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# The Management of Quality in the University of Ulster

**Roger Ellis**

**Abstract.** The setting of standards for teaching is identified as central to any system of quality assurance for teaching and learning. The paper describes a number of initiatives which have been taken at the University of Ulster to identify and develop quality in teaching. They include a project to identify teaching skills through consultation with expert teachers: the use of quality circles of staff and students to specify standards for teaching: the use of student feedback on teaching: the introduction of a distinguished teaching award: the assessment of teaching competence when staff are selected; the introduction of a unit-based in-service teacher training course; and the encouragement of self and peer evaluation using an appraisal schedule. Quality assurance for support services is considered and finally the University's initiatives are related to total quality management and BS 5750.

## **Introduction**

Quality Assurance is basically a simple idea. Standards are set for a product or service; production or delivery is organised so that these standards are met consistently; the customer can, therefore, be assured of quality. To apply the idea to university teaching, standards must be set for its delivery and everything must be managed to ensure that these standards are always met. Students would therefore be assured that they would receive a quality education.

The idea might be simple but its implementation is not. First, teaching has no meaning without learning and the relationship between teaching and learning is by no means clear. Second, there is no general agreement regarding standards. Third, the majority of University teachers have not received training for their job and this limits their capacity to make a professional input to standard setting.

This paper describes a number of initiatives which have been taken at the University of Ulster to identify and develop quality in teaching. The setting of standards for teaching is seen as central to any system of quality assurance for teaching and learning as is regular monitoring and rectification of short-falls. Recourse to the consumer, that is the student, for setting and monitoring the accomplishment of these standards is also an important feature of quality assurance.

Prior to describing these schemes consideration is given to the nature of and reasons for quality assurance and its relation to the problematic area of the professional competence of University teachers.

### Quality assurance and teaching competence

An explicit concern with quality in teaching is undoubtedly a current preoccupation in UK Universities. Planning statements typically stress the importance of maintaining quality in the face of increased student numbers and dwindling resources. The more sophisticated institutions are prone to describe their internal monitoring and review procedures as constituting quality control, quality assurance or even total quality management. Just in case any Universities have not discovered quality there is now a Higher Education Quality Council to help them. It has a Division of Quality Audit which is dedicated to identifying and evaluating each university's mechanisms for the assurance of quality in its courses and teaching.

Why has this approach become so popular over the last few years? One fundamental reason is the political pressure on the professions and the public services to be accountable and to make their activities more transparent to their consumers and to society as a whole. Thus, practitioners have to be more explicit regarding their aims and the methods they use to achieve them.

An important aspect of accountability is the need to demonstrate value for money and that the most cost-effective approach is being adopted. Thus, university teachers must make clear the learning objectives which they set for their students and must demonstrate that their teaching methods are the most effective way to promote learning at the minimum cost.

Consumerism is a widespread social trend. Every consumer, be they customer, client, patient, or student, expects to have informed choice and redress if their needs are not being satisfied. These conditions should be met in a free market with competition between suppliers who vie for the custom of consumers who have purchasing power. When such a market does not obtain, for example in state higher education, special steps must be taken to protect the consumer's rights and to create some analogue of the desirable features of a market. Thus, students are to be viewed as active consumers of a service with the right to question and comment on what they are getting. The tax-payer and their agents the government must be satisfied that Universities are giving value for money.

Finally there is an undoubted commitment amongst university staff to give their students the best possible education. Their capacity to deliver may be inhibited by their lack of a professional identity as teachers. Nevertheless they can be enthused by initiatives which they believe will help them to do a better job.

All of this requires a more explicit approach to cause and effect between teaching and learning in higher education and a willingness to compare and contrast one teaching method with another in order to achieve the most cost-effective solution. Universities have to be active in identifying the characteristics of a quality teaching service and in ensuring that these characteristics are achieved consistently and at the least possible cost.

The term quality assurance with its provenance in manufacturing and service industry on

the one hand and health care on the other is a convenient label for this approach. The effective business or service must assure quality if it is to meet customer's needs. Public services must demonstrate that they are delivering a quality service and providing value for the tax-payers money. In both cases quality must be defined and delivered consistently to a standard that satisfies the customer or client.

Quality has of course, two meanings: one refers to standards and the other to excellence. It is thus possible to set relatively low standards while benefiting from connotations of excellence. Furthermore quality is one of those words, like community, which seems to have entirely positive associations no matter how imprecisely it is applied.

There are thus political, economic, social and professional reasons for the popularity of quality assurance. Furthermore quality is itself an attractive and positive label.

Typically quality is assured in an organisation through a managed cyclical approach. Standards are set through a negotiation between customers with stated, implied or encouraged needs and suppliers with particular capabilities and the need to maintain financial viability. The supplier must have sufficient understanding of and control over the means of production to be able to deliver a product or service up to standard. Further the accomplishment of standards must be monitored to ensure that quality is maintained. Procedures must be in place to detect any short-falls in standard. The cause of these short-falls must be identified and matters put right. The standards themselves are regularly reviewed to take account of consumers, suppliers and lessons learned from production and the need for remedial action.

