



What is Quality?

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QAA is the UK's expert quality body for tertiary education

- ~ offering tailored approaches for each of the four UK nations
- ~ around 300 members across the UK & internationally
- ~ extensive international links





Quality – I'll know it when I see it



**Quality is not an act, it is a
habit.**

Aristotle

Quality is never an accident.
It is always the **result**
of **intelligent effort**.

– *John Ruskin*


AZ QUOTES



A long, dark pier extends from the foreground into the ocean, leading the eye towards the horizon. The sky is filled with soft, orange and yellow light from a setting or rising sun, with scattered clouds. The water is calm, reflecting the light from the sky. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

Quality is remembered long
after price is forgotten.

Aldo Gucci

 quote fancy



What would your quote be?



Definitions of quality in higher education



Academic Quality

...refers to the learning experience students have *during* their study.

It relates to course *delivery* – how does this course ensure that a student is provided with the opportunity and support they need to reach the academic standards we have set for the award?



Academic standards

...describe what a student must achieve to receive a particular mark, grade, award or classification.

They are what we consider in the *design* of the course – what does a student have to do, know and demonstrate to achieve in this course and how will we measure that?



Quality enhancement

...going beyond an agreed baseline

- Deliberate steps...
- Forward look
- Link to strategy
- Partnership with students







Approaches to external quality...

Drivers for focus on quality

- Access to education – expansion of places
- Shape of the sector – bringing together institutions with different traditions
- Tool for distributing funding
- Meeting employer & society needs





Accountability versus autonomy



In England, since the 1980s...

the audit society and the accountability culture
have collided with
academic freedom and institutional autonomy

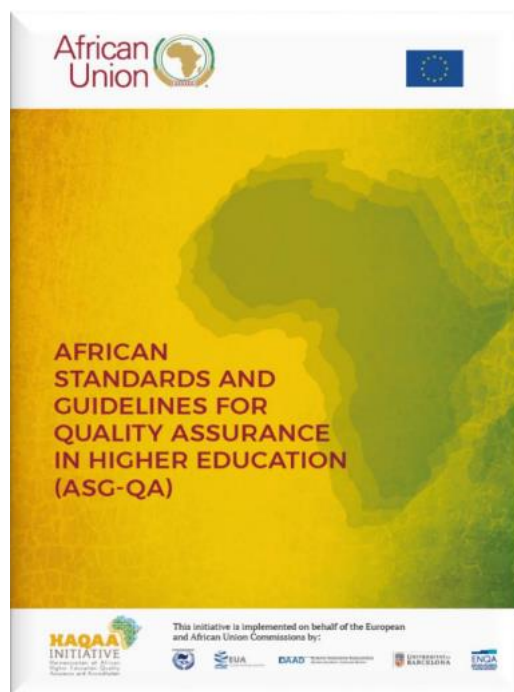
David Watson (2006) **Quality Matters**, A QAA Briefing Paper Gloucester: Quality Assurance Agency December 2006



The Age of Codification...



Standards & guidelines





X Not (absolutely) prescriptive

X Not a national curriculum

- Do support innovation, diversity and flexibility
- Support recognition and alignment between institutions & nations



BUT...

- While not absolutely prescriptive, depending on how they are used, they could become a checklist

And yet...

- When being used internally, there is often a request for (even) more detail





Overall...



- Clarity for students, staff and stakeholders around expectations – including international recognition
- Even where providers and provision varies, recognised approaches and good practice is identified
- Wheels need not be invented when designing or reviewing policies and processes



Role of national & international networks

For example...

International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in HE (INQAAHE) – over 300 members



So what?

- ✓ Recognition of qualifications
- ✓ Student mobility
- ✓ Partnerships
- ✓ Transnational education
- ✓ Student recruitment





Do you recognise that description of national frameworks and guidelines?

How do you use them?





Competing ideologies

Tensions...

- Accountability versus autonomy?
- Staff versus student-centred?
- Assurance versus enhancement?



