Research quality, peer review and performance indicators
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Approaches to research assessment vary in international context

Approaches to assessing research quality, and their respective relative weights, are subject to marked differences between different national contexts. Such differences of approach are related to differences in the characteristics of the national higher education systems with which they are associated, and to the broader political and social environments within which those systems are embedded. In Australia, with the advent in 1993 of the Committee for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (CAEQH) and a research funding system in which research quality has been integrated, at the institutional level, with the assessment of teaching quality, the Australian approach to higher education quality assessment represented by the Committee for Quality Assurance, on one hand, and the distinctive characteristics from the current British approach, on the other, the pursuit of greater "quality". European countries fall into two groups, with Norway and Sweden corresponding to the former, and the Netherlands and Britain forming examples of the latter. Denmark, according to Stier et al., is in transition from the former to the latter. The paper attempts to present comparative analyses of the key features for students and provide instructors or courses of equivalent quality in all nations reflect the 'equivalence' concept. Which approaches promote the differences of trends of society reflect the "quality" concept. In the past, the European policies in higher education have tended to reflect the former more than the latter. However, the recent developments of the concept are that quality assurance policy, and particularly in research policy. In general, all of the above arguments are supported by the recent developments of select indicators in which the key feature is a "select" feature (Stier et al., 1992, p. 133).

Furthermore, if a relationship is involved by which a higher level within the system makes resources available, the desire to develop performance indicators will always originate in value for money consideration. The following figure shows how the government regulations to promote greater resource availability in their allocation (Stier et al., 1992, p. 133).

Where a system of quality control is based on the concept of variety and is directed at generating comparatively qualitative ratings, governments will have a pressing need for performance indicators for numerator systems, not merely for government support, but for local support which makes resources available, the desire to develop performance indicators will always originate in value for money consideration. The following figure shows how the government regulations to promote greater resource availability in their allocation (Stier et al., 1992, p. 133).

The distinction between management statistics on the one hand, and performance indicators on the other, residually on the air as well as in the analysis of this paper. Such processes are potentially many and various, differing also at government and at institutional levels. The context and the mechanisms for use are therefore of critical importance. They are, however, often made explicit or specified in any detail. Systems which substitute one of the above roles for another and which indicate the possible actions are included in such a contextual setting. Conversely, where indicators are unaccompanied by peer review processes they are, in principle, redundant.

Thus a quality assurance system which manifests "peer review" as a search for informed opinion should be consistent with fairness in the provoking of academic values, while one which produces indicators is unaccompanied by peer review may be understood as one reflecting the prevailing values of non-academic values. Where peer review

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review is subdivided into the indicators, the system may be understood as a hybrid of the two sets of values, though tending (at least potentially) towards the non-academic.

The significance of peer review and performance indicators has been well appreciated by Georgebegeu et al. (1990) in their article on a new research management scheme in Dutch and British higher education by reference to the salience of peer review in the former and performance indicators in the latter. One of the problems with the use of performance indicators is the lack of interest in the use of performance indicators as well as in a peer review approach, but after 1985 'in Dutch higher education the use of peer judgment is so widespread as to become problematic.'. "The research indicators are the building blocks of the research system therefore represents a view with a distance to outstanding excellent research. Dutch government often threatens the research universities if they can be implemented at the system level. It is envisaged that they may be used both at the level of assessment of grants applications and at the level of distribution of benefits, and that positions and inter-institutional and other levels otherwise unforeseen.

The Committee for Quality Assurance, appointed by the Minister for Education and Science (Minister Croas 1999), has been set up in 1997 upon the advice of the steering committee and the advice of the relevant authorities. The committee is an advisory committee of the Dutch government. It is the main body of the Dutch government which is responsible for the evaluation of research. Besides, the group of people who are involved in the evaluation of research are not only people from the social sciences, but also people from the humanities. They are chosen by the minister in charge of the evaluation of research.

The evaluation of research is a complex task. It is not only about the quality of the research, but also about the societal relevance of the research. The committee therefore has to take into account both aspects when evaluating research.

