

A photograph of the University of Westminster building entrance. The building is a grand, classical-style structure with large columns and a prominent entrance. The words "THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTMINSTER" are inscribed on the facade above the entrance. A group of people is gathered on the sidewalk in front of the building, some standing and talking, others walking. A woman in a bright yellow coat is visible in the crowd. To the left, there is a poster for a film or event. The overall scene is a busy urban environment.

**Engendering a culture of Quality  
Enhancement in teaching and  
learning – lessons learned  
Evelyne Rugg, October 2009**



## The Quality Enhancement agenda in the UK

Strategies for the promotion of quality enhancement (QE) in UK Higher Education - illustrations of QE and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) at the University of Westminster

- National funds for the development of Learning & Teaching
- Centres for Excellence in Teaching & Learning (CETLs)
- Institutional strategies and formal CPD programmes for staff
- Institute of Learning and Teaching (1999)
- HEFCE's Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund (TQEF)
- Higher Education Academy Fellowship accreditation
- Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (2004 -)



## Why focus on Quality Enhancement ?

- Massification in HE and a more diverse student body
- Rapid changes in external environment
- Need to re-balance research focus with scholarship
- Promotion of student centred autonomous learning
- **Essential for future sustainable international success**
- **Quality Assurance (QA) and Quality Enhancement (QE) measures must be simple, fit for purpose, easily translated and adopted**
- **‘Product development’ - a cyclical programme of research, evaluation and refinement**



## Quality and standards in UK universities – UUK summary on how the system works

Six key features recognised internationally:

- The *Academic Infrastructure* defined by the UK's Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) with Frameworks for HE Qualifications, Subject Benchmark Statements (for use by course approvers) and a Code of Practice on all aspects of taught course and research degree delivery
- Universities' own policies and processes for the design and review of courses and external examiners
- External reviews of universities and FE colleges which run HE courses
- Effective engagement with students, employers and professional bodies
- Mechanisms to support improvements by learning from experience, sharing good practice and supporting professionalism in teaching
- Measures to address complaints.



## Definitions

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- **Quality Assurance:**  
policies, systems and processes which ensure the maintenance and enhancement of HE courses and research
- **Quality Enhancement:**  
deliberate steps taken to improve the quality of the student learning experience
- **Academic standards:**  
The level of achievement a student must reach to gain academic credit for an HE qualification, as defined by the validated learning outcomes for the curriculum



## Safeguards for quality

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- Recruitment of the right academic and support staff
- Leadership, development and succession planning for staff
- Learning infrastructure which is fit for purpose
- Peer review of taught courses and research
- Integrity in recruitment and admission of students
- Scrutiny of external examiners and 'critical friends'
- Clear criteria for assessment/grading, applied with consistency
- Formal Assessment Boards
- Secure Student Record Systems for data management
- Independent Governors, and auditors
- The expectation of high performance by all – staff and students

## Quality Assurance is a threshold approach

1. UK post-1992 universities' frameworks are rigorous but 'box-ticking' practices emphasise thresholds over enhancement
2. UK Government exercises greater control through Funding Council (HEFCE) than other states' Ministries of Education

University of  
Westminster  
models

- Educational Initiative Centre 1995 -
- On-Line Learning Group and Blackboard/wimba developments
- Teaching and Learning Coordinators (TLCs)
- Annual Learning and Teaching Symposium
- Westminster Exchange 2009 – supporting organisational enhancement culture



## Discussion points – lessons learned

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- A ‘lighter touch’ – greater investment in trust, with dialogue and small audits replacing triangulation checks
- Quantitative judgements about qualitative matters don’t work - ‘league table’ rankings
- ‘Lost in Translation’ – numerous publications on quality and learning from practice and reviews but do teaching staff assimilate these texts without a facilitator ?
- Peer observation works but critical friends are not candid
- The student voice is still not audible enough
- The ‘quality mafia’ are custodians of the culture as perceived experts, disenfranchising the teaching staff



## Concluding questions

- Enhancement opportunities have been offered through Bologna initiatives - has the UK focused too narrowly on QA and QE ?
- Should a whole institution evaluation approach replace the subject/Faculty/School level reviews deployed since 1999 ?
- Is a Key Performance Indicator (KPI) and Full Economic Cost (FEC) environment antithetical to a culture which foregrounds quality of the students' learning experience ?
- If QA and QE are corporately managed at executive level can the ethos of collegiality and candid critique still thrive ?
- How can QE mechanisms affect the quality of teaching ?
- Could an impact assessment methodology work effectively ?