. Recommendation 14 of the Report was for the establishment of a professional Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, which would accredit programmes of training for higher education teachers, commission research and development in learning and teaching practices, and stimulate innovation. Dearing put a great deal of emphasis on institutions having good staff development policies and urged HEIs to consider seeking Investor in People status (Recommendation 47).

The Dearing Report met with a mixed response from the government, particularly on those recommendations which would have a serious impact on government spending, such as funding and student support. On the proposals relating to the remit of the QAA, there was support for prioritising work on subject benchmarking. There was also support for the establishment of the Institute for Learning and Teaching, with the government stating that its long-term aim is for all teachers in higher education to have a professional qualification. The government further encouraged institutions to focus on staff development and seek IiP status (THES, 27/02/98).

Following extensive consultation with funding bodies and institutions throughout 1998 and 1999, the QAA finally published its new approach to assuring quality and standards, in its November 1999 bulletin, *Higher Quality*. While endorsed, in the main, by the various funding councils, certain aspects of the proposals continue to generate considerable controversy, not least those relating to the way in which judgements on quality will be reported. Today, the QAA are keen to emphasise that the new system is not simply an amalgamation of the previous programmes of teaching quality assessment and institutional review, but is intended as a means of assuring the overall standards of awards, the outcome standards of individual programmes, and the quality of learning opportunities (QAA, 1999).

The QAA takes, as its starting point, the reporting *outputs* from the process of teaching quality assessment. A recent report states that it is these outputs which are important in ensuring public confidence that quality and standards are being safeguarded; in providing public information; in meeting the statutory responsibilities of the funding bodies; and in helping institutions enhance the quality of their provision (QAA, 1999, Section 2.3). The report further goes on to express a view that the reporting style should promote behaviours that lead to improvements in quality and standards (QAA 1999, Section 2.9). In the new framework, the judgement on standards, within an individual subject area, will not be graded and will be made on whether standards are met, or not. This still raises important questions about *how* the benchmark standards are arrived at and *who* judges what is appropriate or not.

Quality assessment of learning opportunities, which includes three elements - teaching and learning; student progression; and learning resources – will, in the future, include a range of narrative judgements. As at November 1999, the categories to be employed included 'highly commendable', 'commendable', 'approved' and 'failing'. The QAA's justification for such summative judgements is that potential students and employers require clear, concise information about subject provision, in a form which allows them to make comparisons between different providers of similar programmes (QAA 1999, Section 2.22). Yet, a study reported in the *THES* during the same month, found that two-thirds of university and college applicants either were unaware that official information on teaching quality existed, or did not bother to consult it. *Only 12% considered such information* to be important. According to this study, employers paid even less regard to TQA information, *with 95% ignoring such* measures and the remaining 5% still relying on other sources, such as colleagues' perceptions and league tables (Goddard, 1999). The QAA responded to these findings with the announcement that it will revamp its reporting style, such that clear information can be provided to the public, with weak or failing provision clearly identified. Notwithstanding such a response, this does raise questions over the primary function of such summative judgements, when the public response appears to be one of disinterest.

The QAA believes that the proposed new system will promote quality enhancement, not only through its requirements for weakness or failure to be addressed, but also through highlighting general areas of improvement for those who are deemed to be satisfactory, and by commending best provision. To do so, the QAA will have to overcome the obstacles which appear to have prevented the earlier TQA reports from having had much impact on quality enhancement. These obstacles include a perceived lack of qualitative comment and suggestions on improvement strategies within the reports, allied to a widespread belief - certainly on the part of the post-1992 institutions - that the quality dice is loaded against them and that other factors, in particular research reputation and resources, are critical to success in any teaching quality assessment.

The view that the quality assessment process inherently favours *older institutions* will not be diminished by the new proposals for institutional scrutiny. The intensity of scrutiny, which each institution will face, is to be largely decided by past experience. Those institutions that can demonstrate a good track record from earlier subject reviews, and where confidence in internal systems is high, will receive a 'lighter touch'. Indeed, according to current proposals, following an initial visit, no further scrutiny may be required (QAA 1999, Section 2.48). However, those institutions whose previous institutional audits and subject reports do *not* produce high levels of confidence, will be subject to varying degrees of scrutiny, decided on a review by review basis through the mechanism of allocating the number of 'reviewer days'. The fewer days allocated, the less intense the scrutiny will be (QAA 1999, Section 2.47). Our analysis of previous TQA results from the Scottish universities would suggest that most of the post-1992 institutions can expect long visits, while their more ancient colleagues will experience the lighter touch. This differentiation, in turn, is likely to bias results against the new universities.

