Qualifying the debate on 'Quality'

22nd-23rd June 2021 via Zoom

The debate on 'quality' in universities continues to exercise the time and energies of those involved in higher education and in government. These debates include questions of the meaning of quality as well as its measurement. Central to such debates are the related issues of 'teaching' and 'learning'; issues that are embedded in discourse of accountability, value for money, and who pays. The Covid pandemic has foregrounded the inherent quality of online, as opposed to face-to-face learning, but we are also witnessing, in England, ongoing reviews of the various UK government measures of teaching quality. The recent responses to the Augar review, TEF and NSS plans have not done much to clarify the situation

This event will offer opportunities to discuss what is meant by 'quality' and how we might go about measuring it.

This event is organised by the Academic Practice Network, SRHE and supported by CSPACE, Birmingham City University, and CCL, University of Central Lancashire

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22nd June

2pm   **Keynote -** Chair: Vanessa Cui

Quality in the networked digital university

Adam Matthews, University of Birmingham

3pm   Session 1A - Chair: Adam Matthews

One size does not fit all: Ensuring quality across HE sub-cultures - Laura Roper

Session 1B – Chair: Richard Davies

Reimagining quality at a university in a middle-income country - Gerda J. Visser-Wijnveen

Session 1C - Chair: Vanessa Cui

Student Experience Matters: Measuring Quality by Engaging Students through Online Quizzes - Xiangping Du

Coffee break

4.15pm   Session 2A – Chair Matt O'Leary

Accountability as a tripartite construct in the quality debate -
Annie McCartney, Dawn Story and Clare Kell

Session 2B - Chair: Adam Matthews

Not the quality police: tales from an integrated approach to
quality assurance and enhancement - Clare Saunders and
Jennifer Marie

Session 2C - Chair: Vanessa Cui

University quality and student voice in the age of artificial
intelligence - Krzysztof Rybinski

5.15pm   Review of Day 1 – Chair: Richard Davies

5.30pm   Quality Quiz and online social (optional)

6.30pm   End

23rd June

1.45pm   Welcome

2pm   Lightning presentations – Chair: Richard Davies

- Quality Teacher Educators and the development of
  quality classroom teachers - Desiree Antonio
- When I look at the screen, do you see and feel the
  same as me? - Michelle Groves
- Shaken & (Digitally) Stirred. Exploring Pivot Qualities in
  a Transnational Context - Pip McDonald
- Meaningful Assessment as Feedback for Quality
  Assurance - Nathalie Tasler
- Lost in Translation: Lessons from our Chinese Students
  - Cai Zhang

3.15   Session 3A – Chair: Richard Davies

Identifying and Mapping Higher Education's Intangible Assets

Elizabeth Cleaver, Alastair Robertson and Fiona Smart

Session 3B - Chair Matt O'Leary

Dimensions of Wellbeing and implications for Quality in Doctoral Supervision Pedagogy - Martin Gough

Session 3C - Chair: Vanessa Cui

The role of belonging and community in ensuring quality of learning in a digital environment - Marion Snow and Naomi Braithwaite

4.15pm   **Keynote** – Chair: Richard Davies

Quality as an emergent, formative process: understanding and improving teaching and learning as a case in point

Matt O'Leary, Professor of Education, Director of CSPACE research centre, Birmingham City University

Vanessa Cui, Research Fellow, co-lead of Practitioner Education Research Group at CSPACE, Birmingham City University

5.15pm   Final comments and end of conference

Abstracts

Keynotes

Quality in the networked digital university

Adam Matthews, University of Birmingham

Quality Assurance (QA) has many different meanings to many different people inside and outside of the university. In this talk I am not going to attempt to define QA but look at the many influences on QA both inside and outside of the university and between the human and non-human. The concept of the unbundled university and the literature base around it is growing and I will use some of these perspectives to explore the network of specialist roles and organisations who have a stake and influence in both determining and delivering quality in higher education. I will also include digital technologies as actors in this network. Having mapped out some of these 'actants' I will introduce some of the sociological and philosophical perspectives on the relationships between humans, technology and education. This is all with the aim of opening discussions and perspectives about quality in the networked digital university.

