9th European Quality Assurance Forum

13 – 15 November 2014

University of Barcelona, Spain

Changing education – QA and the shift from teaching to learning

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Short bio (150 words max):

Cathal de Paor joined MIC in 2006 as Director of Continuing Professional Development in the Faculty of Education. Prior to this, he worked for the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and before that, as a primary teacher. He has participated on several assessment panels for the professional accreditation of teacher education qualifications in Ireland. He holds a PhD from the University of Nantes which examined the professional development of newly-qualified teachers in France and Ireland. Other research interests include quality assurance and programme evaluation.

Proposal

Title: Supporting the shift from teaching to learning in Professional Higher Education (PHE): examples from teacher and pharmacy education

Abstract (150 words max):
The increasing emphasis on the outcomes of learning, as captured in the conference title has many implications for both internal and external quality assurance. One of the external evaluation activities that can play a role in helping to manage the shift from teaching to learning is the accreditation carried out by professional bodies in Professional Higher Education (PHE). This paper focuses on this kind of QA activity by examining a sample of accreditation reports for teacher and pharmacy education programmes. The analysis shows that the reports focus on inputs and on strategic programmatic issues, while there is less attention on the actual processes of teaching and learning. The paper argues that a greater focus on these issues could support quality assurance in PHE and the shift from teaching to learning.

Text of paper (3000 words max):

Introduction

In managing the shift from teaching to learning, provision for quality assurance will continue to be crucial. This reflects the belief in the ESG that 'Quality assurance is not principally about individual external scrutiny events: It should be about continuously trying to do a better job' (ENQA, 2009, p. 22).

One activity which can serve an important quality assurance function is the professional accreditation by external professional bodies (Patil and Conder, 2007; Bryant, 2013). The distinction between academic accreditation and professional accreditation can be explained as follows:

> 'Programmes may be accredited for their academic standing or they may be accredited to produce graduates with professional competence to practice; usually referred to as professional accreditation.' (Harvey, 2004, p. 6)

At the same time, various challenges with the use of professional accreditation have been identified, such as the risk of standardization and institutional isomorphism (Augusti et al., 2008). Elsewhere, a recent report from EURASHE and the PHExcel Consortium (Jørgensen et al., 2013) highlights the challenges faced by professional higher education (PHE) as it strives towards continuous improvement (in response to the Bologna Process), while also taking account of the requirements of professional accreditation bodies. PHE can find itself in a state of tension between these two priorities, which, while they can be complementary, are also capable of conflict. The authors note that, 'as a result, a blurred boundary exists between what constitutes excellence in purely academic terms and what represents this attribute from a professional perspective (Jørgensen et al., 2013, p. 7).

It is therefore imperative that HEIs become more aware of the role which professional accreditation can play in quality assurance and in the shift from teaching to learning. The study examines two sets of accreditation reports produced as part of the professional accreditation for HEI programmes in Ireland in teacher and pharmacy education. This will help HEIs understand how they can use the process of professional accreditation for the benefit of their own QA. A comparison of two separate approaches in teacher education and pharmacy will also serve to provide additional insight and make the findings more generalizable.

Professional regulation in pharmacy and teacher education

Both of the professional bodies in question – the Teaching Council (TC) and The Pharmacy Society of Ireland (PSI) - are statutory bodies, with many responsibilities in common. The review strategy used by both professional bodies involves the submission of documentation by the HEI, a site visit by an accreditation panel, and the preparation of a final report for consideration by the respective Councils.

Apart from PSI requirements, the education and training of pharmacy students in Ireland is specified in EU legislation (Article 44 of Directive 2005/36/EC) and consists of a five-year education and training programme, which must include a minimum of six months' practical training placement. The five-year programme in Ireland consists currently of a PSI-accredited four-year degree, followed by a one-year internship, although the PSI has now made progress towards moving to a fully integrated 5-year Master's degree (MPharm) (PSI, 2014). A key part of the initial HEI submission is a self-assessment, providing, 'a concise commentary that clearly sets out how the standards have been met (PSE, 2012b, p. 4).' A set of interim accreditation standards describe what is expected of the provider, and dealing with: 1. Pharmacy school and mission; 2. Leadership, organisation and governance; 3. Graduates; 4. Curriculum; 5. Teaching and learning strategy; 6. Assessment strategy; 7. Students; 8. Resources; 9. Quality assurance (PSI, 2012a).