Swapping accountability for the market?

Should the market play a role in determining quality...?





Much of the rhetoric about the value of a higher education market treats students as purchasers, customers or consumers. These terms are anathema to much of higher education... because teaching and learning are seen as symbiotic. **Students do not consume knowledge but construct it... they are co-producers and collaborators.**

- Graham Gibbs

Gibbs, G (2012) *Implications of 'Dimensions of Quality' in a market environment*. HEA research series.





As early as 400 BC, Socrates cautioned against creating ‘merchants of knowledge’ who are willing to give students what they want rather than what they need in order to keep the money flowing. He warned such a **market-based exchange would have a corrupting effect on the teaching and learning process.**

J Angulo, Guardian, Wed 6 Jul 2016





Impact of 'student-as-consumer' on academic performance analysis found:

Having a consumer orientation mediates the traditional relationships between learner identity, grade goal and academic performance

Having a higher consumer orientation was associated with lower academic performance

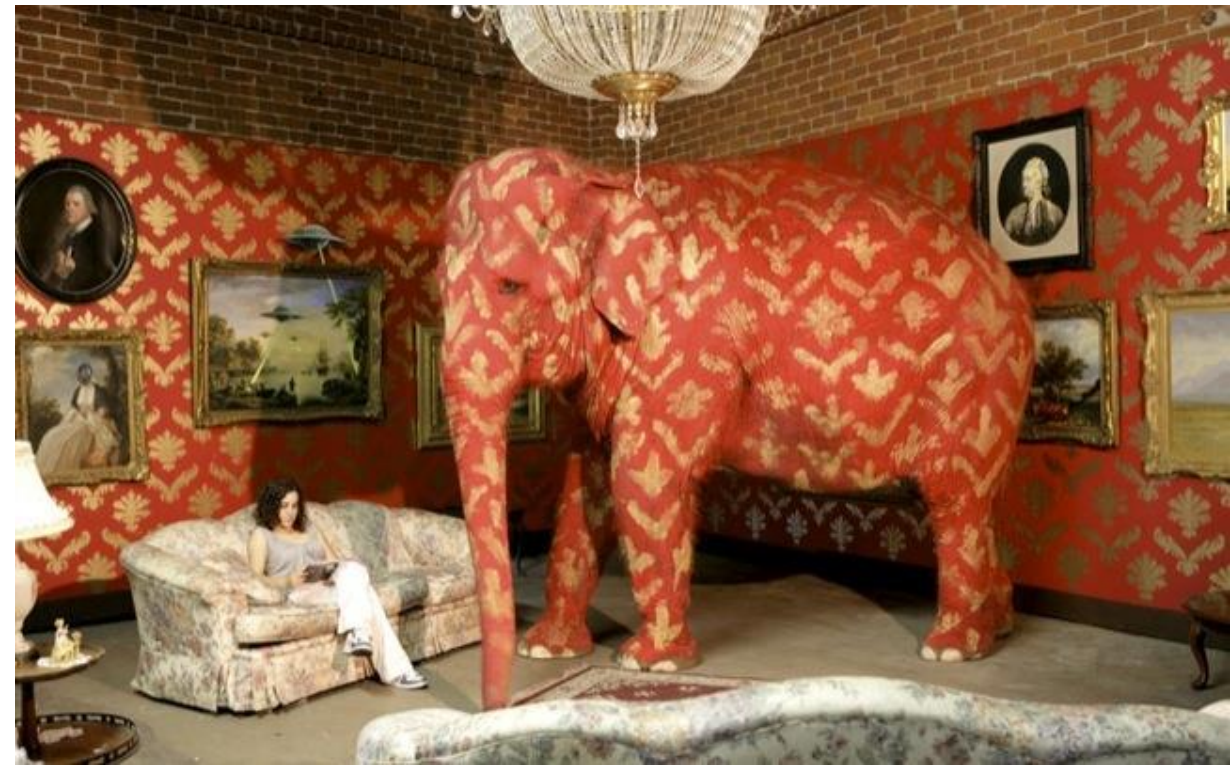
Louise Bunce, Amy Baird & Siân E. Jones (2017) The student-as-consumer approach in higher education and its effects on academic performance, *Studies in Higher Education*





Student satisfaction...versus engagement ?

