Improving university learning and teaching in a market

What the evidence suggests we ought to be doing ... and what seems to be going on

Graham Gibbs
Context of ‘Dimensions of Quality’

- Select Committee ‘no confidence’ in degree standards
- Evidence from international surveys about comparative quality e.g. HEPI (learning hours) CHERI (employability)
- NSS results not following 4Rs: Reputation, Resources, Research (RAE) & Rankings (TQA)
- Ill-informed pronouncements about quality (QAA, NUS, UK Council for Grad Ed)

...purpose to clarify what available evidence indicates about what determines quality in education

...taken up by Willetts & White Paper (“well informed purchasers”)
Where does evidence come from?

• 3P model: Presage, Process and Product
• mainly US research evidence
• multi-variate analyses (Astin, Terenzini & Passarella)
• 30 years work, repeatedly identifying same variables (e.g. ‘7 Principles of Good Practice’)
• ...now embodied in NSSE used in 800 institutions
• ...and if you use evidence-based practices to improve NSSE scores, you also improve learning gains
‘Presage’ variables

• Resources per student predict much less than one might expect (but learning resources predict effort)
• Selectivity predicts performance, but not learning gains, or engagement, or use of pedagogies known to enhance engagement
• Research predicts performance, but not engagement, and negatively predicts satisfaction & measures of learning gains.
• Who does the teaching predicts performance and gains
• Reputation predicts only selectivity, funding & research
• Peer ratings reflect reputation (US and TQA)
‘Process’ variables

- Cohort size, class size, ‘close contact’ with teachers (SSRs) (cohort effect avoidable...)
- Not class contact hours but total study hours
- Quality of teaching: training, student ratings, but not teachers’ research
- Quality of research environment: not at u/g level

Consequences for learning:
- Deep and surface approaches
- Engagement: level of intellectual challenge/high and clear expectations, good quick feedback, active and collaborative learning, time on task
‘Product’ variables

- Degree classifications
- Retention
- Employability

...too many confounding variables to be able to make much sense of any of this data, and degree classifications and employability data are highly unreliable.
What to pay attention to in terms of pedagogy?

• Changing students: effort, internalisation of goals and standards, meta cognitive awareness, self-efficacy
• Changing teachers: who, and how sophisticated
• Moving from solitary to social learning
• Focussing course design, review and evaluation around ‘productive learning hours’ rather than around teaching
• Shift from summative to formative assessment
• Making programmes coherent, with comprehensive changes implemented by course teams, not only by individuals (no matter how wonderful)
Departments and social mediation of quality

- Programmes vary widely in quality within institutions (except where ‘institutional pedagogy’)
- Institutions with no QE focus on programmes have problems
- Communities of practice (Havnes)
- Talking about teaching *at programme level* (TESTA)
- Employment practices (adjunct faculty, pseudo departments, Fordism)
- Modular structures, no assessment (or even shared understanding) of programme outcomes

...implies increased developmental focus on depts. or course teams (Lund, Oslo, Finland, Utrecht...)
The market and quality

• The ‘market’ may not be driven by valid evidence concerned with educational quality, but price, reputation, satisfaction, employability/salaries
• The PIs currently used are unlikely to leverage improvements in quality: league tables, NSS, KIS
• Successful departments may carve out market niches characterised by a sub-set of quality indicators independently of generic PIs or even institutional PIs
What is going on nationally?

- Using teaching PIs to improve quality
- Unanticipated impacts on curricula
- Managerial vs devolved change
- QA
- KIS, and better information about provision
1 Using teaching PIs to improve quality

- Unprecedented attention to quantitative PIs
- Average NSS scores up every year
- Some institutions climbing rankings every year
- ...by paying attention and using clever change processes
  - Exeter
  - Coventry
  - Winchester: TESTA & student engagement
  - ‘hygiene’ factors
Degree programme at Winchester using TESTA, now top ranked nationally

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NSS Question</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>After</th>
<th>Increase</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7 Feedback on my work has been prompt</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>21%</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 I have received detailed comments on my work</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>23%</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 Feedback on my work has helped me...</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>22 Overall Satisfaction</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>12%</td>
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## University of Winchester

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NSS question</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>Increase</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7 Feedback on my work has been prompt</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>25%</td>
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Bottom Quartile nationally

Top Quartile nationally
1 Using teaching PIs to improve quality

- Unprecedented attention to quantitative PIs
- Average NSS scores up every year
- Some institutions climbing rankings every year
- ...by paying attention and using clever change processes
  - Exeter
  - Coventry
  - Winchester: 20 Universities now using TESTA
  - Winchester: Student engagement
  - ‘hygiene’ factors
2 Unanticipated impacts on curricula

– Whole is less than the sum of the parts (OU, module level NSS scores)
– Course rationalisation, abandoning joint degrees
– Abandoning modularity altogether
– Bigger, longer, fewer modules, fewer in parallel
– Planned programme assessment regimes, including programme level learning outcomes
2 Unanticipated impacts on curricula

– Whole is less than the sum of the parts (OU)
– Course rationalisation, abandoning joint degrees
– Abandoning modularity altogether
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• ... but this may cause
  – Less choice, less engagement
  – More conventional curricula
  – Larger classes
3 Managerial/centrist vs devolved change

- Institutional vs Dept level targets for PIs
- Volume of feedback
- Criteria and standards (and hence learning outcomes)
- Institutional learning outcomes/graduate attributes
- Volume of assessment
- Class size
- Use of VLE
4 Quality Assurance

- Annual reviews of NSS scores trumping all other QA and QE processes
- Key quality issues entirely missing from formal quality reviews (e.g. formative-only assessment, Jessop 2012; student effort)
- No comparative analysis of learning products
5 KIS

- Includes invalid measures:
  - % class contact
- Misses key valid PIs about provision:
  - cohort size, class sizes
- Difficult to specify standardised ways of calculating single quantitative indicators that work across contexts
- ...so obliges programmes to specify what provision students are buying .... in Prospectuses, or in descriptive text linked to KIS pages
- David Willets has agreed to review KIS and add unique local data
Egyptology
University of Hamble

If you study with us you will experience:
• small classes, with other students you will get to know
• ...taught by teachers you will get to know
• ...who will give you copious written and oral feedback on your assignments
• ... which will often involve working with other students, and which will mainly be for learning, not for marks
• ...in a new and well equipped ‘learning resource centre’
• ...on a small friendly campus
• ...where students without top A-levels are well supported through to graduation.
‘Distinctiveness’ in the market

- In your department, what is your USP?
- Is your USP a valid indicator of educational quality? Do you know it benefits students? How good at it are you (in comparison with others)?
- Is your USP the same as the institutional USP?
- Are institutional policies improving your educational quality?
- How will you communicate your departmental USP to prospective students?