If this approach can be applied to higher education then the conditions of accountability, cost-effectiveness and consumerism will be met. It should be obvious, therefore why quality assurance for the courses and teaching of universities appears so attractive.

Yet all of this may be built on shifting sands. To talk of quality is to imply standards. But are there generally accepted standards for teaching? If there are, can anyone guarantee that all teachers achieve them or even know what they are?

Even when there are standards for teaching can it be guaranteed that achieving these standards will lead to learning? It is logically impossible to refer to teaching having occurred unless it is accompanied by learning. So quality assurance for teaching is only possible if there are established relations between teaching and learning: if the teaching which leads to learning can be specified with sufficient precision to enable it to be identified; and if the factors which influence teaching can be controlled in order to rectify any short-fall in standards.

So there may be a striking mismatch between the requirements of quality assurance and the current state of knowledge regarding teaching and learning. In order to assure quality in any product or service sufficient must be known about it to specify standards. The accomplishment of these standards can then be monitored. If there are short-falls then steps can be taken to put things right. Quality control is about monitoring output against standards and rejecting items which fail to meet standards. Quality assurance is a process

whereby a consumer or other interested party is made confident that standards will be maintained. But is sufficient known about effective teaching for standards to be specified and generally agreed? Without these standards does it make sense to talk of quality and its control or assurance?

A starting point is to admit that there are no basic laws which relate teaching to learning. Indeed there are precious few hypotheses which have been systematically tested. There are a number of hunches which teachers have that their behaviour is likely to lead to learning in students and there are certainly assumptions about these relationships which can be inferred from the things teachers do and the plans which they lay.

A compounding factor is the problematic status of University lecturers as professionals. Typically professions have an extended period of education and training: a body of knowledge to which the profession contributes substantially and centrally; and some form of professional association which regulates entry to the profession and the discipline of its members. There is no generally accepted training for university teachers in teaching itself; knowledge about university teaching is imperfect and understood and contributed to by a minority; and the only professional association of university teachers in the United Kingdom is no more than a trade union with no regulation of entrants or disciplinary procedures. Yet a lengthy period of education in a subject is a prerequisite of appointment as a lecturer lecturers are expected to contribute through research and scholarship to their subject; and lecturers often belong to academic or professional bodies related to their subject, which do regulate membership and the discipline of members. It is this confusion of subject professionalism with professional identity as a teacher which has contributed to the stunted growth of university teaching as a profession. As a consequence any university wishing to assure quality for teaching has to tackle a difficult set of problems without the benefit of a trained work-force.

The problem may be conceived as one of defining and developing professional competence. Ellis (1988) in reviewing notions of competence and how it might be developed in a range of caring professions, including medicine, nursing, speech therapy and education, concluded that there was little or no formal knowledge in any of these professions linking competence, performance and effectiveness. This is not to say that the professions concerned did not achieve objectives with their pupils, clients and patients but rather that their competencies had not been made sufficiently explicit to allow for scientific study of the relationship between professional action and desired outcomes. The solution to this gap in knowledge, Ellis concluded, was to enable professionals, who might be assumed to have implicit knowledge of their competence, to make this knowledge explicit. Various methods were outlined which would enable them to do this and a range of consultative methods were seen as particularly fruitful.

### **The University of Ulster**

The University of Ulster was established in 1984 as a merger of a large polytechnic and a

small university. It operates on four major campuses and provides courses for some 16,000 students including approximately 5,000 part time and 11,000 full time. The University has around 860 academic staff organised in seven faculties and 37 departments.

The University inherited the CNAAC-related course validation procedures and centrally managed style of a polytechnic together with the more distributed and implicit approach of a fairly conventional University. If it had done no more than continue the practices of both institutions, the University would have had a more explicit approach to quality than most Universities at that time.

However, inheriting and developing a distinctive system of course evaluation and review is not the same as having agreed standards for teaching. Indeed it is a striking feature of course validation and review that it can occupy considerable time and energy without actually enabling sustained attention to be given to standards for teaching. Both evaluations and reviews often concentrate on such topics as market research for the course, course regulations, curriculum design and syllabuses. Dialogue can take place on a series of abstractions, including progression, integration or the balance between disciplines and fields of study. Resource issues are discussed without any clear cause and effect demonstrated between resources, teaching methods and learning outcomes and their assessment. This leaves little time or perhaps inclination to dwell on the details of teaching methods and their relationship with student learning. Since the discussion is between representatives of the quasi-profession described above, there is perhaps an unconscious collusion to avoid areas of mutual ignorance.

So the University has introduced a number of schemes which are aimed at identifying and developing standards for teaching. These schemes are intended to signify the importance that the institution attaches to teaching, to develop a language to describe teaching and enable standards to be set and to enable staff to develop their teaching skills.

