Book Reviews

Ellis (Roger) (ed) *Quality Assurance for University Teaching*, The Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press, Buckingham, 1993. 322 pp. £16.99 (pbk); £45 (hbk). ISBN 0-335-19025-1 (pbk) 0-335-19026-X (hbk)

Since the 1980s, the concepts of quality and quality assurance have become a central issue in many higher education systems across the Western world. At different system levels – government, institution, faculty, department, teacher – quality of education and the way the quality assurance, with regard to education, can be organized are discussed. As the title of the book already indicates, Ellis concentrates mainly on the micro level (teaching) of the higher education system. The main purpose of the author is to 'present ideas and initiatives that are relevant for quality assurance for teaching' (p 11).

The book is subdivided into three themes, namely 'assuring quality', 'identifying quality' and 'developing quality'. Each theme contains a number of chapters which are written by different authors. Thirteen of the twenty contributors are working at the University of Ulster. A number of ideas and initiatives for quality assurance have been introduced at this university. Gained experiences with quality assurance within the University of Ulster are in this book put into words.

The first theme, *assuring quality*, encompasses almost half of the book (pp 3–146). The first part of this section deals with the question, what extent can quality assurance as it is traditionally conducted in manufacturing, service industry and health care be transferred to universities. This view on quality assurance corresponds with the view in the British White Paper *Higher Education: a New Framework*, where the emphasis lays on more efficiently and effectively operating higher education institutions. Although universities can learn from the experiences that the sectors mentioned above have with procedures of quality assurance, we must not forget that the universities have their own culture and traditions. The implementation of quality assurance methods from industry is not a simple matter. It requires a significant change in the functioning of universities, in their culture and traditions. However, this matter receives hardly any attention.

In the second part of the section, three procedures of quality assurance are presented, some of which have already existed for a short time, and others for a longer time in higher education. First, the validation and review of courses. Second, the quality of teaching as perceived by students and third, institutional research. The used evaluation techniques, instruments and procedures can be seen as pieces of a quality assurance system within a university. Although such instruments for the evaluation of teaching have been developed within various universities, very little is known about the extent of utilization of the evaluation, respectively the extent to which these results have led to improvement of university teaching. In other words, the mere development of evaluation instruments does not automatically imply that teachers improve their teaching.

In the final chapter of this section, these pieces are more or less tied together. Elton presents a professional model for quality assurance in university teaching. This model is based on what Elton indicates as a 'dialectical situation': on the one hand, university teachers have not received a professional course, on the other hand, there is strong pressure for a greater professionalism arising from public demand for quality assurance (p 139). Elton's professional model can be seen as a starting point for developing and assessing objectives and standards that ensures competent university teaching.

The second major them of the book, *identifying quality* (pp. 149–211) concerns the quality of teaching performances: the introduction of teaching awards and methods for effective teaching. Although the idea of teaching awards is a relatively new phenomena in European higher education systems, it is worthwhile to encourage such an idea, while, as Ellis pertinently noticed, it has undoubted effect on raising the general profile of teaching. The second part of this section deals with a description and classification of effective teaching. It is a pity that the

teaching methods are presented without reference to certain theoretical assumptions or organizational contexts in which they can be used. Taking the main purpose of the book into account, potential users cannot easily assess whether a particular approach will be well suited to their aims, conceptions of education or organizational characteristics.

The third and last section of the book, *developing quality* (pp 235–300) deals mainly with the question how the quality of university teaching can be enhanced. For most of the authors, which contribute at this section, it is still amazing that there is no recognized and compulsory course or training for teaching. That is why individual institutions have taken initiatives for developing a teacher training course. For example, at the University of Ulster a certified course has been developed, the so-called Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching in Higher Education. Although there is little experience of this course, until now it has been assessed positively.

All in all, the book contains many interesting initiatives and proposals for quality assurance, although some are not new, which can lead to the improvement of quality of university teaching. However, the question as to under what organizational conditions these instruments will be successful at universities, remains for the most part unanswered.

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