

# How can we better communicate the results of QA in Higher Education to the political realm and to the media?

**Dr. Padraig Walsh**

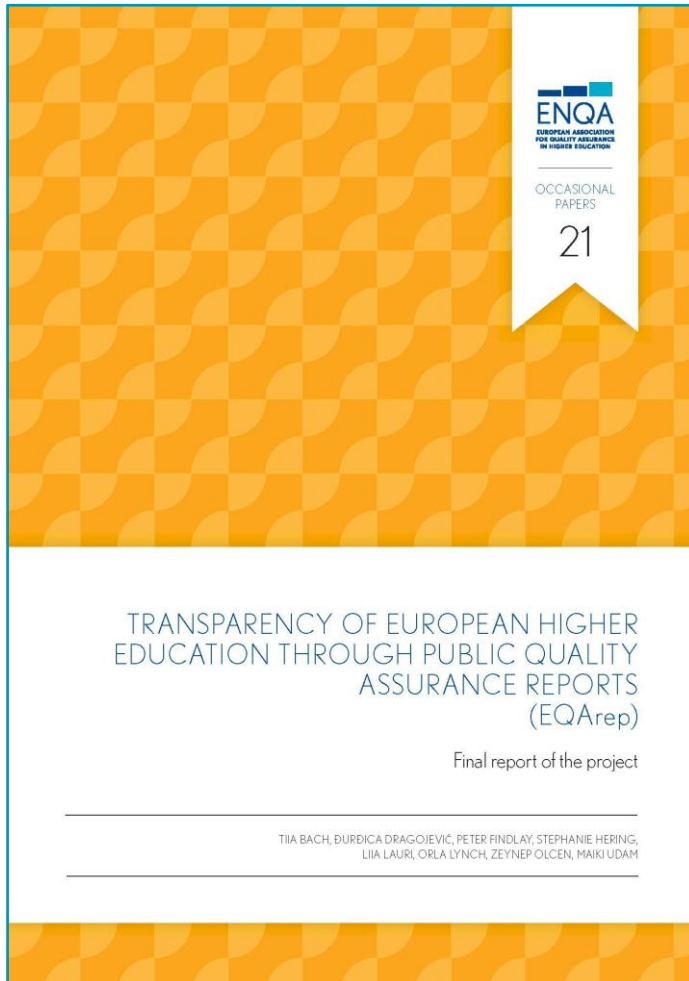
President, European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and Chief Executive, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)

*ASIIN Conference, 3 May 2016, Berlin*

# What are the outcomes/outputs of the QA of Higher Education?

- Typically the outcomes are decisions based on expert reports
- The evaluations tend to be at either the institutional or programme level
- The outcomes are usually decisions
  - to accredit
  - to accredit with conditions
  - not to accredit
- The outputs tend to be largely narrative reports leading to the outcomes above

# EQArep Project



- EQArep Project (2012-14)
- Co-ordinated by ENQA
- Funded by the European Commission - Lifelong Learning Programme
- Consortium of national QA agencies from Croatia, Estonia, Ireland and Switzerland
- Based on inputs from 47 European QA agencies

# Who are the audiences for such outcomes/outputs?

“The evolution towards a more knowledge-based society and strong competition in the labour market has resulted in an increasing interest in higher education in Europe.

Given the large number of higher education institutions (HEIs) and study programmes on the market, choosing a programme and an institution has become more difficult.