Two approaches used at the University of Ulster can be viewed as a form of extended and systematic consultation with expert teachers to enable them to articulate their competencies. Methods had to be found therefore, to enable practising teachers to make explicit the nature of their teaching, the performance standards which they are achieving and the assumptions that underlie the methods they use. Given the gap that there is between formal knowledge of teaching and learning and the limited knowledge of teaching which the majority of University teachers bring to their jobs, there is real value in this process of explication and standard setting being carried out at local level. The University has sponsored a research project based on a critical incident approach with experienced teachers, and set up quality circles involving staff and students. Students' evaluation of the teaching they receive is an important factor in setting and monitoring standards and the University is introducing an institution-wide scheme organised by its Institutional Research Unit.

The University believes that teaching must be recognised as important and staff must be given support and opportunities to develop their skills. This has implications for selection, appraisal, teacher training and promotion and the University has attempted to emphasise

teaching in all these processes. To give the highest possible profile to high quality teaching the University has introduced a Distinguished Teaching Award which is unique in the United Kingdom.

Since quality in teaching and learning depends on a quality support service to teachers, the University has introduced a quality assurance approach to support services. The remainder of the paper describes the following initiatives:

- identifying teaching skills through consultation
- quality circles for teaching standards
- use of student feedback
- distinguished teaching award
- selection of staff
- staff development through teacher training
- teaching evaluation schedule
- quality assurance for support services.

The paper concludes with reflections on the University's overall approach to quality as a quality management system.

### **Identifying teaching skills through consultation with experts**

Although there is an extended literature on effectiveness in University teaching (see for example Brown, G. in Ellis R. (1993), there is widespread ignorance of it amongst University teachers. Indeed there is little or no reference to this literature in course proposals and evaluations. Furthermore there is a dearth of explicit criteria for teaching in appraisal and promotion schemes. In order to remedy these gaps and to generate criteria for effective teaching which would be acceptable within the university, UU has initiated a unique research project.

Basically the idea of the project was to tap the perceptions of 'expert' teachers to identify the skills of effective teaching. A basic assumption of the approach was that a consultative mode of enquiry was a key element in eliciting and clarifying perceptions of effective professional practice. Such perceptions would have high face validity if used in the evaluation and development teaching skills and could be correlated with descriptions of effective teaching arising from other methods of enquiry.

The first step was to identify expert teachers in different modes of teaching. It was decided to concentrate on three methods of teaching identified as most common through the analysis of course documents. They were class teaching; seminar teaching and practicals. It was decided that no group should contain more than twelve members making 36 experts in total. It was also decided to select staff who would reflect the size and make-up of the seven faculties of the University.

In order to select expert teachers Deans were approached in order to enlist their help in nominating and freeing staff to join the research team. By this method 37 staff were identified: 26 males and 11 females. The researchers were satisfied that they were reason-

ably representative of the University's range of subjects and of faculties and the four campuses of the University. Deans had assured, in discussion with Heads of Department, that the teachers were widely recognised as experienced and skilled.

After a thorough induction of each participant into the aims, purpose and approach of the project the investigation proper began. While there are many possible approaches to obtaining data about teaching, including participant observation, interaction analysis, self-reports interviews and the use of questionnaires, it was decided to use a variant of the critical incident technique. Essentially this requires participants to generate examples of critical incidents which represent examples of best practice.

However, before this was done participants were asked to reflect critical contextual factors which influence decisions about teaching strategies used in planning, preparing, presenting and evaluating teaching. The task set was to identify 12-20 contextual factors which influence the kind of decision you make in terms of planning, preparing, presenting and evaluating your teaching. Individual responses were recorded by teachers individually and returned to the research officer for collation and loose classification. Over two hundred different statements were generated for each teaching method.

Through initial classification and group discussion categories were agreed as adequate to encompass the main factors which had to be considered for each method. Through this method a common language began to emerge and participants were becoming used both to reflecting on factors associated with teaching and in working together in a group to clarify perceptions and agree categories.

Participants were now asked to ground the agreed contextual factors in the description of an actual teaching situation which had posed problems to them.

Once transcripts were available of these problem situations, described in terms of agreed contextual features, it was possible to begin to identify teaching skills which might be used to deal with the situation. Participants were asked to list 12-20 statements which constitute advice to an inexperienced colleague faced with the situation described in the scenario.

The two hundred statements generated by this process were then categorised loosely by the researcher and these categories again tested out through group discussion.

At the end of this process three lists of teaching skills had been produced which were deemed relevant respectively to the three methods. These schedules were then tested through questionnaires distributed to 800 teachers in the University who were asked to indicate the importance of each skill using a 1-5 scale or if they wished to exclude the skill as unimportant. At the end of this exercise there were 45 skill items for class teaching, 41 for seminar teaching, and 56 for precticals.