Employer satisfaction...?





Quality from the inside...



Institutional approach to quality

- What is your strategic approach to learning, teaching & assessment ?
- Who are your students & how might that population change ?



What, therefore, are the consequences for your quality arrangements?



Key roles in quality assurance & enhancement



- Quality assurance & enhancement works best when it's part of a strategic approach: whole-institution culture
- But...are there key individuals who might make a difference ?



Programme leaders & the evidence funnel

Students experience...

- The quality of teaching
- Sense of belonging to a learning community
- Programme management

...primarily at the programme level

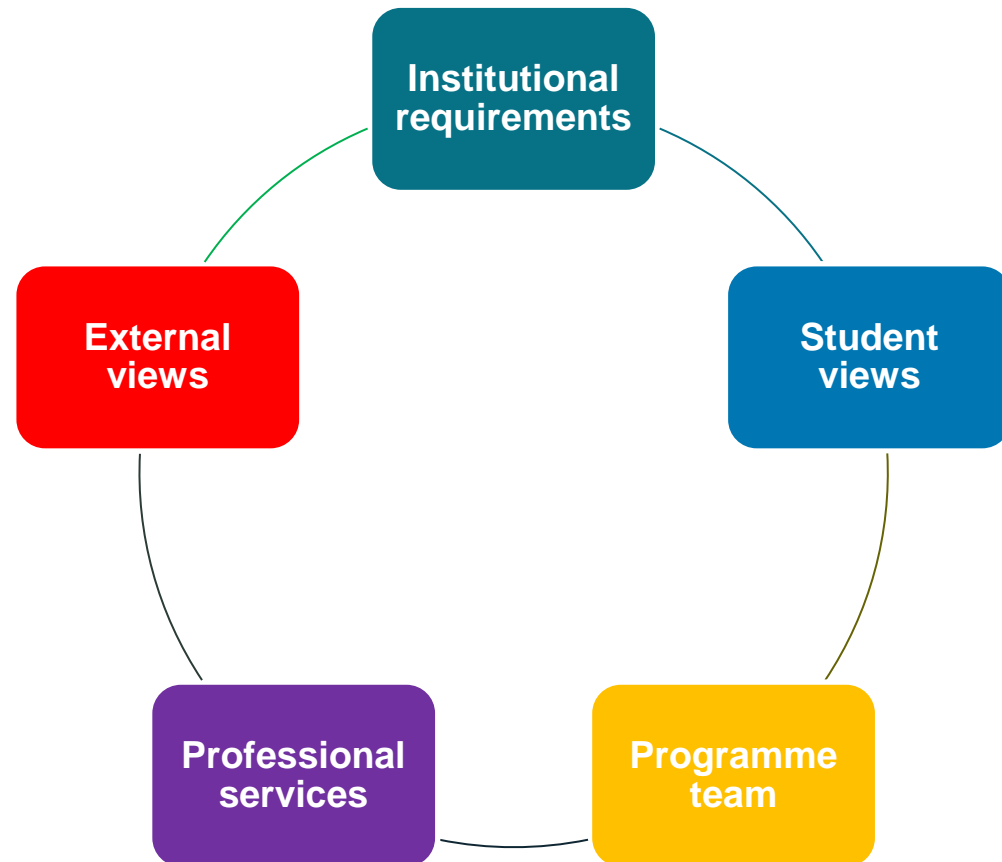
This places significant responsibility on the programme leaders as interpreters and creators of evidence for enhancement.

Programme leaders are the critical interface between key metrics, diverse student & staff voices & calls for action.