For the accreditation of teacher education (primary and post-primary), the criteria and guidelines for providers are categorised by the Teaching Council under Inputs, Processes and Outcomes (TC, 2011a). The Inputs refer to area such as conceptual framework, the programme, duration, staffing, decision-making structures, and financial resources. The processes are broken down into areas such as teaching, learning and assessment approaches, engagement of students, attitudes, values and reflective processes. Finally,

the outputs present a total of 65 learning outcomes which 'encompass the standards of teaching, knowledge, skill and competence together with the values, attitudes and professional dispositions which are central to the practice of teaching' (TC, 2011a, p. 24), and which programmes should enable graduates to meet. The TC indicates elsewhere that it is, 'committed to moving towards a position in the future where self-evaluation processes become a more central feature of the review and accreditation strategy' (TC, 2011b, p. 7).

Methodology

For this study, a total of six 6 accreditation reports were analysed, comprising three reports for each profession. The programmes in question, numbered 1 to 6, were offered by six different HEIs.

The results are based on a convenience sample, three for each profession, chosen from among the various reports published by the professional bodies on their websites. The decision to limit the sample to 6 was for convenience reasons. Only 3 reports on undergraduate pharmacy programmes have been published by the PSI to date, all in 2013. While there were a greater number of teacher education accreditation reports to select from (13), in order to maintain a certain symmetry, 3 accreditation reports, all published in 2012, for post-primary teacher education programmes were chosen.

The teacher education programmes featured were in mathematics education and science education, involving different kinds of concurrent and consecutive arrangements. Programmes 1 and 2 had been previously recognised as teaching qualifications, but were reconceptualised by the HEIs concerned, following publication of new criteria and guidelines by the Teaching Council in 2011 (TC, 2011a). This saw the extension of concurrent programmes from a minimum of three years to four and post-graduate programmes from a minimum of one year to two. Programme 3 is a new programme.

1. 4-year BA degree in mathematics education, for the teaching of Mathematics and Applied Mathematics; 240 ECTS;
2. 4-year BSc degree in either mathematics or science education followed by professional diploma in education; (240 + 60 ECTS);
3. 3-year BSc in Mathematics and Science-Education (Hons) followed by a two - year MSc in Mathematics and Science-Education Programme 1; (180 + 120 ECTS);

The three pharmacy programmes were all bachelor degrees in pharmacy. They were already being delivered by each of the HEIs and were submitted for re-accreditation based on the PSI's Interim Accreditation Standards for the level 8 Bachelor degree (PSI, 2012a).

4. 4-year BSc degree in pharmacy; 240 ECTS
5. 4-year BPharm degree; 240 ECTS
6. 4-year BSc degree in pharmacy; 240 ECTS

The number of experts on each of the teacher education panels numbered 5, while the number of experts on the pharmacy panel was greater, varying from 6 to 9, with each panel also accompanied by 2 staff from PSI.

Data: accreditation reports

The data is based on the commendation and recommendation provided in both sets of reports. These provide an insight into what the accreditation panels prioritise when they review the programmes. The panel can endorse and encourage a particular feature of the programme by either referring to it within a commendation or a recommendation. While both reports use this approach, the PSI reports also include a section entitled 'Challenges' which include items that function as additional recommendations. For

example, one of the 'challenges' listed for Programme 2 is 'To initiate student involvement in the degree development process.' Thus, it is clear that the panel would wish to see this as part of the programme design process, but yet, did not include it as an explicit recommendation. For the purposes of our analysis here, these challenges are included as being the equivalent of recommendations.

The commendation and recommendations (including any 'challenges') were read and categorised into emerging themes, which could enable a meaningful comparison of both sets of programmes. These themes were revised and developed following further re-reading until three definitive themes emerged, which capture the salient issues and priorities of the assessment panels:

1. Programme content and design
2. Teaching, learning and assessment ;
3. Programme leadership and management.

The categories can be seen as corresponding to the programme as *prescribed*, the actual *processes* of teaching, learning and assessment; and *overarching* issues (e.g., programme leadership, management, and resourcing). Overall, the categories reflect the three major criteria used by the Teaching Council (inputs, processes, and outcomes) and the nine standards used by the PSI in its accreditation strategy, but organised in a different way.

One limitation in the methodology is the categorisation of the individual commendations/recommendations items into one of the three categories. Many items contain more than one element which could be categorised separately. However, a decision was taken to categorise each item only once based on the first main idea conveyed, this being taken as representing the most immediate and important priority for the panel.

Results

The reports for both sets of accreditation panels are quite similar in terms of structure. Both provide information on the context for the review, the composition of the panel, the programme, the judgment of the panel, and commendations and recommendations. There is a slight difference in the average length of both sets. The length of the sections dealing with the programme, standards, conclusions and recommendations are longer for the teacher education reports, with the average number of pages being 8, as opposed to 5.5 for the pharmacy reports.