Quality as an emergent, formative process: understanding and improving teaching and learning as a case in point

Professor Matt O'Leary, Professor of Education, Director of CSPACE research centre, Birmingham City University

Dr Vanessa Cui, Research Fellow, co-lead of Practitioner Education Research Group at CSPACE, Birmingham City University

Quality is a ubiquitous term that permeates all areas of higher education policy and practice. Policy levers such as the Teaching Excellence Framework and the National Student Survey have ensured that debates about the quality of teaching and learning in higher education have remained centre stage in recent years. The Covid-19 pandemic has further heightened the focus on the quality of the teaching and learning experience. In this talk, we examine the epistemological and methodological aspects of 'quality' in relation to teaching and learning. We begin by challenging and resisting some of the dominant conceptualisations of so-called quality enshrined in current teaching and learning policy and practice, exposing their shortcomings but also offering a reimagined, alternative perspective driven by collaborative, professional responsibility rather than managerialist accountability. As an antidote to reductive, commodified conceptualisations of teaching and learning, our talk explores the situated experiences of university teachers and students participating in an

innovative model of collaborative observation. Drawing on longitudinal qualitative data, we critically reflect on the key findings and implications for improving the quality of teaching and learning in higher education. Our discussion reveals how these students and their teachers used a model of collaborative observation to develop a collective classroom consciousness about learning and its relationship with teaching. We conclude by arguing that this classroom consciousness can subsequently be used to inform and transform the learning and professional practice of students and their teachers meaningfully and sustainably.

Lightning presentations

Quality Teacher Educators and the development of quality classroom teachers

Desiree Antonio

The long held assumption that 'good' classroom teachers make good teacher educators could be undermining our ability to produce quality classroom teachers. Teacher educators occupy the apex of an education system that is tasked with the responsibility of ensuring that our teachers are prepared to meet the changing demands, challenges and complexities associated with classroom teaching. This presentation is the beginnings of a review of literature which will extends the issue arising from a doctoral thesis. The quality of teacher educators and the influence they have on the student teachers they train in Higher Education institutions is explored. Who they are as teacher educators, what they should know and do and how they should be prepared and developed are issues that need to be considered to address the idea of quality. A proposition is made for teacher educators to be supported through targeted continuing professional development of different types and forms while meeting different purposes according to their needs and that of their institutions.

I work as an Education Officer, School Administration with the Ministry of Education, Sports and Creative Industries Antigua and Barbuda. My work involves the supervision of teachers and principals. providing professional development and contributing to policy development. I have a keen interest in Continuing Professional Development since I believe it is a tool that can be used to assist in responding to the ever-changing environment in which we work as educators. As an Adjunct Lecturer, University of the West Indies, Five Islands Campus, I teacher student teachers in a Bachelors of Education Programme

When I look at the screen, do you see and feel the same as me?

Dr Michelle Groves

In September 2020, I was timetabled to deliver a series of lectures on research methodologies to 20 PGCE dance teacher trainees. Covid-19 restrictions dictated that these sessions were to be delivered virtually, a new(ish) experience for myself and the trainees. Having delivered these sessions in previous years, I was confident that I knew what was to be delivered and how the 'what' might be received. What I was less sure about was how

the dance teacher trainees would act, and react, to the constraints of receiving and engaging with information from behind computer screens. This 5 minute presentation draws on abstracts from my aide memoire of that time, reflecting on my attempts to breath life, movement and motivation into a two-dimensional virtual world. The lessons I learnt from these reflections have altered how I think about quality in learning and teaching, regardless of the medium and external expectations of 'best practice'.

With over 40 years as experience as a performer, teacher and educator, Michelle Groves was appointed Director of Education, Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) in 2016. Michelle has responsibility for the strategic development of the RAD's Faculty of Education dance teacher education programmes, and CPD provision for over 10,000 RAD registered dance teachers internationally. Her interests are in dance teacher education in higher and professional contexts, the professionalisation of dance teaching and professional identity formation of dance teachers. She gained a Doctor of Education from UCL, Institute of Education London.

Shaken & (Digitally) Stirred. Exploring Pivot Qualities in a Transnational Context.