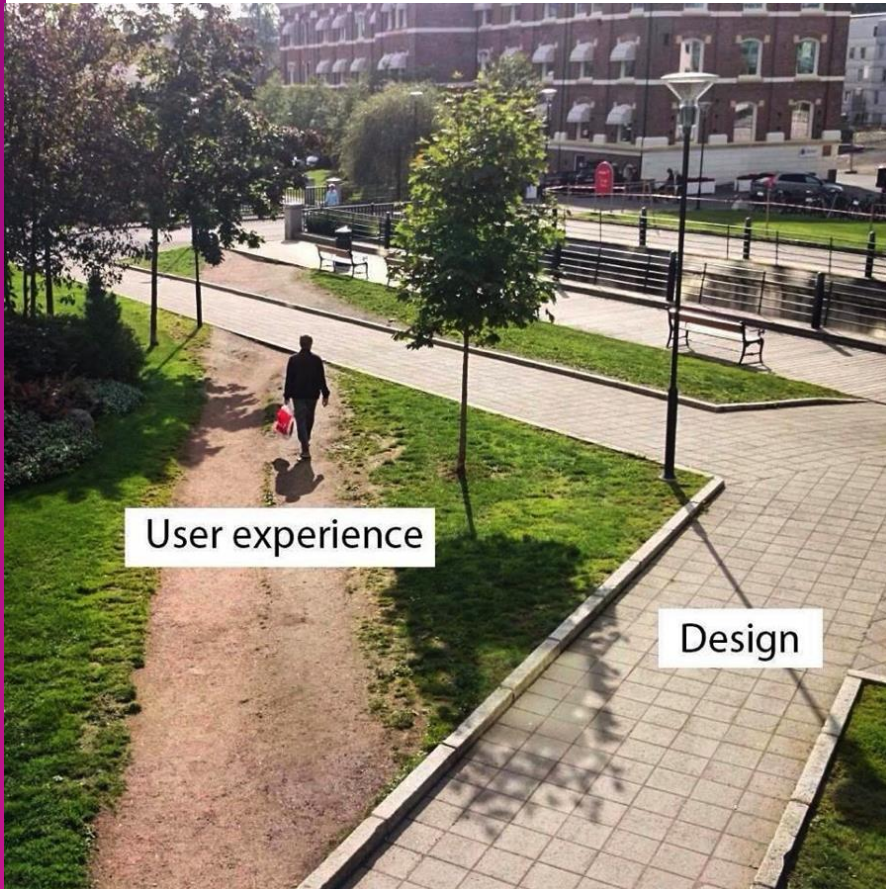


Programme leader perspective





Understanding competing views

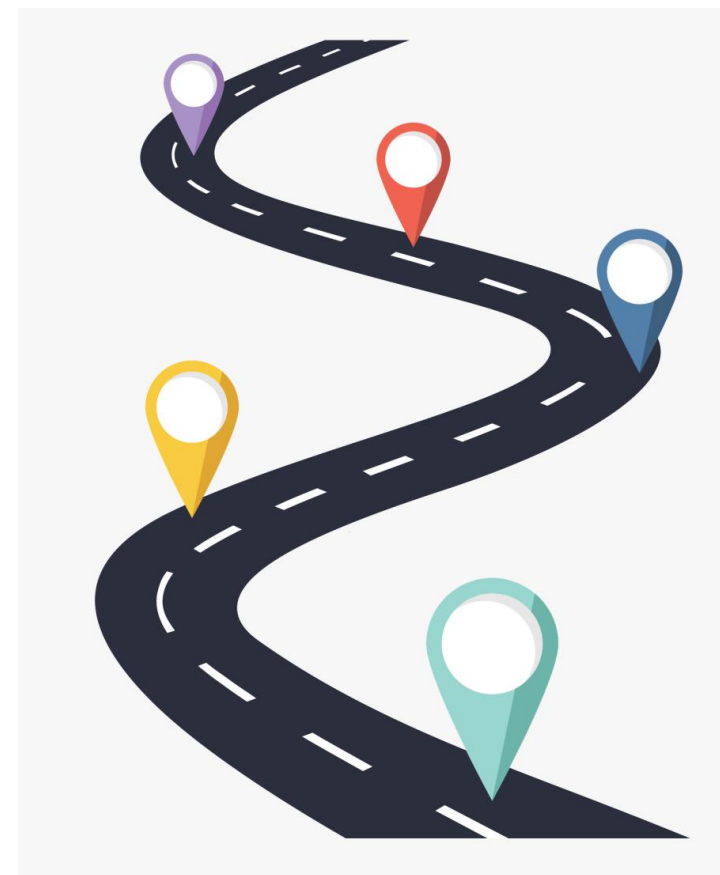


- What support can you put in place to help programme leaders meet potentially competing needs ?
- How can you help programme leaders to interpret potentially conflicting information or evidence?
- What opportunities do you have to hear programme leaders' views ?



Roadmap for quality enhancement?

- Linking to strategy: what are you seeking to enhance?
- Identifying what success will look like
- Knowing where you are starting from
- Tracking (& adjusting) how to get there
- Partnering with students
- Engage in review activity, eg QAA offers International Quality Review

