

How a Quality Unit Works in Practice: a case study from Newcastle University



Who we are

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Outline of purpose

To provide a case study of the approach taken to quality management at Newcastle University illustrating:

- the structure and functions of the Quality in Learning and Teaching (QuILT) service
- the role of the Faculties and academic community in quality management
- the relationship between QuILT and the institution
- the adaptation of quality management structures and processes to institutional culture

What is quality assurance for?

What is QA for?

The view from the average quality unit:

- Assure standards of awards being made
- Public accountability and confidence
- & enhancement...evaluation, reflection and action planning to support ongoing development of a high quality student experience

The stereotypical view from an academic:

- Driven by professional accreditation rather than internal QA processes
- “QA is all about processes not about quality of delivery”
- “The University keeps imposing things on us”

Newcastle – institutional context

- Mission
- Size
- Disciplinary mix
- Structure
 - Managerial
 - Academic organisation
 - Student and academic services
- Income
- Partners

National and international context

- Funding structures – student fees and government funding
- Quality Assurance Agency
 - Academic Infrastructure (Code of Practice, subject benchmark statements)
 - Institutional Audit
- Professional Accreditation
- Higher Education Academy
- Bologna process

Structure and functions of schools

Academic peer review of learning and teaching close to discipline level

- Boards of Studies
- Boards of Examiners
- FTLC representatives
- School Teaching & Learning Committees
- Staff Student Committees
- Directors of Teaching
- Teaching Champions

Structure and functions of faculties

- Role of Deans
- Role of FTLC secretaries
- Faculty level committees
- Devolved first line of quality management
 - Approval of new programmes
 - Annual Monitoring of programmes
 - Updates to modules and regulations
 - External Examiner reports
 - FTLC representatives
- Identification and dissemination of good practice

Structure and functions of QuILT

QuILT is the Quality In Learning and Teaching service.

The aims of QuILT are to work closely with staff and students to:

- develop and manage learning and teaching activities across the University
- provide the first port of call on all quality assurance and enhancement matters

QuILT (continued)

The QuILT team of 14 staff is engaged in:

- Provision of advice, and development of policy, on learning & teaching and quality management
- Co-ordination of institutional student survey activity
- Support for parity of esteem for learning & teaching alongside research
- Support for institution level stages of quality assurance processes
- Support for innovative practice and learning and teaching projects
- Support for e-learning
- Co-ordination of institutional preparations for external audits of learning & teaching
- Institutional dissemination of good practice



QuILT (continued)

QuILT works :

- To support governance structures for learning and teaching (e.g. University Teaching and Learning Committee, Quality and Standards Sub-Committee)
- With other student and academic services (e.g. Staff Development Unit to deliver academic staff development)
- With academic colleagues on learning and teaching projects, to disseminate good practice, and to promote understanding of quality management
- With student representatives

How it works in practice

Example: Late Submission of Work Policy

- Identification of issue
- Initial consultation (e.g. think tank, working group)
- Development of policy
- Formal consultation with faculties
- Approval at institutional level
- Dissemination of policy to faculties
- Local implementation by schools
- Monitoring of implementation/impact by faculties
- Overview report from faculties to institutional level

What do you think are the key features, potential strengths and weaknesses of the Newcastle approach?

Key features of Newcastle approach

- Quality assurance and quality enhancement linked
- Consensus rather than control model
- Balance between institutional oversight and academic ownership
- Importance of partnerships and communication
- Reliance on informal influence as well as formal structures
- Quality culture is adapted to academic culture of highly devolved institution

Comparison with other institutions

- Variety of structures, but common core functions
 - Learning, Teaching and Assessment strategy
 - Audit – assurance of teaching quality
 - Enhancement and innovation
 - Professional development of staff
 - E-learning
 - Academic/pedagogic research role
- Size: average 13.1 FTE staff in post 1992, 8.7 in pre-1992 institutions (Gosling, 2008)
- Trend towards distributed model
- Regular re-organisation

Comparison (continued)

Successful quality and education development (Gosling)

- Sensitive to institutional and disciplinary culture
- Flexible – responsive to change
- Inclusive – works with all staff and students
- Collaborative – working in partnership
- Scholarly
- Strategic – linked to leadership and clear goals
- Multi-layered
- Visible – supported by good communication
- Well-resourced
- Reflexive – constant self-evaluation

What type of quality unit would fit in your institution? Why?

What types of working relationships and methods of influence could you put in place to ensure that QA works?

• Marching band

or

• Jazz band?

Just one thing...