Societal Engagement and Quality Assurance in Irish HEIs

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Overview

» National Context

» Research Aim and Methodology

» Mapping the Landscape

» Analysis and Findings

» Conclusions
National Context

» Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)

» Higher Education Institution (HEI)

» Annual Institutional Reports (AIQRs) and CINNTÉ Cyclical Review Process
What are the features of community/civic engagement within Irish HEIs?

What is the relationship between QA (internal and external) and the community engagement activities of the HEIs?
Methodology – Mixed Methods

» Documentary Analysis

» Semi-structured Interviews

» Short Case Study

» Limitations
## Mapping the Landscape

### EUROPEAN

- Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020)
- European Standards and Guidelines (2015)

### NATIONAL

- Social objects of Irish universities
- Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 in Ireland
- Higher Education Authority Systems Performance Framework
- QQI Quality Assurance Guidelines
Analysis and Findings

» Important strategic objective for all HEIs

» Different approaches to operationalising community engagement

» Campus Engage case studies

» Rich and diverse landscape of activities

» National framework for measurement and evaluation
### Relationship with...

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Internal QA</th>
<th>External QA</th>
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<tr>
<td>» Reference to civic engagement in 5 AIQR reports</td>
<td>» No explicit reference in external cyclical review</td>
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<tr>
<td>» Effectiveness and impact measures not provided</td>
<td>» Only considered if explicit institutional objective</td>
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<tr>
<td>» Role of internal QA not clear</td>
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<td>» No systematic integration</td>
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Community Engagement

- Engagement Plan
- Goals and Values
- President’s Award for Engagement
- Evaluation of Implementation
- Quadruple Helix Model

Government / State
Academia / Universities
Industry / Business

Participatory Domain

Media- and Culture-based public, civil society
DCU - Internal QA and Community Engagement

» Not explicitly incorporated in QA

» Not reported on through AIQR

» Evaluation not embedded within IQA

» Activities included in internal reviews
DCU - Internal QA and Community Engagement

» Co-ordinated, strategic and planned approach

» QA taking over engagement agenda?

» Effectiveness difficult to measure

» Mechanism for self-assurance
Qualitative Analysis – Emerging Views

» Case study reflects qualitative interviews

» Negative relationship with institutional ranking

» Resistance to further external requirements

» Internal and external QA do not have role
Qualitative Analysis – Emerging Views

» Concern that QA inhibits engagement

» Current review already includes engagement

» Institutional freedom for organic growth
[It is] ... important for student societies ... to have the freedom ... to do what they want to do ... [they] can be more creative with what they want to support.
Conclusions – Features of Engagement

» Embedded feature with Irish HEI strategies

» HEIs are active and creative participants

» Diverse range of activities

» Perceived to be of benefit

» Features in all institutions
Conclusions – Relationship between QA and community engagement

» Supports in ‘embryonic stage’
» Differing perceptions and views
» QA stifling engagement and innovation?
» Seen as part of systems of control
» QA perceived as tool to support accountability
Conclusions

» Legitimacy of QA depends on staff support and collaboration in process

» QA at odds with ethos and language of community engagement
For Institutions

» How do you know what you are doing is right?

» How do you know what you are doing has impact?

» Difficult to measure but not impossible.
» Do we need to rethink the language and concepts of QA?

» Could QA be used as a tool for change? To test boundaries?
Final Reflections

» ESG definition of quality assurance
» Evolution of QA systems
» External QA could highlight engagement
» Inclusion of engagement in review
» HEIs to articulate their engagement activities
» Evolutionary not revolutionary
Thank You!