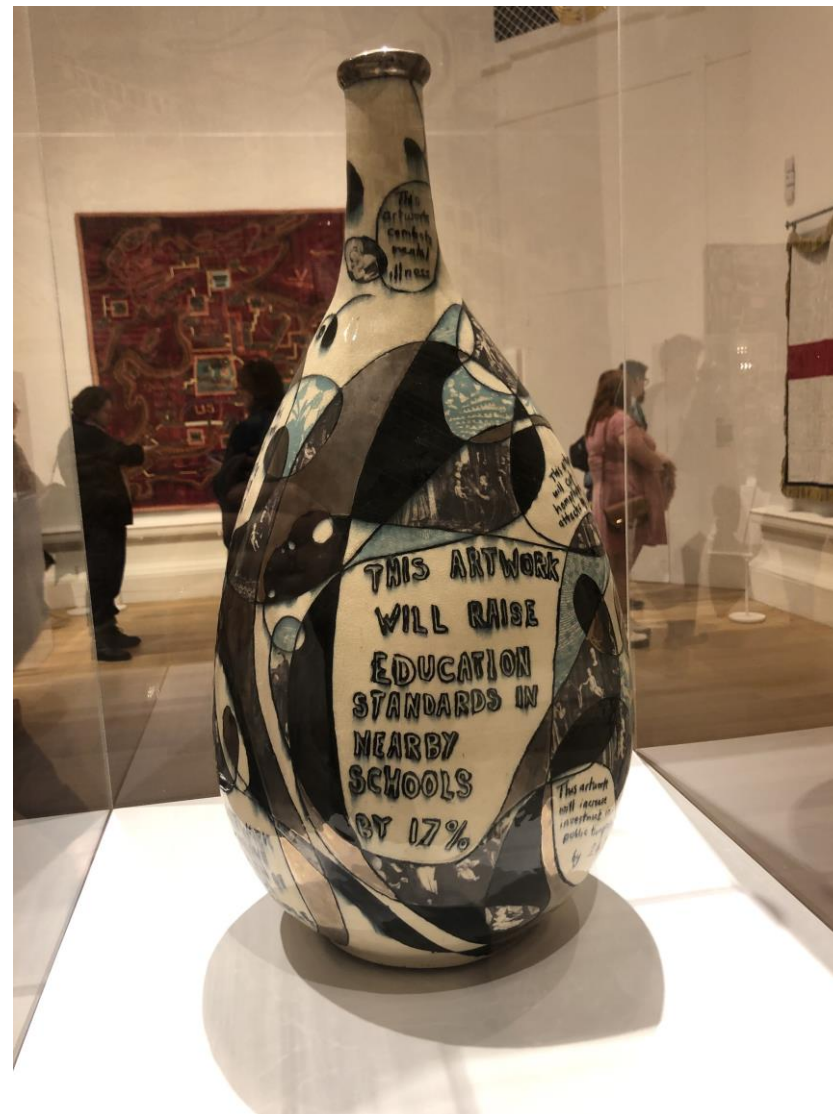