As a result, **students**, other **stakeholders** and the **public at large** are looking for more **detailed**, **reliable** and **comparable** information on the quality of individual study **programmes**, **faculties** and **HEIs**”

*Foreword, EQArep final report (ENQA, 2014)*

# Findings of the EQArep Project

- The main purpose of the traditional, comprehensive institutional or programme QA report is to facilitate a review or accreditation decision and to serve as a trigger for enhancement at the reviewed institution
- Consequently, the primary users of such reports are the higher education institution or programme under review

# Findings of the EQArep Project

- Summary reports, on the other hand, are mainly produced to provide concise and easily readable information to the general public
- The EQArep report recommended that, in order to better meet the needs of stakeholders, a higher degree of comparability between summary reports would be beneficial

# Findings of the EQArep Project

- Respondents were asked about the main sources of information they used to collect the information which they sought about HEIs or programmes
  1. Websites of HEIs
  2. Information from friends, colleagues, parents, etc.
  3. Assessment reports
- Very few respondents marked social media as a source for this kind of information

# Findings of the EQArep Project

Several respondents indicated that they had never used QA reports as an information source. Why?

- They didn't know about the reports or the kind of information they provide
- They didn't know where to find the reports
- The reports did not contain the necessary information
- The reports are either too long or too complicated to understand



# Too much information?

We conduct reviews of all UK higher education, wherever it is provided. In addition to courses run by UK universities or other degree-awarding bodies, students may choose from a range of courses offered by further education colleges, private organisations or overseas colleges, all of whom work in partnership with their degree-awarding bodies (mainly universities). Some universities also have their own overseas 'branch' campuses.

Providers differ considerably, but all must meet the expectations of the Quality Code. The degree-awarding bodies, which award the final qualification, have ultimate responsibility for standards. They work with partner providers to ensure that expectations are met.

We undertake over 300 reviews each year.  
The reports on our reviews, together with a summary of the key findings, are published on our website.

## QAA Quality Mark

Our Quality Mark launched in 2012 is available for use by subscribing institutions that meet UK expectations following their QAA review. Different versions of the Quality Mark are used in Scotland and Wales, while non-subscribers use a separate graphic.



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The sheer quantity of reports can still somewhat overwhelm the general reader

QAA (UK) – 300 reviews each year

# Political domain and media

Can we ...

How can we ...

Do we really want to ...

draw the attention of the political system or the media to the outcomes/outputs of quality assurance?

# European Standards and Guidelines 2015



## **Standard ESG 3.4 Thematic analysis**

Agencies should regularly publish reports that describe and analyse the general findings of their external quality assurance activities

# European Standards and Guidelines 2015

## **Guidelines ESG 3.4 Thematic analysis**

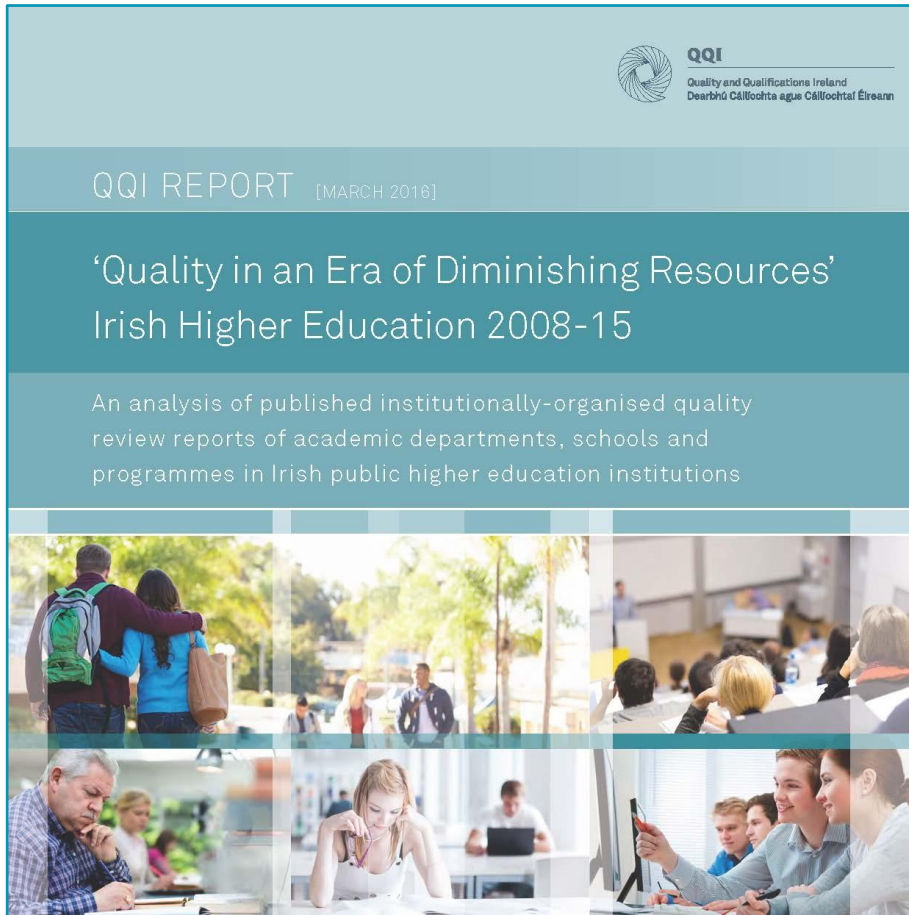
“In the course of their work, agencies gain information on programmes and institutions that can be useful beyond the scope of a single process, providing material for structured analyses across the higher education system. These findings can contribute to the reflection on and the improvement of quality assurance policies and processes in institutional, national and international contexts.