The committee's evaluation process is based on a number of criteria. These criteria are used to assess the quality of the research and to determine whether the research is relevant to society. The criteria are:

- Quality of the research: whether the research is satisfactory, whether the research is original, whether the research is relevant and whether the research is innovative.
- Societal relevance: whether the research is relevant to society, whether the research is of interest to the public, and whether the research is of interest to the private sector.

The committee evaluates research on a scale from 1 to 5. A score of 1 indicates that the research is not satisfactory, and a score of 5 indicates that the research is excellent.

The committee's evaluation process is important for the Dutch research community. It helps to ensure that research is of high quality and relevant to society. The committee's evaluation process is also important for the Dutch government. It helps the government to make decisions about funding research and to ensure that the research is meeting the needs of society.
Do performance indicators measure outcomes of education?

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Introduction: The context

The current focus in higher education on quality, and the current interest in using performance indicators are reflections of the context in which higher education is operating.

That context can be characterised in terms of a period of significant change and adjustment. Universities have been challenged by a series of dilemmas. It has been a period of significantly increased participation in the final year of secondary education leading to increased demand for higher education from school leavers. In parallel there has been an adoption of more flexible entry provisions to address issues of equity and access, leading to increased demand for access to higher education from groups other than school leavers.

And the prevailing economic conditions have reduced the availability of alternatives to higher education. They have also changed patterns of demand for courses. The current downturn in demand for Education courses is but one example.

This increase in demand and the resulting increase in higher education places has occurred in an environment of general economic constraints, reducing resources and increasing competition for scarce resources. Partly as a result of these resource constraints, and partly also because of the perceived weakness of change in universities, there have been persistent and increasing calls for improved efficiency and public accountability in all aspects of higher education.

This has been reflected in pressure for the development of multi objective and systematic procedures for the evaluation of universities, and for systematic monitoring of the performance of universities and the higher education system as a whole.

There has been accelerating change toward more formal, routine and quantitative approaches to evaluation of higher education. The focus has been on monitoring performance and productivity to assist institutions to improve their efficiency and accountability.

Some key developments

It is important to acknowledge some of the recent milestones which have influenced the way in which performance indicators are currently viewed.

1. The Review of Efficiency and Effectiveness in Higher Education (CETC, 1986) marked a significant advance in government pressure for visible progress in establishing systematic mechanisms for performance appraisal of higher education institutions. To that time the cost of higher education had been large at the discretion of the institution, institution, predominantly subjective, confined essentially to single institutions with inadequately defined central data systems offering little basis for comparability.

This Review encouraged the further development and application of performance indicators both within institutions and across the higher education system to assist in identifying strengths and weaknesses and in measuring progress toward specified institutional and systemic objectives.

2. The Discipline Review of Engineering (Williams 1988) which reported in 1988 systematically attempted to define and apply a range of input and performance indicators for higher education institutions, which to some degree covered the major functions of higher education in professional discipline areas.

3. The Green Paper (Commonwealth of Australia 1987) marked a strengthening of government policy on institutional evaluation and performance appraisal. That paper proposed in specific terms that institutional performance in its various forms be quantitatively assessed and that this assessment should have some influence on institutional funding. The paper explicitly stated the Government's intention "to fund on output and performance". Importantly, there was an acceptance that performance indicators needed to be acceptable to both institutions and the Government.

The need for performance indicators acceptable to both institutions and the Government points to the likelihood of further demands on the higher education statistical information base. (Commonwealth of Australia 1987, p:42)

4. The AVCC/ACCP Working Party on Performance Indicators was jointly established by AVCC and ACDP in response to these proposals in the Green Paper. This joint working party attempted to define what they saw as a 'proper context' in which performance indicators should be used.

The joint working party sounded some warnings in those terms to enthusiastically embrace performance indicators:

Some resembling a Cargo Cult terms to have grown up around the notion of performance indicators, so that all manner of powers and virtues are ascribed to them and expectations are aroused that by collecting and using them great benefits will miraculously result. (AVCC/ACDP 1989, p:1)