Trials of aspects of the new system of quality assurance were conducted during academic year 1998-99 in 21 institutions, during which period, draft subject benchmark statements for chemistry, history and law were tested. The QAA describes subject benchmark information as a set of principles, shared by each subject community, which can be used as a basis for discourse when quality and standards are considered (QAA 1999, Section 4). It is notable that the three subjects in the initial trial showed no consistency in their approaches. The Law group produced detailed notes on the minimum standards required for a student to gain a 3rd class degree; the History group submitted pages of guidelines on the standard likely to be achieved by a 'typical' student; and the Chemistry group produced a lengthy checklist of attainments and qualities required for progression to a professional qualification (Tysome, 1999). *While this might* produce some consistency within subject areas, the results of the trial do nothing to assure the public that similar standards apply to different academic degrees, if only because of this diversity in the approaches taken by various benchmarking groups.

It is on the issue of the reporting of outcomes from the quality assessment process over which there is most controversy. Heads of higher education *institutions opposed the inclusion* of single summative ratings, or summative ratings on individual aspects of provision, believing that *this would lead to* invalid comparisons being made among institutions with different aims and objectives, and an assumption of comparability where none existed (Baty and Tysome, 2000). As reported in the *THES* on 7th January 2000, the HEIs appear to have been brought into line by the funding councils, which have insisted on a system from which simple, easily comparable judgements can be made, and by government ministers who prefer clear performance indicators. John Randall, Chief Executive of the QAA, was reported as saying that the funding councils needed a style of reporting that could report on *relative quality* of provision, on a consistent basis, which could inform funding decisions. They needed, he said, consistency and a *greater degree of comparability*.

It is clear from the above that the new quality assurance regime focuses strongly on accountability, transparency and comparability. However, given the research presented in this thesis, the extent to which such a scheme will encourage and facilitate quality enhancement remains debatable. By confirming that summative judgements, albeit of a narrative nature, will be part of the assessment reports, the QAA is perpetuating a system in which, by converting such judgements to numbers, simplistic league tables can be created. This is likely to result in a continuing path dependency between a number of historic factors, and high teaching assessment scores, and an accompanying lack of differentiation between institutions with very different missions.

Today, questions are being raised regarding the setting of subject benchmarks. Who will be setting them? Which aspects of quality will be judged? And will the standards of the old university sector prevail? The likelihood is that most new universities will not benefit from the 'lighter touch' predicted for their more elite and established colleagues. This may mean that intense scrutiny of teaching and learning, set against benchmarks which may not fit the post-1992 HEI's type of programmes and student clientele, will perpetuate the poor results we have seen from previous subject assessment rounds.

Indeed, with student progression being a key feature of such scrutiny, those institutions which do recruit heavily from the lower socio-economic groups or from mature applicants – mainly those HEIs in the post-1992 sector – may find themselves criticised for their higher than average drop-out rates. They may be additionally disadvantaged by the focus which the subject scrutiny will place on learning resources. Here, the utilisation of IT equipment, accommodation, library resources and staff, is also likely to favour those institutions which are better resourced through research income, and other commercially generated sources.

The government may argue that it has gone some way in acknowledging the diversity of the higher education sector by encouraging the production of a set of performance indicators, which measures institutional performance with respect to widening access, student progression, outcomes of learning and teaching, learning and teaching efficiency and research output (HEFCE, 1999). However, these indicators have been benchmarked against each individual institution's expected performance. Thus the Oxbridge universities have low benchmark figures for wider access, compared to universities in the post-1992 sector. In comparison, performance indicators relating to research are much higher in the older established universities, than in their newer counterparts. As a result, some indicators may be held in higher regard than others – a case of all things being equal, but some being more equal than others. In addition, despite the government's advice that these indicators should be taken as a whole, e.g. non-completion rates should be considered in relation to access indicators and in the context of the institutional mission, they have given rise to a new set of league tables. Which institution is best/worst at widening access? Which has the highest drop-out rates? Which is least 'efficient'? (THES, 03/12/99)