Pip McDonald

"It is important to acknowledge that "Globalisation is affecting the rise of the quality industry" (Morley, 2003: p1). To what extent does our understanding of quality differ in a transnational context? The transnational online pivot is a unique area. Perhaps the pivot has forced us to reconsider how we frame quality. What can technology tell us about quality? How can teacher observation in online transnational classrooms be understood and measured in a constructive way within the 'transnational gaze'? This presentation explores pivot modalities within the frame of transnational architecture at the Royal Agricultural University (RAU). A teacher observation evaluation form was developed in order to evaluate teaching and learning in interactive sessions carried out using the Zoom platform with students at Shandong Agricultural University (SDAU) in China. The presentation will both outline reflections on this approach and will discuss the implications framing pivot quality in this capacity can have on pedagogy and post-pivot transnational realities.

Morley, L (2003) Quality and Power in Higher Education (Maidenhead: Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University)

Senior Learning Technology Project Officer at Royal Agricultural University (RAU). Keen to bring a learning technology perspective to the table. Specialism in technology-enhanced transnational learning (TETL) in the Digital Innovation team. @PipMac6

Meaningful Assessment as Feedback for Quality Assurance

Nathalie Tasler

I am leading two PGT courses and the masters dissertation for our MEd in Academic Practice. I have redesigned all assessment to be part of the course participants own academic practice or teaching. Over the last years, this has unexpectedly lead to students using the actual assessment submissions to feed back on the courses and their experience with it. I would like to introduce this integrated practice as a possibility for QA. Data collection and evaluation will follow later, thus the lightening talk

I am a senior academic developer (lecturer in academic and digital development) with a focus on creative pedagogies and SoTL. I run two PGT courses and the MEd projects on our MEd in Academic Practice.

Lost in Translation: Lessons from our Chinese Students

Cai Zhang

A short learning from a ongoing ethnographic research on Chinese (international) Alumni of Postgraduate Art and Design courses from University of the Arts London. This 5mins talk only shares one group discussion in particular as the conversation was on "quality" of the academic transformation on practice-based Constructivist postgraduate courses.

I am an associate lecturer on MA Applied Imagination at Central Saint Martins and teaching on a range of postgraduate and undergraduate course at the Design School at the London College of Communication. I am an research associate at The Social Design Institute at University of the Arts London. My research focus in design pedagogy in gaming engine. I am also an Artist with a sculpture and drawing practice for social justice.

1A - Not the quality police: tales from an integrated approach to quality assurance and enhancement

Clare Saunders and Jennifer Marie

In 2019 the University of Greenwich merged its academic quality and educational development units to provide a unified home for learning and teaching developments. We reflect on the successes and challenges of this approach, from the cultural – developing a shared understanding of quality enhancement and roles – to the practical – providing coordinated support and guidance for staff and curricula through the turbulence of COVID-19 and beyond.

Clare is University Director of Learning and Teaching at the University of Greenwich: she is responsible for learning and teaching quality enhancement across the institution, and leads the Greenwich Learning and Teaching directorate including quality assurance and education development.

Clare's 'home' discipline is philosophy, and she has a long-standing interest in concepts of value in higher education, for example critically analysing how we judge the value of a degree; the changing purposes and values of higher education institutions; and the role of values in notions of academic identity.

1B - Reimagining quality at a university in a middle-income country

Gerda J. Visser-Wijnveen

In 2013, shortly after the creation of the National Institute for Accreditation (NOVA) as the accrediting body in Suriname, the Anton de Kom University of Suriname's first program was accredited. Especially external partners of the first accredited master programs strongly valued this external validation of quality for these programs. This focus on external validation also meant that quality and quality assurance was mostly perceived as what Goff (2017) describes as 'demonstrating quality', a view that concentrates on the accountability aspect and -specific for this context- earning trust for new programs. It included a focus on administrative accountability which is more typical of 'defending quality'; a retrospective approaches to quality assurance.

In recent years, the university has been moving slowly but steadily in the direction of 'enhancing quality', i.e., a more prospective approach to quality assurance. Instead of a focus on offering the right courses and having various procedures in place as required by the various accreditation standards, the question is being asked: 'what does this mean for our students and how can we further contribute to their learning experience?' The same standards are still being used but from the perspective of how the university itself defines quality and a stronger focus on student learning. This process was supported by the introduction of a university teaching qualification program around the same time (2014).

