



An Evaluative Approach to
Quality Assurance
in
Higher Education

AEA November 2009

Hello / kia ora

- Evaluative quality assurance – why, how and why now?
(Syd King, NZQA)
- Methodological challenges – shining a light
(Jane Davidson, Davidson Consulting)
- Capability building in a diverse sector
*(Sue Walbran, NZQA; Phillip Capper, WEB Research;
Kate McKegg, The Knowledge Institute Ltd)*
- EQA in indigenous contexts – challenges & opportunities
(Nan Wehipeihana, Research Evaluation Consultancy Ltd)
- Manipulations, manoeuvrings and machinations
(Syd King, NZQA)

- Welcome and introductions
- Explain how sessions organised – an integrated presentation with questions and discussion at the end
- A large and complex story and of necessity this is merely some of the ‘highlights’
- Maximum presentation time 60 minutes
- At least 30 minutes for discussant comments & questions and general comments and questions
- The fit with context – the conference theme – is imbued throughout

From auditing compliance to...
..... evaluating what matters

- Outcomes and key contributing processes
- The quality of learning and teaching
- Clear judgements and information about 'quality'

- Secured and sustained government commitment
- Sector-wide implications - very significant cultural shift for all involved – agencies & tertiary organisations
- Research supports move towards 'educational quality' but is ambivalent about method

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So what is “quality”? And what is “assurance”?

The focus is shifting from auditing – checking that TEOs are doing what WE say they should be doing - to evaluating actual performance – evaluating what matters – quality, outcomes and educational achievement - and the things that contribute to them

Huge interest – government Ministers, sector, agencies, educational ‘consumers’ - Massive head shift

Design intent:

- The new system seeks to align quality assurance, monitoring, planning and investment to generate improvements.
- It has been designed within an investment framework to ensure that New Zealand gets a good return for the \$ billions invested in tertiary education.
- And is expected to responsibly balance the inherent tensions above with a healthy dose of educational and evaluative reality
- So that won't be easy, will it?

International research is both a friend and a foe

Reasons for shift

- Encourage **ownership** and improvement of quality by the tertiary organisation (where it belongs)
- Provide useful **information** - for learners, employers, communities, Government, tertiary organisations, and funders
- Provide **confidence** that provision and outcomes meet reasonable expectations
- Add **value** to tertiary education

Ownership

Useful information to various audiences

Clear implications for both accountability and improvement functions (which are often regarded as incompatible, or at least in competition with each other)

'Confidence' has proven to be a useful concept in quality assurance

Adding value to actual educational outcomes is a significantly more ambitious target than "checking compliance"

➤ Giving effect to evaluative quality assurance

- Initial entry processes
accreditation, approvals, registration
- On-going self-assessment (SA) by tertiary organisations
Organisation evaluation of its own practice and performance
- Periodic external evaluation and review (EER)
Systematic process to make judgements about organisation's
 - *educational performance*
 - *capability in self-assessment*
- Responses where the organisation may be non-compliant with the Education Act

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- These are “the bits” – the components of evaluative quality assurance
 - So far this is a standard approach internationally, business as usual
 - Except that the EER function is typically some form of audit and typically against a set of input and system criteria
 - Usually without a practical focus on outcomes
 - Or if there is, the development of associated measurement approaches, psychometrics etc and the potential downsides of that – what gets measured gets done, “what is measurable” and “what is important” are often not the same thing
1. Get in to the system
 2. TEOs take responsibility for self-assessment and quality improvement
 - value IN the process, value FROM the process
 3. Periodic EER - educational performance, capability in self-assessment (accountability + improvement) - with an emphasis on the interface between SA & EER
 4. Range of responses available where there are problems with performance

So what's 'evaluative' about it?

- Answers questions about quality, value, importance
- Focuses on needs assessment and 'met needs' as basis for reaching conclusions about educational performance
- A systematic and robust basis for reaching judgements about quality
- Qualitative and quantitative evidence of outcomes including educational value added, referenced internally and externally
- Participatory processes, systematic enquiry, specific tools to reach robust judgements
- Applies a 'fresh eye' to validate effective practice, identify improvements, recognise innovation

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- Quality & value – emphasis on what matters most – the quality of the educational experience and the value of the outcomes for learners
- The evidence of learning and the quality of teaching (as key contributing process)
- A rational basis for reaching conclusions – referenced to 'met needs' as opposed a pre-determined picture or definition of 'quality'
- Systematic methodology – evaluation tools and processes involving key evaluation questions, evaluation indicators & performance criteria descriptors
- Open & transparent
- Participatory as means of best understanding information and what it means and what has been done in light of that understanding
- Congruence between internal self-assessment and external evaluation and review - common object and purpose if working well
- Time constrained
- Flexible to context and distinctive contribution
- Trained & competent evaluators
- Generally seen as fresh and worthwhile – but can you do it?