A total of 29 commendations and 22 recommendations were given in the teacher education reports amounting to 51 items overall. The number of items for the pharmacy reports was slightly lower at 36, comprising 17 commendations and 19 recommendations. Figure 1 shows that issues relating to programme content and design occur more prominently in the teacher education reports than they do in the pharmacy reports, 24 items as against 9. The opposite is the case with regard to programme leadership and management issues, although the disparity is not as great, i.e., a total of 19 items in the pharmacy reports, as against 14 for teacher education. Issues relating to teaching, learning and assessment receive the least amount of treatment in both sets of reports, with teacher education showing 13 as against 8 for pharmacy. These results are presented in percentage terms in Table 1.

Figure 1: An analysis of the commendations and recommendations for both sets of reports (teacher and pharmacy education)
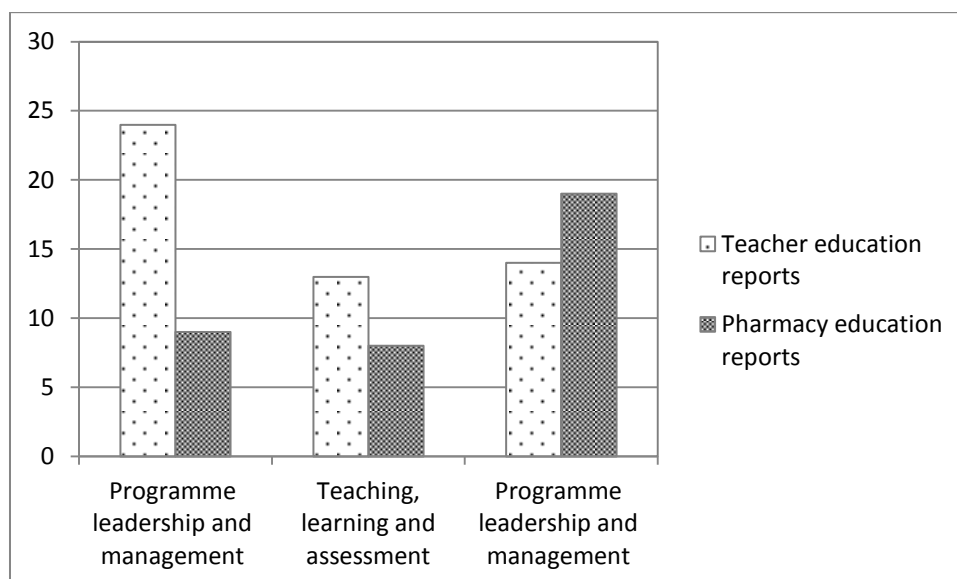
Table 1: An analysis of the key issues highlighted in the commendations (C) and recommendations (R) given by the assessment panels

Category	Teacher education reports			Pharmacy education reports		
	C	R	C & R	C	R	C & R
Programme content and design	14 (48%)	10 (46%)	24 (47%)	3 (18%)	6 (31%)	9 (22%)
Teaching, learning and assessment	5 (18%)	8 (36%)	13 (26%)	5 (29%)	3 (16%)	8 (11%)
Programme leadership and management	10 (34%)	4 (18%)	14 (27%)	9 (53%)	10 (53%)	19 (67%)
	29 (100%)	22 (100%)	51 (100%)	17 (100%)	19 (100%)	36 (100%)

Issues raised in the first category include: professional knowledge; theory and practice; innovative structure; electives; quality of learning outcomes; coherence and integration; links with related professions, and CPD. It can be noted that while both sets of reports contained items on professional knowledge particular to their professions, this occurs more frequently in the teacher education reports. For example, in Programme 1, the panel recommends that the grade descriptors should include, 'a reference to the demonstration of investigative skills.' The teacher education reports also contained specific references to the need to increase the focus on literacy and numeracy, (coinciding with the Irish government's national strategy for both of these areas launched around this time). There are fewer references to professional knowledge for pharmacy. One illustration is where the panel for Programme 6 recommends that 'professionalism be inculcated and assessed throughout the programme' and that 'greater opportunities for structured patient contact' be introduced.

Programme integration and coherence also seems to be more of an issue in teacher education. This was addressed in six commendations (five in teacher education and one in pharmacy), and in three recommendations (two for teacher education and one for pharmacy). There were also references to progression within the programme, the development of critical reflection skills, and knowledge construction. While these issues

do receive some comment in the earlier sections of the pharmacy reports, they do not receive the same level of attention in the commendations and recommendations.

Moving to the second category, there were markedly fewer commendations and recommendations relating to the processes of teaching, learning and assessment. The following kinds of issues were raised in the items sorted into this category: feedback to students on assignments; use of grade descriptors; co-operative learning; range of assessment methods; online learning. For example, the panel for Programme 6 recommends, 'the extension of the use of OSCEs throughout the programme' [Objective Structured Clinical Examination]*, while the panel for Programme 3 commends, 'the comprehensive and clear criteria and grade descriptors for the assessment of School Placement.'