The performance indicators are designed to allow comparisons to be drawn and, in a similar fashion to those relating to quality in teaching and learning, may encourage institutions to seek strategies which will maximise their 'points' and thereby their place on the ranking of institutions. A strong element of compliance may therefore result. By selecting these particular indicators, the Government is actively encouraging HEIs to follow government policy in

widening access, and promoting issues such as value for money, which it considers to be adversely affected by high drop-out rates. Indeed the Higher Education Minister, Baroness Blackstone, is reported as saying that the Government expects *action* to remedy shortcomings identified by the indicators, and that performance indicators are invaluable tools, allowing the funding councils to *steer the sector* (Goddard, Thomson and Wojtas, 1999). One mechanism by which institutions might counter the problem of high drop-out rates would be a diminution of existing academic standards, thereby enabling a higher percentage of students to pass. This is unlikely to be what the government has in mind, but it is a danger nonetheless.

This thesis has confirmed the view that the monitoring and review of performance are essential if an institution is to seek continuous improvement in teaching and learning, and in the student experience. It has also argued that performance indicators should not become ends in themselves. Yet, higher education appears increasingly faced with a number of performance indicators, set by government ministers and funded agencies, which are determining the strategies of these institutions and effecting control over how they spend their resources.

Our analysis would suggest that placing emphasis on performance indicators and quality assurance procedures will not, in itself, encourage or enable quality enhancement in teaching and learning. Instead, such a focus on performance indicators may perpetuate concerns over the workload burdens on academic staff and institutional management, and stimulate a false sense of priorities. For quality and innovation to flourish in an academic environment, a culture must exist whereby staff are valued, encouraged and empowered. The institutional culture should be one which has a commitment to excellence – which most HEIs would claim to have – but one which is also committed to reflection, review and continuous improvement. A culture which is aware of, and responsive to, its various stakeholders' needs, while at the same time pushing *beyond* the boundaries of existing knowledge, and creating new means of delivering its message.

In order to do this, a clear policy on staff development is necessary. Dearing's recommendation, supported by the Government, that institutions consider working towards Investors in People status, is one which assists the development of a quality culture and the ability of staff to adapt to a changing environment. IiP requires any organisation to ensure that all its staff are aware of its aims, and the part they each have to play in achieving those aims. In order to do this, training and development of staff is essential, with monitoring built in so that the effectiveness of such training can be evaluated. The University of Strathclyde gained the IiP award in 1999 and was the first pre-1992 university in the UK to gain recognition for the whole institution. *While part of the reason for seeking* this recognition was, according to Strathclyde's Director of Personnel, as a means of ensuring that staff's skills and knowledge were at the heart of the institution's planning process, the perception of others was also a crucial consideration (Wojtas, 1999). While, as we have seen, RAE ratings and TQA outcomes may not be greatly understood by, or of great interest to, the majority of the public, IiP is a widely-recognised quality standard, which can send a powerful message to users of higher education. Furthermore, the holistic approach of IiP, including as it does *all* staff within an organisation and recognising their needs, in relation to the success of the organisation as a whole, is one which sits well within a TQM approach.

For academic staff, development of skills in teaching is a key component in any assessment of staff development needs. As discussed in Chapter 6, the impact of the RAE has created tensions *between teaching and* research activities, and a prevailing sense that teaching is the lesser valued of the two activities. The aim of the Institute for Learning and Teaching is to ensure that HE institutions give more visibility, and provide greater rewards, for the teaching element of academic work - with accreditation as only one element in a programme, which is aimed at everyone who teaches in higher education, building on existing good practice (Bucklow, 1999b)

While the mechanistic nature of the proposed routes to ILT accreditation have been widely attacked, more fundamental is the argument which sees the Institute's very existence as a threat to the principle of academic freedom

(Furedi, 1999). Such an argument is based on a view which, although acknowledging that the quality of university education is uneven, prefers to see this addressed through informal initiatives at departmental level, rather than by some form of mandatory teacher training. That individual departments will be able to adequately provide for such training is perhaps unrealistic. Equally, the idea that the academic, through her research activities, will automatically be able to transmit that knowledge effectively to undergraduate students appears somewhat naive. Research should undoubtedly inform teaching in higher education and stimulate students' interest in the subject, but the skills of teaching a wide range of students in a wide range of settings – lectures, tutorials, laboratories – and by open or distance learning, require to be developed, both formally and through experience.