The next stage was to validate these skills against direct observation of teaching. For practical reasons this was carried out on three video taped examples of each teaching method chosen as representative across the disciplines of the University. Observation of the tapes was interspersed with group discussion. At the conclusion of this stage 25-30 component skills remained for each teaching method.

Further work remains to refine these schedules of skills and to determine their use in evaluation, appraisal and staff development.

For the purpose of this report, the approach has been outlined to indicate ways in which the staff of an institution can be involved in making explicit their intuitive knowledge of effective teaching skills. The procedures of the institution in evaluating and developing skills can thus be based on shared perceptions of salience and significance.

### **Quality circles for teaching standards**

A rather different consultative approach has been adopted in one faculty where quality circles of staff and students have been used to determine standards for a range of teaching methods. There are a number of definitions of quality circles available drawn in the main from industrial settings. The basic idea is that a small-typically less than 10-group of employees should meet to consider problems in their workplace and propose solutions which are then considered by the organisation and, ideally, implemented.

In this case the quality circles were made up of equal numbers of academic staff and students, typically 8 in all, with a common identity derived from their involvement in higher education. The groups were established by the faculty's Academic Courses Committee, a sub-committee of the Faculty Board concerned with the quality of courses, teaching and learning. Members of the committee volunteered to convene groups which were to be made up of volunteers.

The teaching methods selected for examination were:

- lecture
- seminar
- tutorial
- practical
- placement
- studies advice
- research supervision,

It was agreed by the conveners that in every method of teaching there were three components which should be considered. These were:

- the environment and other necessary conditions
- the academic member of staff's contribution
- the student's contribution.

In relation to each of these, the standards which should be achieved would be described. Not only would these standards be informative for new members of staff and students but also they would provide yardsticks against which performance could from time to time be audited. If short-falls were detected then appropriate action could be taken. It was also important that the standards should be regularly reviewed to avoid the system becoming too static and to maintain a commitment to improving quality.

In undertaking this work it was essential to be realistic. The standards set should be

achievable either within existing resources or with a relatively small investment in time or money. Unless this approach was maintained the whole exercise was likely to be theoretical only and to result in disillusionment for the participants.

The ways in which the groups actually functioned varied with the different conveners involved. None in the groups, including the conveners, had been involved in such activities before and the majority of the students had not previously carried out joint activities of this kind with members of staff.

There was one common factor between all groups and that was perceived pressure to complete the task quickly. Thus groups met, typically, no more than three times with each meeting around one and a half hours. Individual work was carried out between meetings.

The first requirement for each group was clarification of the task to be undertaken. This necessitated discussion of the principles of standard-setting, what was required in this particular case and how the group could work.

Brainstorming was the major approach used in the groups to generate a wide range of ideas. Notes were taken by the chairman and organised under the three headings. This draft was circulated to all members before the next meeting when it was discussed and refined. Following this the revised draft was circulated again and a final meeting confirmed its content.

One group found it helpful to use Donabedian's (1969) framework of structure process and outcome to guide their work. Before beginning the work of standard setting, it was important to establish what the teaching method might be intended to achieve in terms of learning outcomes. Structural features, that is resources needed to achieve the outcomes, were identified. The process of the teaching method then focussed on interpersonal and other interactions.

Following the exercise the standards were reproduced as a draft manual and circulated to all staff in the Faculty (140) for information and comment. Few comments were received which probably reflected low priority rather than perfection. It is now intended to circulate the manual to all course committees in the Faculty (34) asking for specific comments on the applicability of the standards to the teaching methods employed. This should produce more specific feedback.

Following this feedback, and any modifications, it is then intended to use the standards to structure student feedback, annual course monitoring, and regular audits of facilities.

The exercise so far has had a number of beneficial outcomes. Members of the groups, who were asked for anonymous written comments, all felt that they had gained through the detailed consideration of the particular teaching method which they addressed.

Despite the lack of comment, a sample of staff surveyed identified a number who were using the standards as criteria against which to evaluate their own teaching. The manual is now available for staff and supervisors to use in appraisal.

The production and distribution of the manual has highlighted the importance which the Faculty attaches to quality in teaching and learning. The involvement of staff and students

in the circles has underlined the Faculty's commitment to partnership between teachers and taught.

The standards have drawn attention to certain shortfalls in the Faculty's performance. First, not all physical environments measure up to the minimum specifications in the standards. This has helped to establish priorities for refurbishment and minor improvements. Second, the teaching methods require a level of professional competence from academic staff which would require more widespread staff development and teacher training.

### **Use of student feedback**

Students are the primary consumers of the courses which are being monitored and reviewed and their views are a critical element in this process. Since its establishment in 1984 the University has had a system of staff-student consultative committees matching its course committees. These committees are expected to have a majority of students on them. Their minutes are received by course committees and must be responded to through the annual course report referred to in an earlier section. However, the operation of these committees varies from faculty to faculty and indeed course to course, and the University has not as yet set standards for their operation or established a central system to monitor their effectiveness.