“What matters” is ...

- the **value** that learners gain
- the **utility** of their qualifications and
- the extent to which positive longer term **outcomes** occur

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- Quality is not a fixed target, (nor is it best set by bureaucrats) – what matters is the **value** learners gain, the **utility** of their qualifications, and the extent to which positive longer term **outcomes** occur
- Significant shift - not one of the many definitions of quality in the international literature - perfection/zero defects, exceptional, fitness for purpose, value for money, transformational, etc
- Not a fixed target, will look different in different contexts
- Educational value added is important (learner progress)
- So what is the value of the outcomes for learners – are their qualifications relevant and useful
- and do they lead to employment ?
- Further study ?
- Positive engagement in society ?
- Positive engagement in the economy ?

- The challenge is to be able to recognise what the ‘outcomes of value’ are and
- how would you know they were happening, given that many of them are medium to longer term?

Principles

- High trust / high accountability
- Quality as a dynamic concept
- Practical focus on outcomes
- Flexibility to respond to the distinctive contributions of tertiary organisations

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- We know everyone pays lip service to principles, but in this case we mean them
- The principles provide a robust framework for making design and operational decisions
- In the absence of evidence to the contrary, both parties trust and rely on the information the other provides / uses
- Not about control from the centre
- Focus increasingly on *educational* quality – outcomes & key contributing processes
- The focus on outcomes must be practical What outcomes? How would you know them? What evidence?
- 'Measuring' learners' educational experience beyond the usual i.e. retention, completion, qualification rates - although they remain important
- Emphasis on learner progress / educational value-added
- Opportunity for flexibility of approach within a consistent conceptual framework



Methodological challenges:

'shining a light'

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Methodological Challenges

There was a need for:

- Actionable answers to important questions about quality & value
- Robust conclusions, consistency and comparability – even with qualitative and mixed method data
- Consistency across TEOs (tertiary education organizations) BUT flexibility to capture unique contributions & contexts
- Something that would make sense to TEOs, government agencies, relevant ministers, learners/families, the public

➤ Actionable answers ← evaluative questions

<i>Key Evaluation Question (KEQ)</i>	<i>Coverage</i>
1. How well do learners achieve?	Value of educational outcomes
2. What is the value of the outcomes for key stakeholders, including learners?	
3. How well do programs and activities match the needs of learners and other stakeholders?	Quality and value of key contributing processes
4. How effective is the teaching ?	
5. How well are learners guided and supported ?	
6. How effective are governance and management in supporting educational achievement?	

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Each TEO selects a number of “focus areas” that are evaluated using the following KEQs.

High-stakes programmes

Stuff that matters

Areas of interest to the Minister, e.g. performance of Maori students

KEQs cover process evaluation and outcome evaluation

This shift to big-picture, evaluative questions forces a mixed method answer, not just the simple measurement and presentation of indicators

The Tertiary Evaluation Indicators

Example indicator:

- “Graduates gain employment, engage with further study and/or contribute positively to their local and wider communities.”

Some prompts to aid evaluative conversations:

- How well do TEOs make the connection between longer term outcomes (employment, further study, community involvement) and the shorter term outcomes (or outputs) of tertiary study (completions and qualifications)?

Evidence could include:

- employment outcomes
- career advancement
- creative enterprise
- voluntary work
- community participation
- further achievement in scholarship, research, publications or awards

Taken from:

- Alumni information
- Graduate surveys
- Employer surveys
- Economic trend data
- Societal trend data
- Census data

... indicating improving trends that are plausibly associated with tertiary study.

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Supporting the SA and EER are a set of TEIs.

They are not “indicators” in the sense of a specific, quantitative measure, but prompts for evaluative conversations and a guide for what kind of evidence (qual and quant) you might/should include to build a convincing case for a particular rating on the KEQs: How well do learners achieve? And What is the value of the outcomes for key stakeholders including learners?

Note that this is another tool to make the answering of KEQs more concrete and get people more on the same page, so the evidence is more consistent and robust than if they were just left to their own devices to come up with whatever suited them. Of course, there is huge flexibility within this, and the indicators aren’t compulsory, but it’s a place to point to that shows people what kind of thing would constitute good evidence.

