



How to instil quality culture in higher education

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Introduction

- What is ‘quality culture?’
- Why is it important? What impact does it have?
- Who is responsible for it?
- Where is it visible?
- When should we think about it?
- How do we make it happen?



Two resources

- European Universities Association publication: *'Examining Quality Culture (Part 1: QA processes in HEIs; Part 2: Processes and Tools – Participation, Ownership and Bureaucracy; Part 3: From Self-reflection to Enhancement'* (www.eua.be)
- A journey through one Irish University





What is 'quality culture'?

- Does it have just one meaning?
- What does it mean in YOUR context?
- Is it about making things better?
- Is it about a shared vision?
- Is it about staff and students? Or about the reputation of the institution?

QUALITY 



What do our resources think?

- EUA definition: *“an organisational culture characterised by a cultural/psychological element on the one hand, and a structural/managerial element on the other hand.”*
- Irish university: definition ranged from an element of necessity to
- a quality culture (*“some of it is forced upon us”*) through to those who saw it as an ethos (*“It’s so all pervasive that you almost lose sight of it.”*)





Why is quality culture important? What impact does it have?

- Do you think that instilling a quality culture would require too much effort for the benefits it might bring?
- Or is it something that can genuinely lead to consistent improvement?
- Is it just about your institution or university? Or can it spread across HE sectors, both nationally and internationally? Would that lead to shared benefits or to competition?
- Does a quality culture just impact on QA processes or can it be embedded in the whole culture of the institution?



What do our resources say?

- The third part of the EUA study suggests that an effective quality culture will allow us to reflect critically on what sort of organisation we are, what we do and how we do it – and that this self-reflection will lead to continuous improvement.
- The Irish university suggested that the presence of a quality culture means that, “*we look to improve, wherever we can.*”





Who is responsible for instilling a quality culture?

- Senior management?
- Academic staff?
- Administrative staff?
- Students?
- Quality assurance agencies?
- Others?
- All of the above?



What do our resources say?

- The EUA study suggests that we are all responsible, at both the individual and the collective level. It also highlights four key groups: Leadership, Students, Staff and External Stakeholders
- At the Irish university, one member of staff said, *“If I could change anything, I’d like to see a more holistic approach to a quality culture – a lot of staff don’t feel part of it.”*



How is a quality culture visible?

- Can you see it through good staff/student survey results?
- Is your university held in high regard? Nationally? Internationally?
- Is there a sense of the whole institution rather than a collection of academic and administrative departments?
- Is there a collective ownership of quality?
- Is there an active desire to improve?



What do our resources say?

- The Irish University: *"It's so all-pervasive you almost lose sight of it"*
- An example from a UK university





When should we think about a quality culture?

- At senior management/strategy meetings?
- At faculty meetings?
- At academic departmental meetings?
- In our interactions with students/employers/stakeholders?



What do our resources think?

- The EUA study says: *"...quality culture is closely related to organisational culture and firmly based on shared values, beliefs, expectations and a commitment towards quality...which make it a difficult concept to manage."*
- The Irish University: *"Good enough is not enough; we have to be the best that we can be."*





Conclusions: how to instil a quality culture

From our resources, it seems that a quality culture needs the following (at least) to thrive:

- A champion in the senior management who will drive forward the institutional vision and ethos
- A shared approach to this vision and ethos
- Inclusivity (staff, students, stakeholders...)
- An atmosphere that is open to discussion and ideas; one that allows for critical self-reflection





THANK YOU!
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