The use of questionnaires to facilitate student feedback was, until a year ago, very patchy. Some courses built in feedback through anonymous questionnaires into all their units. One faculty had sponsored a comprehensive literature review leading to a faculty questionnaire which was applied uniformly to all courses with summary feedback being received by the Faculty Board. Other courses in the University had no feedback of this kind.

The University resolved, therefore, through its Academic Policy Committee and Senate, to establish a common feedback questionnaire which would be applied to all course and all staff. The scheme was to operate through the University's Institutional Research Unit, a facility which has much to offer to institution-wide quality management and assurance.

As a first stage, a pilot questionnaire was produced to allow feedback on formal lectures. This was the most straightforward area to address and linked most obviously with the literature on the subject. Volunteers were sought from each of the 37 departments of the University to pilot this questionnaire on their teaching. At least one volunteer was secured from each department with some providing two or three.

The questionnaire was administered by a third party at the end of a term's sequence of lectures and analysed by the IRU who provided specific feedback to each lecturer and general results to the Academic Policy Committee. Given the self selection of the volunteers it was perhaps not surprising that the feedback was overall highly positive. Students were invited to comment on the questionnaire as were staff and this led to certain modifications.

For the next year it was agreed that all staff would be asked to subject one of their sequences of lectures to questionnaire feedback. At the same time new questionnaires were produced for seminars and practicals. These could be used instead of lectures or in addition

to them.

The results of this second phase have been disappointing for several reasons. First, there was some delay in the availability of questionnaires which effectively excluded some staff from the exercise due to the pattern of their teaching over the year. Second, there was disagreement with the Associated University Teachers (AUT) regarding the requirement or otherwise that staff should participate in the exercise and the subsequent use of the information in relation to staff appraisal. Finally, there was some confusion between the University scheme and previous faculty or course based schemes.

Nevertheless a substantial proportion (45%) of the staff were able to receive feedback on their teaching and the third year of scheme should see comprehensive coverage and the scheme becoming more a matter of routine.

Any system of quality management requires objective data on performance and the existence of an Institutional Research Unit which derives and analyses data and serves as a management information facility is recommended. In addition to the teaching questionnaire exercise the UU IRU has undertaken various surveys of student opinion including the needs of part-time students, reasons for not taking up places at the University and the satisfaction of research students with their supervision.

### **Distinguished teaching award**

In order to signal the importance which it attaches to good teaching and to recognise outstanding achievement the University has instituted a Distinguished Teaching Award modelled on those which are relatively common in the US and Canada.

The idea of an award first surfaced at a senior staff conference held for Heads of Department, Deans and Pro-Vice-Chancellors. At that time research was the major topic: research selectivity, research achievements and the promotion of research were all being discussed. In this context many senior staff felt that teaching needed a continuing or even extra emphasis. The idea of a distinguished teaching award was welcomed as part of a package of measures which would address teaching and learning. Every encouragement was given to the proposers of the scheme to promote its introduction in the University.

Enthusiasts for the scheme included two deans of faculty who had seen established schemes at state universities in the US including Kent State University, Ohio. A task group was established under the chairmanship of the author to undertake a feasibility study and make a formal proposal the Academic Policy and subsequently Senate.

A professor from KSU was retained as a consultant, and he produced comprehensive details of their scheme. In brief, their scheme depends on nominations made by students, ex-students and faculty members being considered by a select committee made up of alumni, present students and faculty. If a prima facie case is established, nominees are asked if they wish to be considered for the award. If so, they are invited to provide supplementary evidence and if they are willing to allow student evaluations and heads of department reports to be solicited.

The committee considers all this evidence and then nominates a small number for the DTA which consists of formal recognition through parchment, a monetary prize and inclusion on a roll of honour. The award is highly prized and brings great credit not only to the individual but also the department and faculty to which they belong.

The University of Ulster scheme is broadly based on this but had to take account of significant differences between the institutions. KSU has a large number of staff on teaching only contracts. Student evaluations of teachers is well established and there is bank of evaluations available on each teacher. Their Alumni Association is well established and indeed is responsible for running and financing the scheme which is thus effectively distanced from normal promotion and discipline procedures. In contrast, the staff of UU are on conventional teaching and research contracts: university-wide student evaluation of teaching is in its infancy: and the Alumni Association had only just made a modest start. The scheme would have to be run by the University and it was essential to keep it formally separate from appraisal, discipline and promotion.

The KSU scheme employed seven criteria, six of which were readily adopted. They were:

1. communicates subject matter effectively
2. communicates an enthusiastic interest in the field of study
3. stimulates thinking and develops understanding
4. challenges the student's intellect
5. uses relevant methods of assessment
6. takes a personal interest and is willing to help.

One criterion-'demonstrates comprehensive knowledge of subject matter'-was not included since it was felt to be reflected through the others. A new criterion-'provides regular and useful feedback on students'coursework'-was introduced.