Robust conclusions, consistency ← rubrics

	<i>Criteria for rating answers to KEQs</i>
Excellent	Performance is <u>clearly very strong or exemplary</u> in relation to the question. Any gaps or weaknesses are not significant and are managed effectively.
Good	Performance is <u>generally strong</u> in relation to the question. No significant gaps or weaknesses, and less significant gaps or weaknesses are mostly managed effectively.
Adequate	Performance is <u>inconsistent</u> in relation to the question. Some gaps or weaknesses. Meets minimum expectations/requirements as far as can be determined.
Poor	Performance is <u>unacceptably weak</u> in relation to the question. Does not meet minimum expectations/requirements.
Insufficient evidence	Evidence unavailable or of insufficient quality to determine performance.

So, how would you evaluate a diverse range of evidence from the indicators and other sources?

Another prompt for an evaluative conversation about “how good is good?” TEOs don’t have to use these in SA, but they are encouraged to use these as a conversation starter to draw their own conclusions about quality and value. And, to encourage them to bring evidence to support their conclusions.

The answers to the KEQs have to be convincing both in terms of the evidence presented AND in the logic used to draw evaluative conclusions based on the evidence

The rubrics are another tool to try and get some consistency in SA and EER – not really rigid, but just an “all roughly on the same page when it comes to interpretation” kind of consistency. It’s not a lock-step guide, but an evaluative conversation prompt that helps with the interpretation of the mix of qualitative and quantitative evidence gathered with respect to each KEQ.

Consistency ← → Flexibility

The same Key Evaluation Questions are asked & answered	TEOs define “valuable outcomes” and “quality processes” for their learners, for their organization and context – based on sound evaluative evidence and reasoning
The same set of Tertiary Evaluation Indicators is drawn upon	TEOs choose which indicators to use or adapt, or whether to formulate something that better fits their unique contributions, their learners, and their context
The same broad-brush evaluation rubrics are used to interpret evidence	TEOs define “strong performance”, “acceptable”, etc – based on sound, context-relevant evaluative evidence and reasoning
TEOs are evaluated on how authentically they use self-assessment (SA) – on the same SA rubric	TEOs identify their own “focus areas,” evaluate them using methods that work for them, and choose what actions to take based on their findings

Flexibility – unique contributions and contexts

Overall Conclusions About TEOs

- SA and EER are performed on “focus areas”
- Focus areas are a sample only
- Not a “representative” sample of the organisation

=> What conclusions about the organisation as a whole can we defensibly draw?

Statements of confidence ... what can we say, given that the focus areas and questions are a sample and not necessarily representative of the whole? Can we say nothing? Or, can we say at least SOMETHING, an approximate answer to an important question?

The agencies involved and the Minister need some broad-band sense of organisational performance that is roughly comparable and that is methodologically defensible.

Confidence in Educational Performance

EER report conclusions begin with:

- “NZQA is highly confident in the educational performance of [the TEO]. This is based on the following ...”

“**Highly Confident**” = ALL of the following:

- Clear and comprehensive evidence that the organisation is meeting the most important needs of learners and other relevant groups.
- Clear evidence of effective processes that contribute to learning and other important outcomes.
- No significant gaps or weaknesses.

To address this need, NZQA came up with the notion of “levels of confidence” in educational performance and in capability in self-assessment. An evaluative conclusion based on the evidence that WAS seen as part of the EER.

The levels are Highly Confident, Confident, Not Yet Confident, and Not Confident

Not Yet Confident means there is an expectation that improvement is likely;

Not Confident means there are serious issues.

Confidence in Self-Assessment Capability

- “NZQA is not confident in [the TEO’s] capability in self-assessment. This is based on the following: ...”

- **“Not confident” =**
 - The self-assessment system is narrow and/or covers too few of the organisation’s high priority programmes and activities; or
 - Coverage and prioritisation may be adequate, but the validity or utility of evidence or conclusions are too weak to usefully inform decisions or improvements. There are critical weaknesses evident in the TEO’s capability in self-assessment.

As TEO educational performance is looked at across focus areas and KEQs, the EER team evaluates the quality of self-assessment both in how well the KEQs were answered AND in what was covered or not covered.