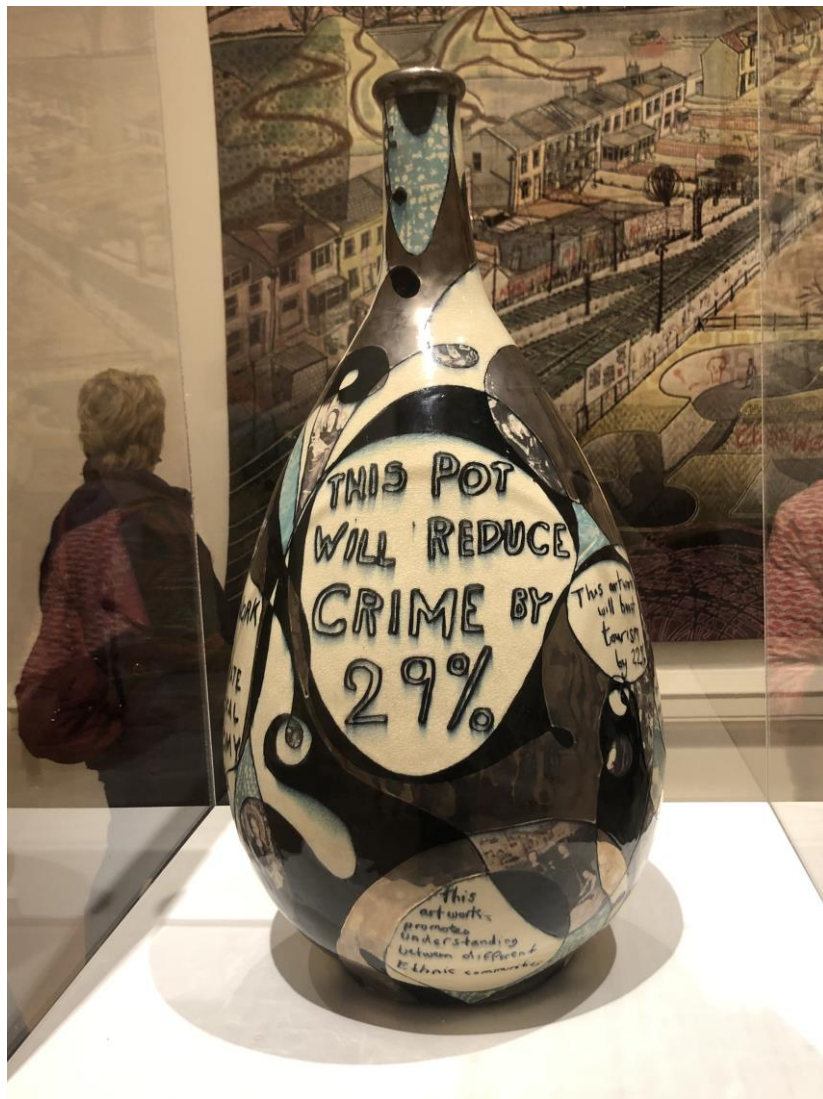