The award was construed as being an award of the University on the recommendation of Senate and hence, properly bestowed at the annual congregations. A financial award of £500 was introduced being a valid application of the discretionary element in the block grant.

While there was widespread support for the scheme in the University, particularly from those who felt, perhaps, that teaching was being under-valued in relation to research, there were nevertheless several objections which had to be addressed. First, there was an anxiety that a scheme devised for a US university might not transplant successfully to the UK. Distinguished teaching awards were thought of as characteristic of the American university approach which differed significantly from that of the UK. However, it was recognised that teaching was being given a much higher profile in the UK system and that many innovations, including for example credit accumulation and transfer, modularisation, student evaluation and teaching only contracts were being modelled on the US system.

Other objections included concern that the scheme might unduly emphasise long service at the expense of the young high flier; that nomination and award might be no more than a popularity contest; that awards might be a cause of dissension; that the award might become embroiled with promotion, discretionary points and accelerated increments; that the panel would be unable to make valid judgments on essentially second hand evidence; and that external assessors would be necessary to avoid bias.

In the event it was possible to allay all these fears either through reference to evidence from the US or by carefully building in safeguards. A final hiccup occurred when the Union representatives objected that they had not been consulted formally. Fortunately the AUT was in support of the scheme in principle and a further round of discussion led to some small but significant modifications to the scheme.

The scheme has now operated through two annual cycles and four distinguished teachers have been designated. The scheme follows an annual cycle which begins with a widely advertised invitation to nominate in the Autumn term and culminates with awards at the July Congregations.

All staff and students of the University are informed through posters, items in house newspapers and circular memos of the opportunity to nominate individually or collectively. Nomination requires the completion of a printed form with assesment of norminees against the seven criteria. Self nomination is not permitted nor are nominees informed at this stage.

A selection panel established by Senate and including academic staff, students and alumni then considers the nominations receives and determines whether a prima facie case has been established. Where this is so nominees are informed and asked if they wish their nominations to proceed. If they do they are invited to provide a supporting statement and CV highlighting their teaching experience and achievements. They are also invited to nominate a colleague, who may be their head of department, who is familiar with their teaching and willing to testify to its quality. Further consideration is given to this material by the panel who eventually nominate up to three persons to the Senate for DTAs.

During the first round of this process the selection panel refined the criteria and added several orders to help them discriminate between nominees. They included:

1. diversity of nominators
2. high scores in each category
3. range of comments
4. quality or perceptiveness of comments
5. sustained evidence
6. insight of nominee into teaching experience
7. evidence of innovative teaching techniques
8. evidence of further objective comment
9. breadth of experience and willingness to develop.

There can be little doubt that the scheme has achieved its objective of drawing attention to the importance which the university attaches to high quality teaching. Each year there have been more than twenty nominations ranging across the faculties of the University. There has been unqualified acceptance of the first Distinguished Teachers in that the judgment of the panel coincided with general perceptions. So far, therefore, it seems that the scheme has transplanted very successfully across the Atlantic.

### **Selection of staff**

When a post is to be filled in an academic department the head of department and dean complete a personnel specification which covers, inter alia, the teaching experience and skills required for the post. Against these selection criteria sources of evidence must be identified for the selection panel from the application statement, selection interview and references. For teaching skills one source of evidence is the interview and all candidates are required to make a ten minute presentation to the panel on a topic chosen from a list of five provided by their head of department. The candidates are informed that audio-visual equipment will be available. This has proved a very worthwhile innovation in that this brief presentation does give direct evidence of the candidate's ability to present information clearly. If one requirement for a test is that it should discriminate between candidates, then this has worked very well. Presentations have ranged from almost inaudible reading of poorly organised papers to exceptionally clear and succinct presentations of coherent arguments supported by OHPs and summary handouts for the panel. Obviously this is not the only evidence available to the panel, but it is undoubtedly superior to inferences made from the candidate's ability to respond to questions, the previous source of direct evidence.

### **Staff development through teacher training**

Once appointed all new members of staff are invited to a short induction course which covers the main teaching and assessment methods used in the University and draws attention to educational support services available. Beyond this there is a range of short courses available through the staff development department and these act as an introduction to more substantial units of study which are modules which can lead to the University's Higher Education Teachers' Certificate.

This course has been planned by the Faculty of Education in close collaboration with the central Educational Technology and Staff Development Departments. It has been validated using the procedures outlined above and the evaluation panel included external experts who were running comparable courses in what were at that time polytechnics. The course is part time, requiring one day per week although it can be undertaken full-time if this is considered appropriate. A particular feature of the part-time version is its emphasis on the concurrent work of its students. It thus integrates with work of lecturing staff in teaching, assessing, course planning and evaluation.