ECB
in a diverse sector

~
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The mission

- External - the sector
 - *building evaluation capability for effective self-assessment in tertiary education organisations*
 - *developing understanding of a new evaluative approach to quality assurance with other agencies*
- Internal – NZQA & the evaluator workforce
 - *Culture shift*
 - *Lead evaluators*
 - *Pool of 50-80 evaluators*

The Sector

Mention that capacity for self assessment, comes from a baseline of audit, compliance orientation to quality assurance

New evaluative approach, is quite a significant paradigm shift in the sector (important to note that the development task here is to build capacity in funding and policy agencies to utilise the new evaluative information effectively in decision making)

Internal

Culture shift for the sector...also a culture shift for NZQA. Significant change management...a new workforce, that internally is now made up of some of the old workforce (auditors), retrained as evaluators

New evaluation workforce

Lead evaluators – are employed

Pool – contractors

The external sector challenge

- Diverse sector
 - Over 700 tertiary organisations including:*
 - Institutes of technology and polytechnics
 - Private training establishments
 - Wānanga
 - Industry training organisations
- Previously QA based on systems audit of quality management system
- The sector - very unsure of what the change would mean

Large number and diversity of organisations in the change process

Previously quality assurance system was previously focused on inputs and processes, and the new evaluative approach more overtly focused on outcomes, but also on building evaluative judgement into process, and getting a better balance between improvement and accountability

Unsure sector about the meaning of change – high levels of anxiety, in particular how the information will be used – especially as there is an increased expectation in the new approach for organisations to discuss transparently strengths and areas for improvement

Where to start?

- Research indicated TEOs approach to organisational self-assessment to be fragmented rather than systematic.

Therefore:

The organisations are all at different stages of understanding and practise of self-assessment

Key aims:

- establish common understanding of self-assessment and its value to organisation
- build the skills required to “make it work”
- build on what is working well
- Focus attention on the opportunity for organisations to consider what is important for them rather than be dictated to

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Key point...is that we are not prescribing a self assessment model...but supporting them to do this. A deliberate approach to use principles and characteristics rather than rules based so that practice can be locally responsive to context

But the challenge is that what good practice looks like is still emerging

Sector initiatives - multi-strategy approach

- Facilitated discussion web-site (eValueate)
- Newsletters (eValueate)
- Meetings with representative bodies (cross sector)
- Regional conferences (3)
- Meetings with individual TEO CEs
- Workshops facilitated by experts

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Involved people at all levels on individual and group levels.

Early stages involved socialising the change of philosophy in evaluative QA as a benefit for the outcomes for learners rather than from the stance that the old system was somehow 'broken'

Buy-in from Chief Executives most important so considerable effort in this area.

A range of experts involved at advisory group level as well as running workshop these included Jane Davidson, Jean King, Patricia Rogers

Included:

75 self-assessment workshops

1,000 participants nationwide

Clusters of providers – *aim to develop communities of practice.*

Covering

Using evaluation to strengthen self-assessment

Exploring what individual organisations already do and what they might do differently

Starting to plan how to do it better in the future

NZQA & the evaluator workforce challenge

- Internal culture shift
- A (mostly) untested procedure
- A mental model shift for many of the evaluators
- Evaluators agents of cultural change in their own organisation
- Evaluators agents of cultural change in the whole tertiary education sector
- Lead evaluators to become the main mentors for the pool evaluators

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➤ A developmental approach to evaluator preparation

- Collaborative design more than training
- Initial emphasis on principles and goals
- Technical procedures only as far as necessary
- Large amounts of simulation and discussion time
- Spread over a long lead in time (2 months)
- Programme continues after EER becomes operational



Evaluative quality assurance
in
indigenous contexts
-
challenges and opportunities

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Context, challenges and opportunities

- Māori want to be Māori
 - Live as Māori
 - Global citizens of the world
- Tertiary (education) system that responds to this aspiration
 - Supported by legislation
- Challenge – historical injustice
- Opportunity – potential of the evaluative approach

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One of the key weaknesses of mainstream evaluations has been a lack of Māori input at the formative or planning stages of evaluation (Ministry of Māori Development, 1999)

Too often research and evaluation have resulted in Māori experiences and ways of knowing being misrepresented, with few benefits accruing to Māori through these processes. (Bishop, 2005, Smith, 1999).