One of the central concepts in reimagining the concept of quality at Anton de Kom University of Suriname is the further conceptualization of 'studiability' -included in one of the accreditation standards- as one of the core criteria of quality for our university. One of the major issues at the university is the long study duration, partly caused by external influences, which let us to question the 'studiability' of the programs. The main question asked regarding 'studiability' is 'whether it is feasible for students to graduate within the estimated timeframe?' While previously the focus in 'studiability' was on ensuring that program-related barriers that might hinder a student's study progress are removed, a different way to approach it was to look for program features that might promote the feasibility of graduating without delay. Based on the literature four aspects that could either form a barrier or promote the 'studiability' of a degree program were identified: study load, ratio between contact time and self-study, competition between courses and (re-)examinations. These aspects continue to be discussed resulting in changes made to the various degree programs offered.

This contribution will share parts of this journey -that is far from complete- including the importance of the conceptualization of quality. A journey that so far resulted in a shift noticeable by external panels in, among other things, the way teachers and students describe their teaching and learning experiences.

Gerda is Quality Assurance Manager at the Anton de Kom University of Suriname. Her responsibilities include academic development in both teaching and research, institutional research/evaluation, and internal and external quality assurance. Her research focuses, among other higher education topics, on the research-teaching nexus. Between 2012 and 2020 she was the Editor for Research into Higher Education Abstracts.

1C - Student Experience Matters: Measuring Quality by Engaging Students through Online Quizzes.

Xiangping Du

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought enormous challenges towards the UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Despite HEIs' quick adaption to online learning in support of students' continuity of education, challenges of e-learning are inevitable for students who take part in learning virtually from different locations, at different time zones, with different access to equipment and internet, and different level of digital literacy. Student experience of learning is no longer the same as when learning happens in bricks-and-mortar.

The nature of online learning with the absence of face-to-face interaction and university experience makes students less likely to enjoy and less interested to engage. Accordingly, exploring effective tools for students to enjoy and engage has become vital for educators and HEIs to ensure students' learning experience. This will in turn help the UK to fulfil its International Education Strategy, i.e. to recruit 600,000 international students annually by 2030. It also helps the UK to remain being the second largest learning destination for international students.

This presentation shares a tutor's experience of using online quizzes to engage students and enhance their educational experience. Three different quiz tools, i.e. Kahoot, Canvas Quiz and Mentimeter were utilised irrespectively for online delivery, assessment and feedback within one postgraduate module in a UK HEI's Master's programme.

Dr Xiangping Du is a principal lecturer at Hertfordshire Business School, University of Hertfordshire, UK. Her main research focuses on learning, teaching and student experience in higher education, including identity, diversity in classroom, cross-cultural communications and transnational higher educations.

2A - Accountability as a tripartite construct in the quality debate.

Annie McCartney, Dawn Story and Clare Kell

This short, conceptual paper builds upon previous empirical mixed methods action research conducted between 2017 and 2020. The paper will spotlight accountability and its contemporary place in the quality and policy narrative of a post pandemic and potentially new and litigious UK Higher Education environment.

Further, the paper will critically assess the extent to which EdTech tools routinely used in the new classroom 'normal' can transparently track educational provision fairly across the disciplines and whether the digital fingerprint they leave can be usefully deployed in avoiding disputes with students over the quality of provision received during the pandemic.

The paper will present a forensic analysis of the accountability duties and obligations of three key stakeholders (HEI, academic and student) responsible for discharging the 'Student Contract to Educate' (SCTE) and delivering a high-quality academic experience for all students however they are learning. The empirical data concentrates and tracks the extent to which liability as split between the three stakeholders can be captured with the use of EdTech tools at the 'classroom coalface' where it is argued that accountability and quality of provision matters most to fee paying students. Tracking performance of each stakeholder's duties and responsibilities and the extent to which they can or cannot be held accountable for performance has arguably been facilitated in the post pandemic era by widespread use of these 'accountability' EdTech tools and the transparent digital fingerprint they leave.