The third category, leadership and management was more prominent in the pharmacy reports (67% of all items) than in the teacher education reports (27%). Issues addressed included: academic regulations; partnership between the HEI and placement settings; human and physical resources; commitment of staff and programme leadership; institutional vision; provision of exit routes. References to placement issues were frequent in both sets, with all six providers being commended at least once for the quality of the placement component.

Many of the items in the pharmacy reports refer to the research activities of staff. References to resources were also frequent in the pharmacy reports. For example, the panel for Programme 4 include 3 recommendations which could be categorised as resource-related: 'avoid staff burnout'; 'develop a clear business plan;' 'link investment to the strategic plan goals'.

Discussion and conclusion

The three principal findings from the analysis are as follows: (1) both sets of reports give the least amount of coverage to issues relating to the process of teaching, learning and assessment; (2) the pharmacy reports give greater coverage than the teacher education reports to programme leadership and management issues; (3) Programme content and design issues dominate the teacher education reports.

Issues which both professional bodies focus on include the student placement (timing of introduction and integration within programme) and the integration of the students' learning experience. While certain aspects of assessment receive treatment (such as grade descriptors), there is less focus on issues relating to the actual processes of teaching and learning. This might be as one expects, given that the site visit by accreditation panels affords limited opportunities for making significant and informed judgment on the actual quality of teaching and learning. The professional bodies may also consider this to be beyond the scope of their enquiry. For example, in its guidelines to providers, the Teaching Council notes that, 'the required Inputs and Outcomes are clearly elaborated in the document while the Processes are less prescriptive. The latter respects the HEIs' freedom to develop the processes which best suit their individual situations' (TCa, 2011, p. 7). Thus, there may be a deliberate attempt by the professional body to focus more on compliance issues, and avoid issues relating to what takes place in HEI classrooms.

This may relate to the need for the professional body when engaging with HEIs, to negotiate a balance between ensuring accountability and not undermining the HEI's own sense of professional responsibility. It can be placed within the broader debate in PHE as noted at the outset of this paper in relation to the EURASHE initiative (Jørgensen et al., 2013), i.e., how the views of the academic institution and the professional body with regard to quality and excellence can complement each other, rather than conflict. Further insight into the debate is given in a recent piece of research by Solbrekke et al. (2014), writing in the context of teacher education. These authors note that the professional

accreditation can be designed so that it holds the education provider accountable for the quality of the programme which it offers to potential members of the profession. But, the professional body is also aware that the educators of professionals will be operating on the basis of their own professional responsibility, based on knowledge, values and a commitment to the profession in question. In the context of the shift from teaching to learning, it is clear that an effective system of professional accreditation must negotiate between these two considerations in order to create the best conditions for student learning.

The analysis suggests that the role of professional accreditation is geared towards programme inputs and overarching issues. The focus is on the learning that is prescribed and less on the learning that is experienced (even though site visits do include meetings with students and graduates). But this is also valuable. Programme inputs include requiring the HEI to demonstrate the extent to which the programme as prescribed is designed to create a coherent and challenging learning experience, and supported by robust QA processes. The overarching issues which also featured prominently (i.e. third category) also serve as a kind of input, reflecting the HEI's investment in quality assurance institutionally and in programme leadership.

But in further considering how the interface between professional bodies and HEIs can be a productive one, it is worth drawing on the recommendation from Solbrekke et al. with regard to 'performance scripts'. These 'scripts' include the documentation submitted in advance by the HEI, the various interactions between the accreditation panel and the HEI personnel during the site visit, and the final report. In highlighting the limitations of the final report as a script, these authors note that it can often amount to a kind of anti-climax when it arrives at the HEI some time after the accreditation visit, and can seem 'cautious' and 'deflationary' when compared to the discussions during the site visit. They argue for the use of 'multiple performance scripts' in order to give a more satisfactory account of the programme as experienced by the students and in order to get the balance right between enforcing accountability and promoting professional responsibility. This paper has focused on the final report only as one of these performance scripts. Therefore, we may conclude with Solbrekke et al. that there is a need to encompass other scripts so that the potential of professional accreditation can be fully exploited in order to help QA in managing the shift from teaching to learning.

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Questions for discussion:

1. Professional higher education (PHE) must respond to the need for continuous improvement in higher education, while also taking account of the requirements of professional bodies. To what extent can the processes of external accreditation and internal quality assurance in professional higher education (PHE) complement each other?
2. What are the tensions and how can these be resolved in order to create the conditions for improved learning for students?

Please submit your proposal by sending this form, in Word format, by 25 July 2014 to Gemma Fagan (Gemma.Fagan@eua.be). The file should be named using the last names of the authors, e.g. Smith_Jones.doc. Please do <u>not</u> send a hard copy or a PDF file.