In general, most of the issues that arise in research and evaluation are ones that fail to observe, recognise, value or understand Indigenous peoples' culture, principles and ways of knowing (Kennedy, 2007)

The privileging of:

- non-Maori knowledge, theories and methodologies over matauranga Māori and tikanga Māori
- evaluation as objective, independent, authoritative and valid

Opportunities: EQA

EQA

...not a one size fits all

...room for unique contribution of Māori

Opportunities for

- Māori to lead the process
- Māori values to underpin the valuing
- Māori to determine what matters
 - *As Māori*
 - *For Māori*
 - *For All*

➤ Opportunities: Māori values at the heart

- Valuing
 - what's important
- Whose values hold sway
 - who gets to decide
- What place or space for Māori perspectives and values
 - relative importance in the mix
- What mana / importance given to Māori perspectives and values in the overall judgments

Opportunities

➤ Outcomes for learners and communities

- Outcome Indicator - graduates gain employment, engage with further study and/or contribute positively to their local and wider communities



Successful in non-Māori contexts

&

Confident and competent contributors in Māori contexts

- Take up leadership roles in iwi (tribal organisations)

For example, one of the outcome

Have the knowledge skills and competencies to engage in non-Māori contexts – to be global citizens

Have the knowledge skills and competencies to engage with Māori – whānau, hapū, iwi settings

Business management degree

– have traditional business management knowledge - employment hiring policy and practices

– have in-depth cultural knowledge and recognise the unique context of employment and hiring policy and practices and the implications of operating in a whānau (family), hapū (sub tribe) or iwi (tribal) contexts – when your hiring or firing your cousins, and the impact of these decisions on ongoing whānau or tribal relationships.

In an iwi context, relationships, whakapapa (genealogy) are ‘forever’

Intrinsically Māori



Manipulations, manoeuvrings
& machinations

—
“getting buy in, come hell or
high water”

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“wicked problems” abound

- There are 100 reasons why this might not succeed ... most of them contextual
- Context is everything - “the three messes”
- Evaluative quality assurance not necessarily understood or welcomed, or, “...great idea, already doing it”
- The challenges identified through international research – including AJE

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1. External – government, govt agencies, sector agencies, and the sector itself – unis, ITPs, wānanga, PTEs, GTEs, ITOs
2. Internal – capability in evaluation policy design & implement
3. Content and policy direction – policy solutions not “easy”!

Sector reaction generally positive

But not “getting it” is a problem

Sometimes people don’t want to get it

Or are dismissive ...because EQA challenges the status

quo - those providers who have been regarded as successful under the previous approach may not be

so under the new

And then there are always your colleagues

AJE, September 2009

- Variability of organisational readiness for self-assessment
- Self evaluation lacks objectivity and thus credibility
- Evidence for impact of self-assessment on achievement unclear
- Self-assessment -> 'safe' behaviour -> the 'production of comfort'
- QA doesn't actually influence consumer choice much
- QA doesn't actually influence decision makers much
- External review has modest impacts on organisational performance
- External review encourages 'strategic' behaviour on organisation's part (gaming / keeping the bureaucrats happy)
- Effects of aligning internal and external evaluation open to debate
- Improvement and accountability functions are often incompatible

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Fortunately this article was printed just as we were completing the initial design work!

1. Variably true, depends on context – self-assessment at what level, by who, of what, with what rigour, for what purpose?

Yes slack self-assessment is unlikely to make much of a difference

But data-driven, thoughtfully interpreted, and constructively used self-assessment focused on actual learning?

Where organisational purpose and mission is aligned and directly focused on student achievement and its key contributors?

2. If external evaluation and review is done well it looks primarily at the outcomes of self-assessment – its impacts and effects - rather than emphasising the self-assessment processes that are presumed to be effective

Done well, the incentive to game etc is defeated by the authenticity of the self-assessment - what changes occurred as a result, who benefitted, how, and to what extent is this an outcome of value?

So where are we at and what have we learned?

- Evaluative quality assurance has acted as a trigger for wide debate about 'quality' – "what does quality look like, taste like, feel like, smell like?"
- ... and what contributes to it?
- Evaluation policy responses must be principled and clear on key concepts
- Participatory strategies for constructing solutions – rather than simply authoritative, competitive, or collaborative

The debate has been healthy, and sector response has been constructive

What is an educational outcome? What is to be valued?

How would you know? What do we understand contributes to or is co-related to valued outcomes?

What is quality? What is value added? What is the role of 'standards'? What is the role of benchmarking?

This presentation represents an approach that has attempted to find practical answers to these fundamental questions

Solutions have been developed through what we characterise as 'participatory' approaches where we endeavour to weigh up all ideas on merit



It's all here folks

Details about evaluative quality assurance can be found at this URL

Thank you and good night