The role of data in quality

The data landscape





Grayson Perry, 2007



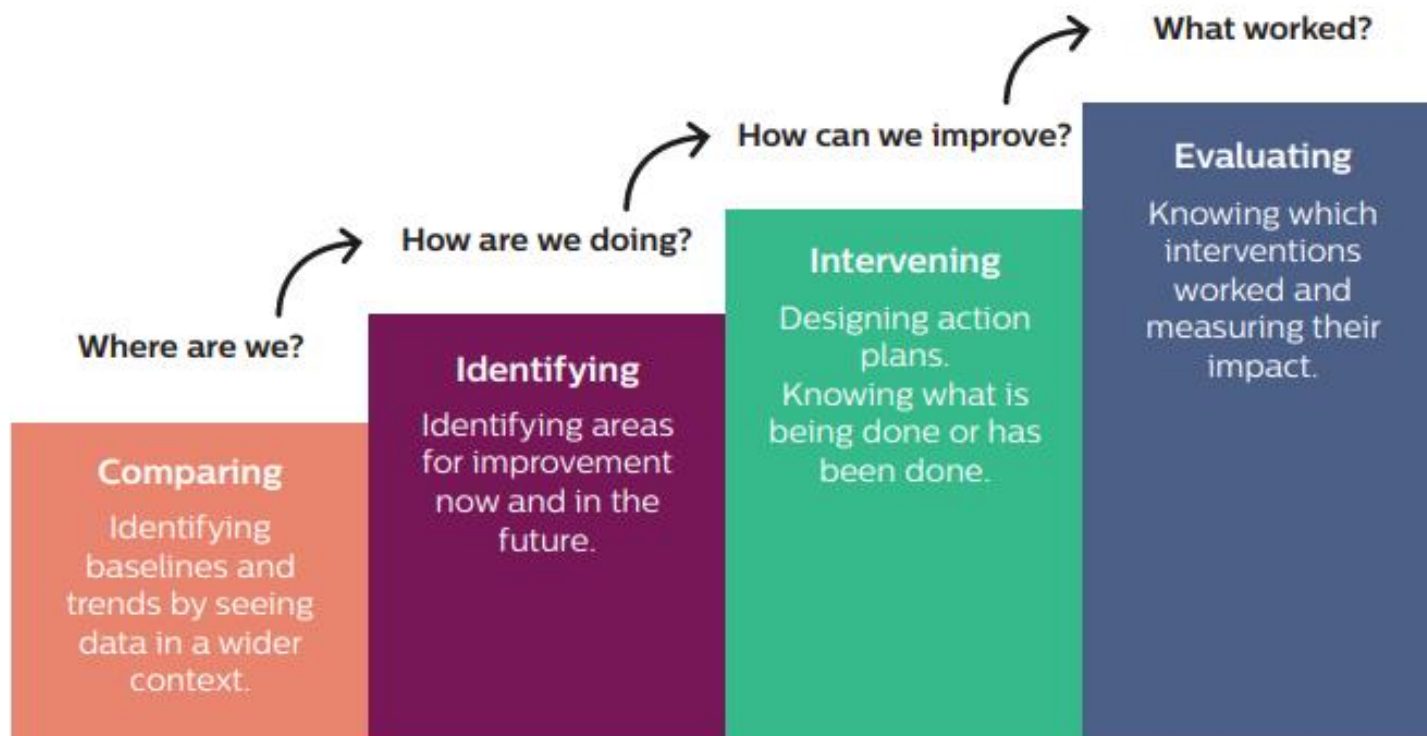
Some key questions...



- What information is useful to help us identify and understand what we do well and what could be improved?
- Do we use the information we have in the best way possible?
- Do we have the right information (to inform decision making)?



Using data to inform quality...



- Information: qualitative & quantitative
- External reference points



Different lenses & intelligence bases

- Module
- Course/programme
- Institutional
- Sector-wide
- Clusters
- Snapshot/pulse
- One-off longitudinal
- Annual
- Periodic/cyclical
- Dynamic





Quality enhancement cycle



- Analysis/Evaluation – using external indicators or reference points
- Prospective – considering the quality implications of strategic intentions
- Using evidence to support decision-making
- Taking action on the basis of your analysis/evaluation
- **Evaluating impact**



Aiming for success – learning from failure

“Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better”

Samuel Beckett

1983 story Worstward Ho





Retrospective & prospective information





Impact of generative AI



Challenge & opportunity

- ❖ Skills for employability
 - ❖ Tool for learning & achieving
 - ❖ Support for quality processes
-
- What does responsible use look like?
 - What about the nature of academic awards?
 - What about the relationship between staff & students?