A thorough and careful analysis of this information will show developments, trends and areas of good practice or persistent difficulty.”

# 'Quality in an Era of Diminishing Resources'

## Irish Higher Education 2008-15

### Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Report March 2016



Following the global recession, in Ireland between 2008-15

- the state grant to HEIs fell by 38%
- overall funding fell by nearly 14%
- full-time students numbers increased by 25%

In 2016, QQI published an analysis of 90 institutionally-organised quality review reports of academic departments, schools and programmes in Irish public higher education institutions

# Editorial 'The Irish Times' Apr 18, 2016

Findings-From-HER-2014-1 Ducking difficult decis

irishtimes.com/opinion/editorial/ducking-difficult-decisions-1.2613823

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## Ducking difficult decisions

Funding third level education

Mon, Apr 18, 2016, 00:02

THE IRISH TIMES VIEW

**f** The higher education system is helping to create jobs, raise living standards and give Ireland an edge in the global market. But this cannot be taken for granted. Almost eight years of spending cuts, rising student numbers and falling numbers of academic staff mean the sector is under acute pressure. A report commissioned by the State body responsible for quality assurance in higher education contained more troubling findings. It found spending cuts have pushed some third-level courses to "crisis point" with serious implications for their sustainability.

The cumulative effect of reduced funding and higher student-staff ratios and casualisation of employment is posing a real threat to the quality of teaching and learning. And, if anything, the pressure will keep rising. We have one of the fastest growing populations in Europe. High birth rates mean the number of students entering higher education is projected to increase by almost 30 per cent by 2028. Annual funding will need to rise by about €1 billion just to meet this demand.

**Editorials »**

**Why Irish Water should be saved**  
It is typical of Irish politics that current negotiations are being conducted in a bubble, concentrating on the suspension of charges and abolition of Irish Water

**The ghost of Jörg Haider resurfaces following election in Austria**  
France's Marine Le Pen and Geert Wilders, leader of the Dutch anti-EU, anti-Islam Freedom Party, will be rubbing their hands in glee