The *ILT's* focus is on the enhancement and development of existing practice – aims which again fit well with a TQM approach. By encouraging *HEIs* to provide accredited programmes of staff development in learning and teaching, and individual academics to become members of the Institute, the ILT is additionally aiming to raise the status of teaching as a professional activity in higher education, so that excellence in teaching and learning support can command as much respect as excellence in research (Bucklow, 1999a).

A Total Quality Management approach is one which is people-centred and which takes as its central tenet the notion of continuous improvement. It is *managerial* only in the sense that it must be supported and encouraged by senior management. It is instead, more akin to a *collegiate* approach in which each member of staff is valued, both as an individual, and as a member of a university team, which collectively contributes to the overall student experience. This holistic approach to quality management seeks to involve everyone in the achievement of successful outcomes for the institution as a whole. The emphasis is on innovation and development, and on reflection and review – qualities which are essential in a learning environment.

TQM utilises feedback to inform decision-making, but it does not rely on checking mechanisms, which are by their very nature post-event, and encourage

a reactive approach. Instead, it promotes individual and organisational learning and places emphasis on the training and empowerment of individual staff, as a means of encouraging continuous improvement. To be successful, a TQM approach requires management leadership and excellent communication throughout the institution. If the quality message is not communicated clearly, then commitment by staff to an institution-wide quality initiative will not be achieved.

Reliance on checking mechanisms, such as those carried out by the funding councils and now the Quality Assurance Agency, as a means of enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in higher education institutions, has been shown to be less effective than these agencies expected. The teaching quality assessments, with their summative judgements, have encouraged a climate in which academics may 'play safe' and seek to comply with the assessors' perceived preferences. The new benchmark quality standards may assure a certain level of provision, but again may discourage innovation and lead to conformity, rather than diversity in higher education provision.

By adopting a Total Quality Management approach, higher education institutions would send a clear message that they value all their staff and their students, that they are committed to providing the highest quality provision, and that they continue to seek innovation and improvement in all their activities, not least in their fundamental purpose of teaching students and supporting their learning.

Appendix 1

Ref: LD/PhD3/ML

Date:

Direct Line: 0141 331 3153
Dept Fax: 0141 331 3229
E-mail: ldr@gcal.ac.uk

[ADDRESS]

Dear [Salutation],

I am currently undertaking part-time study for a PhD in Education at the University of Glasgow. My supervisor is Malcolm MacKenzie.

The focus of my study is an examination of the ways in which Scottish Universities are managing and developing teaching and learning, and the perceived influences on this aspect of academic work by those responsible for its management. To this end, I would like to carry out interviews with the appropriate personnel in each of the thirteen Scottish Universities.

I shall contact you by telephone, within the week, to discuss the matter and hopefully to arrange an interview with you.

Kind regards.

Yours sincerely,

Lynn T. Drennan,
Department of Risk and Financial Services.

Appendix 2

List of Institutions and Dates of Interviews

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN	03/06/97
UNIVERSITY OF ABERTAY DUNDEE	02/06/97
UNIVERSITY OF DUNDEE	02/06/97
UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH	21/07/97
UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW	29/04/97
GLASGOW CALEDONIAN UNIVERSITY	16/04/97
HERIOT-WATT UNIVERSITY	19/02/98
NAPIER UNIVERSITY	25/06/97
UNIVERSITY OF PAISLEY	14/07/97
ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY	03/06/97
UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS	04/06/97 and 20/02/98
UNIVERSITY OF STIRLING	09/06/97
UNIVERSITY OF STRATHCLYDE	30/04/97

Interview Schedule

Interviews generally lasted between an hour and an hour and a half, and followed a schedule which was neither pre-circulated to, nor seen by, the interviewees. Although the first question was always the same, the interview schedule could be used flexibly and the order in which the other questions were asked, would depend on the way in which the respondent answered previous questions.

1. Introduction and explanation

a) Background to the study

b) Choice of interviewees

c) Seeking both factual information and personal opinion

d) Permission to tape record

e) Interviewee's control over final version of transcript

f) Confidentiality. Statements not attributable to individuals nor institutions

2. How TQA reports are utilised

a) When a TQA report has been published for a cognate area, how is this used within the institution?

b) Do any mechanisms exist to monitor and follow-up the actions plans which a cognate area draws up, following publication of the TQA report?

c) When particular features are highlighted for praise in the TQA report, is this information disseminated in any way throughout the institution?

d) Have the TQA reports informed the staff development policy or strategies within the institution?

e) To what extent do you believe that the TQAs achieve their aim of quality enhancement in teaching and learning and dissemination of good practice, throughout the Scottish HEIs?