Viewing accountability through these distinct stakeholder lenses should generate thought provoking discussions across the discipline mix. Further the authors wish to widen the debate by questioning how the transition to a more transparent and arguably more accountable online delivery model is being received. Additionally, the authors are keen to facilitate an honest exchange with participants on the extent to which EdTech tools can be relied upon as transparent tools to capture and fairly track accountability at the HE classroom coalface across the disciplines.

Annie is a senior lecturer in construction law and ADR and completed my PhD in 2020 entitled 'The value of 'Technology-enhanced Learning' (TEL) in evidencing compliance with the student contract to educate in a new era of accountability in UK higher education. Clare and Dawn were the supervisors and we have shared platforms but internally and externally to share the research generated from the PhD.

2B - One size does not fit all: Ensuring quality across HE sub-cultures.

Laura Roper

HEIs contain a number of sub-cultures based on discipline, department, role etc. Each of these sub-cultures have their own particular systems of conduct, principles and values. This short

academic paper will discuss how a quality approach can be embedded within an institution whilst acknowledging that one size does not fit all and that there is a need to acknowledge and adapt quality to meet differing needs. In doing so it anticipated that there would be improvements in collegiality, interdisciplinary and the breaking down of silos of working practice.

Laura has worked in HE for over 15 years in a Professional Services role focused on quality, accreditations and project management. Laura is currently completing a PhD focused on humanistic leadership across sub-cultures in HE in addition to working as a part-time lecturer in Business & Management. Her experience has given her insights into HE processes from every angle (academic, professional and as a student) and so hopes to use these insights to provide a useful addition to discussions.

2C - University quality and student voice in the age of artificial intelligence.

Krzysztof Rybinski

My contribution is based on three recent papers of mine:

- Rybinski, K. (2021) "Assessing How QAA Accreditation Reflects Student Experience", *Higher Education Research and Development*

- Rybinski, K., Kopciuszewska, E. (2020) "Will Artificial Intelligence Revolutionise the Student Evaluation of Teaching? A Big Data Study of 1.6 Million Student Reviews", *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*

- Rybinski, K. (2020) "Are Rankings and Accreditation Related? Examining the Dynamics of Higher Education in Poland", *Quality Assurance in Education*.

All three papers apply Artificial Intelligence (AI) models to understand various aspects of assessing university quality, including accreditation processes, crowdsourcing student feedback and student evaluation of teaching. The above research and the trends visible in other sectors indicate that AI models will be used more often to assess HEI quality and be incorporated in essential processes, including teaching staff performance assessment, research impact assessment, and more.

However, Rybinski and Kopciuszewska (2020) make a strong case against using AI as a black box for performativity purposes. For example, while the AI models exhibited high prediction accuracy, they learned two SET biases from students: extreme responding and assigning higher ratings to less demanding courses. Consequently, the AI should remain a useful tool for university administrators aware of the AI weaknesses documented in the paper. My

contribution will argue that the AI revolution is coming to universities, whether we like it or not. And as researchers, we should strive to understand its benefits and risks.

Krzysztof is a Data science professor at Vistula University in Poland. He specializes in applying data science and artificial intelligence to solve problems in social sciences and higher education.

3A - Identifying and Mapping Higher Education's Intangible Assets

Elizabeth Cleaver[1,] Alastair Robertson[2] and Fiona Smart[3]

This contribution showcases work developed as part of a QAA Scotland Enhancement Theme Cluster Project which has built tools to identify and map the things that matter in higher education but cannot simply be 'measured' and are therefore often overlooked or seen as less important in our metrics driven culture..

[1] Independent HE Consultant and Visiting Professor at UWE, Bristol and Buckinghamshire New University.

[2] Glasgow Caledonian University

[3] Edinburgh Napier University

3B - Dimensions of Wellbeing and implications for Quality in Doctoral Supervision Pedagogy

Martin Gough

Wellbeing and mental health concerns are gaining progressively higher profile across society and in national policy. As HEIs adopt their own versions of this Wellbeing Agenda, the discourse inevitably pervades the PGR domain, and reports investigating this phenomenon and causes underneath it find that the issue is more acute here than most other domains of society (Panger et al. 2014, Guthrie et al. 2017; Levecque at al. 2017; Ayres 2019; Pierson 2019; Lane et al. 2019).