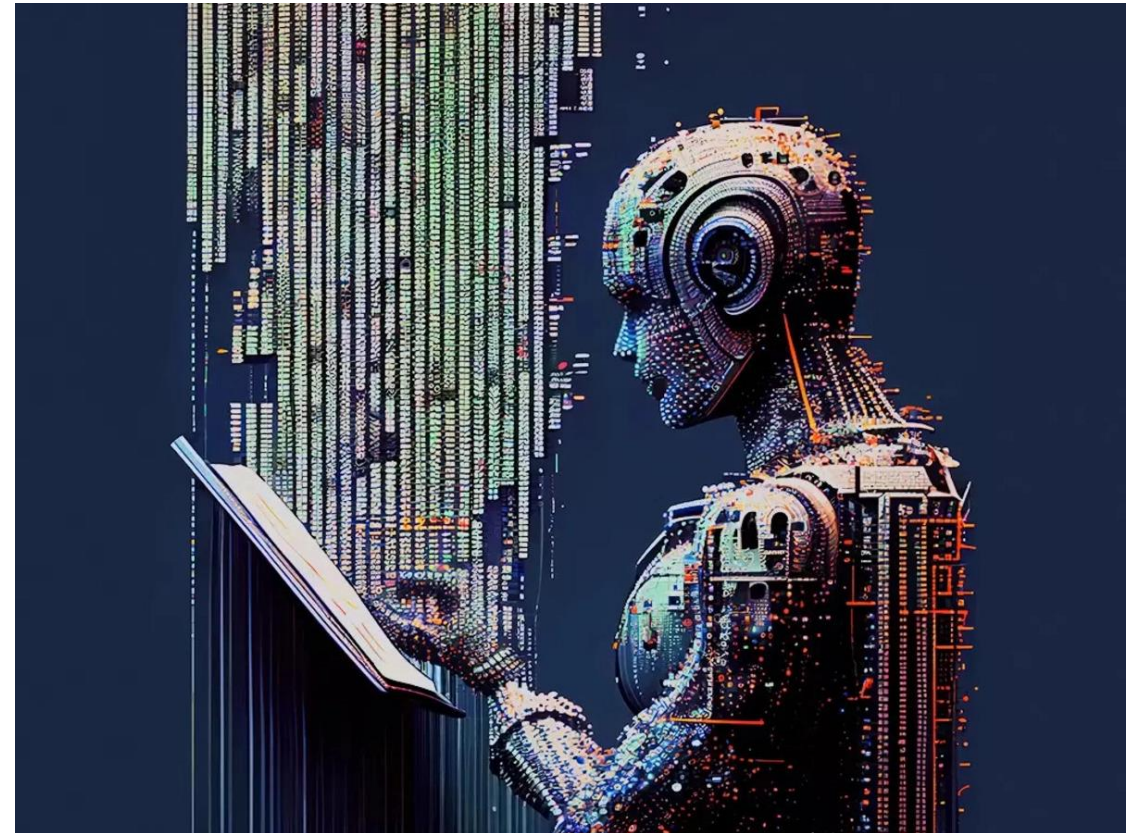


Illustration by Muhabit ul haq via AI



- What is your view of AI?
- Does it have a role in the classroom?
- Should it be used to support quality processes?



Recap ...

- What is quality?
- Drivers and approaches
- Role of national & international frameworks & networks
- Institutional approaches to quality
- Using data in quality processes & decision making
- Impact of generative AI



Takeaways ...



- Be clear about what you are trying to achieve (**strategy**)
- Know your **student population** & how might that change
- Understand your strengths & areas for development – access the information you need to identify those, take action on the findings & evaluate those actions
- Ensure all your processes are **coherent** & support your strategic direction (including a forward focus)







Thank you

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