3. Structures and responsibilities

a) What structures are in place, within this institution, i.e. committees or working parties, with a remit for the management and/or development of quality in teaching and learning?

b) At the most senior *level in the institution,* who has the operational responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning?

4. Staff Development

a) Is there a separate Educational Development Department / Academic Staff Development Department, or similar, with a remit for the development of skills in the management and delivery of teaching and learning?

b) Is there an Induction programme for new lecturing staff and research staff who have a teaching remit? What form does this take?

c) Is there a requirement for academic staff to undertake staff development in the area of teaching and learning? If so, how is this monitored?

d) Has the institution considered, or does it operate, a more formal system of continuous professional development, whereby academic staff are required to undertake a minimum number of hours CPD within a time period, e.g. one to three years?

e) Does the institution offer staff the opportunity to undertake a post-graduate qualification in teaching and learning? Is this an actual requirement of new teaching staff?

5. Monitoring teaching quality at the delivery stage

a) What mechanisms are in place for the monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning at individual module (or unit) level?

b) Are student evaluation questionnaires employed in all discipline areas? How are these used?

c) Does peer review of teaching delivery take place? If yes, is this voluntary or compulsory? How is the process managed? How are the outcomes utilised?

6. **Appraisal, rewards and recognition**

a) Do staff participate in regular Staff Development / Career Reviews?

b) To what extent is the quality of teaching and learning a feature in these reviews

c) Are there any rewards, or recognition, given for excellence in teaching and learning, e.g. Professorships, Readerships in the Teaching of the discipline, Prizes?

d) What value, in terms of recognition and/or rewards is given to excellence in teaching compared to excellence in research?

7. **Impact of semesterisation and modularisation**

a) Does the institution operate a semesterised academic year? Has the institution changed its academic year from 3 terms to 2 semesters, since 1992?

b) Does the institution operate a modular provision of academic subjects? Has the institution changed the format, i.e. size, shape or credit of its units or *modules since 1992?* What form have these changes taken?

c) What impact, if any, has semesterisation and/or modularisation had on the quality of teaching and learning within the institution?

8. **TQM and BS5750**

a) Do you believe that management philosophies, such as Total Quality Management, have a place in academic institutions?

b) What influence, if any, has TQM had on your institution and, in particular, its approach to quality enhancement of teaching and learning?

c) Have academic staff experimented with some of the TQM methods, such as 'quality circles'? Were these encouraged throughout the institution?

d) Has the institution developed quality systems in line with BS5750 / ISO9000? If so, for which aspects of the institution's work?

9. Other quality marks

a) Has the institution considered becoming an 'Investor in People'? For what reason(s) has the institution chosen to do / not to do so?

10. Final questions

a) We have discussed a number of influences on teaching and learning quality. Are there any influences which you feel I have missed out?

b) Do you think that I am likely to find differences between the approaches of the old and the new universities?

11. Close

a) Thank you for time and assistance.

b) Transcript to be sent for approval / amendment within a few weeks.

c) Stress that individual comments will be unattributable.

d) Follow-up with written thank-you letter, and copy of transcript.

Ref: LD/PhD1/ML

Date:

Direct Line: 0141 331 3153
Dept Fax: 0141 331 3229
E-mail: ldr@gcal.ac.uk

[ADDRESS]

Dear [Salutation],

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to interview you on [DATE].

A copy of the transcript is enclosed. I would be grateful if you could check it and note any corrections you would wish me to make. It is not my intention to include transcripts, as whole, within the thesis. Instead, I will be coding key aspects for comparative analysis and perhaps including selected quotes.

Please let me know if there are any aspects, which you would not wish in the public domain.

I look forward to hearing from you, and thank you once again.

Kind regards.

Yours sincerely,

Lynn T. Drennan,
Department of Risk and Financial Services.

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Northwest Missouri State University (http://www.nwmissouri.edu)

Research Assessment Exercise (http://www.rae.ac.uk)

Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (http://www.shefc.ac.uk)