Doctoral supervision pedagogy, at least no less than general academic pedagogy, has always had a pastoral dimension.   Following through the implications of the Wellbeing Agenda,

should supervisory practice now become mainly about ensuring the continued wellbeing of our doctoral students, and will that maintain or enhance its quality? My answer to this question is, variously, no and yes. The answer depends upon the particular dimension of wellbeing under consideration. Few would equate wellbeing and mental health together: for one thing physical health is part of wellbeing. Nonetheless, the Wellbeing Agenda is tending to approach issues contained under it uni-dimensionally. This dimension is, at root, Utilitarian, which elides together logically the economic, the medical and the psychological facets of phenomena. Utilitarian thinking has its place in rational decision-making in certain contexts but can only explain a part of human experience. In as much as the Wellbeing Agenda limits us to this dimension, the answer to my question is negative, whilst recognising that supervisors do still need to have due concern over the actual health of their students.

In my interactive workshop session, I shall present a list of scenario-related statements, with the following posed to participants to interrogate them: '*These statements represent issues – Is the issue one of wellbeing?*' and inviting yes/no responses and the reasons for them. The point of this will be to explicate alternative dimensions of wellbeing, including as set out for us by Aristotle, such as to evade the critique of 'emotional epistemology' and the 'diminished subject' (Ecclestone & Hayes 2008). This will then provide opportunity to explore: which dimension good supervisory pedagogy should prioritise for the maintenance or enhancement of quality; prospects for an affirmative answer to my question; and whether the Wellbeing Agenda is tending to interfere with this.

Aristotle (1925) *Ethica Nicomachea*, (trans. W.D.Ross). In W.D.Ross (ed.), *The Works of Aristotle Volume IX*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Ayres, Zoe (initiating March 2019 exchange on Twitter), https://twitter.com/ZJAyres/status/1102861872137674752 [accessed 17 March 2019]

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Panger, G., Tyron, J., & Smith, A. (2014) *Graduate student happiness & well-being report, 2014*. Berkeley, CA: Graduate Assembly, University of California Berkeley.

Pierson, Emma (2019) "PhDs without tears", *Times Higher Education* (10 Jan. 2019)

Martin is a Lecturer (Doctoral Supervisor, Researcher, Academic Development Consultant), University of Liverpool Centre for Higher Education Studies and SRHE Postgraduate Issues Network Convenor

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The role of belonging and community in ensuring quality of learning in a digital environment

Marion Snow and Naomi Braithwaite

The shift to online at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic presented a pressing challenge to maintain the sense of belonging and community, that has always rested so comfortably in the physical teaching space for our students. As educators we recognise the integral role that a student's sense of identity and personal engagement with their learning, peers and tutors has in ensuring a quality learning experience. Our paper discusses our response to this challenge. Tutor reflections and research with students within our fashion business courses, evidenced a sense of loss in community, particularly amongst cohorts in their first year of studies. This resulted in a lack of engagement and participation in the online teaching sessions, which we felt compelled to resolve. Our solution was the creation of the Virtual Shoe Salon. The objective of the salon was to create an innovative approach to teaching our students about qualitative research and data analysis. Using the ordinary and personal objects of shoes the students were asked to engage in collaboration, conversation, and peer to peer learning. By sharing their shoe images and personal stories with peers, the salon fostered a sense of social presence in the digital space, encouraging community and the development of interpersonal relationships through the process of learning about research methods. Post session reflections and qualitative research has evidenced the value of the salon in ensuring a quality learning experience that is underpinned by the sense of belonging and community that Covid-19 had threatened.

Marion is a senior lecturer in Fashion Marketing and Branding in the School of Art and Design at Nottingham Trent University. Her current research focuses on fostering a sense of belonging and community for students and tutors in an online learning environment. She came to academia from an industry background in sales and marketing in FMCG. Her broad experience in coaching, line management and mentoring forms the basis for a passion for creating a humanised approach to teaching.