While the course has been successful in that it has broadly achieved its objectives and

received generally positive evaluations from students and external examiners, its impact in the University as a whole is modest. The Senate debated whether attendance for at least part of it should be mandatory for all staff new to higher education. Unfortunately for the course, Senate was not prepared to be that prescriptive and went no further than minuting a 'strong expectation'. In any event the alternative priorities which had influenced the Senate have proved equally compelling at departmental level. The course had 13 students enrolled in its first year and 11 in its second, the majority of these drawn from areas like Nursing where teaching training is a professional expectation. Having the course is obviously a good start but much progress needs to be made in developing motivation and incentives for attendance.

The course was developed to reflect a number of basic principles. First, while it was developed primarily for those with little or no experience of teaching in higher education, it was not to be exclusively for them. Second, this was not to be a part time course which participants took in addition to their job; rather it was to be a direct contribution to their normal daily work. Third, as far as was possible, the sequencing of course content should reflect the needs of newly appointed staff during the first two years of their probationary period. Fourth, throughout the course, there should be a strong element of theory which participants should use to inform their practice. Finally, the content of the course should be the same for all participants regardless of the Faculty to which they belonged.

The Certificate course consists of four modules of study which would be studied part-time one per semester. All meetings are organised one day per week between 10.00 am and 1.00 pm and a wide repertoire of teaching methods are employed, including lectures, peer teaching, seminars, tutorials, simulations and role play, demonstrations and workshops. Areas covered by the modules include large and small group teaching, planning and conducting laboratory practical sessions or studio work, collecting data to identify strengths and weaknesses in one's teaching, theories of learning and instruction, assessment, project and postgraduate supervision, problems encountered by the adult learner, course design and evaluation, and educational, audio-visual and information technology aids.

The participant's overall grade for the course is based on formal assessments of a portfolio produced for each module of the course together with video-recordings of their teaching in normal situations. Portfolios and videos are assessed by the participants, their peers and finally the tutors. In addition to this, participants are informally assessed on a diary kept throughout the course. In the diary participants are required to produce evidence of reflective analysis and evaluation of their own teaching and the effect of the course on this.

A central feature of the course is the provision of a mentor whose job it is to help the participant to reflect on practice and hence improve the standard of teaching and quality of student learning. The mentor is an experienced person with whom the participant feels at ease. The mentor is usually a member of the same department or faculty. The mentor fulfils pastoral, facilitative, supervisory and assessment roles and also is intended as a role model for the participant.

The course lays great store on feedback from participants and this has already identified significant strengths and weaknesses in delivery which have led to modifications for the second cohort.

### **Teaching evaluation schedule**

The University is obviously some considerable way from having a totally teacher trained work-force. Meanwhile, it is considered important that all staff should be encouraged to be reflective on their teaching and committed to the improvement and development of their skills. It is recognised that the evaluation of teaching should start and finish with the individual but that this can be facilitated through peers and supervisors. To provide a focus for this evaluation the University has developed an assessment schedule which has been approved by Senate and issued to all staff. Staff are also encouraged to accumulate a portfolio of evidence which can be used in appraisal, progress through probation and efficiency bars and in support of applications for promotion. Evidence may include artifacts such as lecture notes, visual aids or learning packages; descriptions and evaluations of teaching and learning by peers or supervisors; student evaluations; external examiners' reports; and descriptions of student learning. The assessment schedule should assist in giving structure to these evaluations. A copy of the schedule is included as appendix 1.

### **Quality assurance for support services**

It is not possible to deliver good quality teaching without an infra-structure of support services. These include the services which support teaching and learning directly including the Library, Computer Services and Audio-Visual Services together with Student Services including accommodation, counselling and health services. But there are also the basic central services of the University which include staffing, finance, estates and maintenance.

Recognising that quality will depend crucially on standards being set and met in these services the University has set in motion a comprehensive quality assurance system for them. Essentially the aim of this exercise has been to establish service standards and to ensure that these are being achieved.

At the start of this exercise each service department has been asked to produce answers to the following questions:

- Who are the customers of the service?
- What are the needs of these customers?
- What are the critical functions which the service undertakes to meet these needs?
- What are the documented procedures and standards which describe the way in which these functions will be carried out?
- How are these procedures and standards monitored?
- How are short-falls remedied?

The establishment of quality assurance mechanisms for these departments has been made the special responsibility of a Pro-Vice-Chancellor with the intention that the approach will match that which obtains for academic departments.

### **Total Quality Management and BS 5750**

Quality Assurance requires some form of management procedures to ensure that quality standards will be met. The various steps described in this article, together with others not covered, constitute, de facto, the University of Ulster's approach to the management of quality. Can this be described as Total Quality Management (TQM)? Would it be the kind of system which could lead to registration for a quality management standard such as BS 5750?

The University has become increasingly self-conscious regarding quality assurance and quality management and thus reflects the concerns of the university system as a whole. Latterly, the University has considered the desirability and feasibility of preparing for registration for BS 5750, the British Standards Institute's standard for a quality management system. The University has addressed quality management as a theme at two annual senior staff residential conferences and, latterly through a special working group of the Senior Management Group.

In the course of these deliberations, the University has identified and audited its present mechanisms for quality assurance and the initiatives referred to above were, in part, a consequence of this.

The University has recognised that quality management is a complex interaction of a number of sub-systems and that there is value in identifying these as a comprehensive and in that sense total quality management system. The advantages of a BS 5750 approach were seen as being the sharp focus into which the University's systems would be brought: the improvement which would follow in performance; the motivation engendered by preparing for an external validation; and the market advantage which the kitemark would bring. However, it was also recognised that there would be substantial direct and indirect costs involved in the exercise and that a procedural approach to teaching and research was of unproven value. Furthermore preparation would be yet another burden on academic staff who were subject to very rapid change consequent on the University's adoption of modularisation, credit accumulation and transfer year round working and the expansion of the system. However, the advantages of the approach to service functions were considered substantial particularly where present performance was considered sub-optimal.

The University is therefore adopting what might be described as a BS 5750 approach for its service functions, as outlined above. Subsequently the University might decide to seek the kitemark for these functions.

Whether the University's systems could be described as Total Quality Management depends on how TQM is defined and operationalised. Certainly the University has not explicitly adopted a TQM approach and can thus be distinguished from those in the United

Kingdom which have. On the other hand the University has audited its procedures comprehensively and put in place procedures which are judged sufficient to assure quality for its courses and teaching. Furthermore, as this article is intended to show, it has recognised that standards for teaching and its development are crucial to quality assurance and has taken explicit steps to remedy a fundamental perceived short-fall in knowledge in this area.

### Conclusion

This paper has given an outline description of activities in one UK University aimed at redressing what is seen as a fundamental gap in the requirements of a quality assurance system, that is, standards for teaching and means to recognise and develop them. Those seeking further details of the schemes will find them in Ellis (1993).

The various initiatives described will, at a future stage, need to be integrated to ensure consistency of approach. At present the schedule used for self and peer evaluation, the schedule of competencies emerging from the expert consultative project and the teaching standards derived from the quality circles have different provenances and some differences of emphasis and content. The ultimate goal is to integrate these descriptions of teaching into a single schedule and validate them through staff and student consultation. They will then form the basis of appraisal, self, peer, supervisor and student evaluation, staff development and teacher training.

### References

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## Appendix I

ASSESSMENT OF UNIVERSITY TEACHING Self/Mentor/HOD Assessment			
Staff Member	Mentor:	HOD:	Assessment 1-5*
Planning of teaching	1 Clarity of aims	The aim is stated clearly and in due detail.	
	2 Appropriateness of aims	The aim is worthwhile and an appropriate one for these students, it's implications have been understood and planned for.	
	3 Resources	Suitable resources for teaching, learning and assessment have been prepared.	
Implementation	4 Knowledge of content	A sound knowledge of content is evident in every aspect/phase of the teaching.	
	5 Structuring of content	The content is structured and sequenced appropriately for the students, with and between the successive phases of teaching and learning.	
	6 Explanation/presentation	The explanations given are clear. Examples, illustrations, and tasks presented to students are valid for the underlying principles/concepts of the content and for the skills to be learned by the student.	
	7 Elicitation/questioning	The elicitation methods used (verbal, incl. questioning, non-verbal) are appropriate for the facilitation and progression of learning.	
	8 Responsiveness/rapport	The responses given to student's work/ideas/activities/selves are valid and encouraging.	
	9 Resources	The resources for teaching, learning, etc., are suitably deployed.	
	10 Timing and pacing	The timing and pacing of the successive activities are positively responsive to the pace and nature of the student's learning.	
	11 Organization	The teaching and learning are organised to provide a balanced and varied sequence of work for the students. When grouped for learning the students are grouped helpfully, considering their individual differences and their need for access to resources, etc.	
	12 Management and control	There is unobtrusive but appropriate monitoring of all of the student's activity (whether the students are working as a class, in groups or as individuals) to ensure the positive engagement of them all in their learning. Where appropriate care is taken over safety. Directions given are clear. Rebukes, when given, are prompt and clear.	
	13 Assessment of learning and of pupil attitude	A due variety of assessment of procedures is used (non-verbal, spoken, written modes as appropriate) and feedback given to facilitate/encourage further learning, and enjoyment of learning.	
Evaluation of teaching	14 Evaluation	The teaching and learning which took place are reviewed and interpreted carefully, with an intention statement about further development of them both.	
Professionally in the context of the University	15 Trainee role	Advise is accepted with grace and responded to.	
	16 Relationships	Relationships with staff and students university wide, and with others involved in the life of the university are effective and harmonious.	
	17 Positive contribution to the life of the University	A positive contribution is made to the overall life of the university including its links with the community.	
	18 Response to opportunities	Opportunities for wider professional and self-development are positively welcomed. Lively interest in innovation.	
Overall Assessment			

\* 5. Outstanding

4. Good

3. Satisfactory

2. Less than satisfactory

1. Poor

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

..... Member of staff

..... Mentor/HOD