**Our Columnists »**

**Fintan O'Toole**  
Fintan O'Toole: Publishing tax returns a good way to revive ideals of Rising

**Una Mullally**  
Una Mullally: Farewell my wacky purple Prince

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10:24 26/04/2016

# Editorial 'The Irish Times' Apr 18, 2016

## **“Ducking difficult decisions - Funding third level education”**

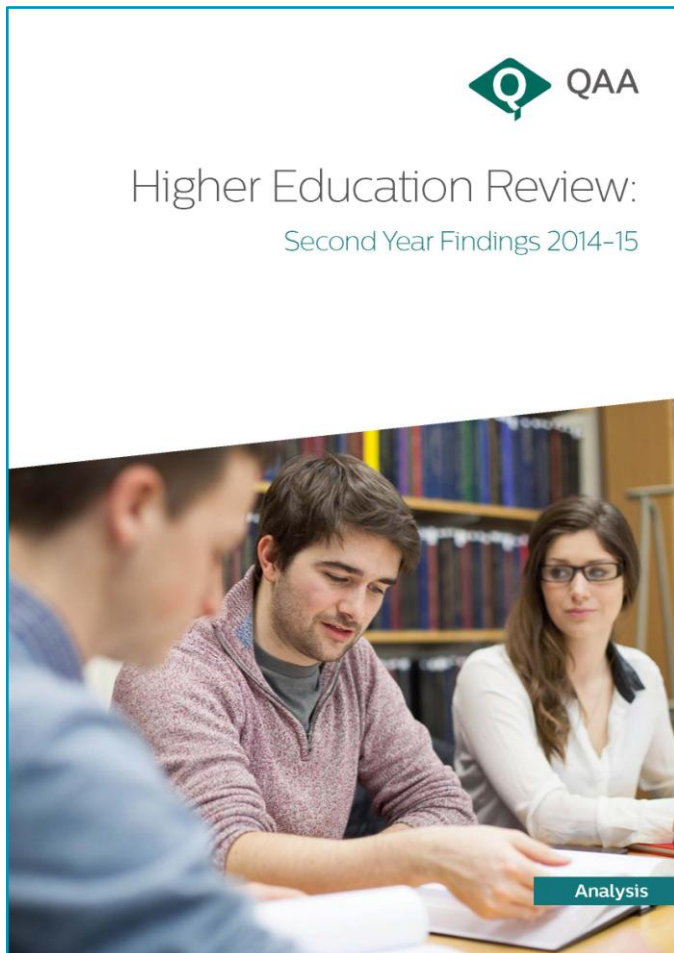
“The higher education system is helping to create jobs, raise living standards and give Ireland an edge in the global market. But this cannot be taken for granted. Almost eight years of spending cuts, rising student numbers and falling numbers of academic staff mean the sector is under acute pressure.

A report commissioned by the State body responsible for quality assurance in higher education (QQI) contained more troubling findings. It found spending cuts have pushed some third-level courses to “crisis point” with serious implications for their sustainability.

The status quo is not sustainable. The quality of higher education is under real threat. The system of funding is increasingly unfit for purpose. If Ireland as a society, a State and an economy aspires to quality third-level education, it needs to face up to difficult decisions.”



# Higher Education Findings from Institutional Review QAA UK



- **Findings from 87 Higher Education Reviews (HER) conducted in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in 2014-15**
- Good practice, recommendations and affirmations
- What's working well
- What could be improved



## ‘Higher Education Findings from Institutional Review’ (QAA UK)

- ‘A Provider’s Perspective’ (University College, London)
- ‘Inclusive Arrangements for Student Feedback’ (Walsall College)
- ‘Students as Leaders of Enhancement’ (University of Southampton)
- ‘QAA Review improving Research Students Experience’ (De Montfort University)
- QAA Review Enhances Students Learning Opportunities’ (Aylesbury College)

# ‘What they say’

## Google ‘QAA Report’ and the titles of various UK newspapers/magazines

- ‘Uncontrolled expansion – how private colleges grew’ (*Times Higher Education, THE*)
- ‘College rapped by QAA over business course’ (*THE*)
- ‘College rapped for report change request’ (*The Guardian*)
- ‘College fails to meet standards on sub-degree courses’ (*THE*)
- ‘Private colleges progression rates criticised by QAA’ (*THE*)
- ‘Room for improvement for college following QAA Report’ (*The Guardian*)
- ‘Private college falls short in QAA review’ (*THE*)

# The Fourth Estate

‘Journalists aren't supposed to praise things. It's a violation of work rules almost as serious as buying drinks with our own money or absolving the CIA of something.’ ~ P.J. O'Rourke

‘There ain't any news in being good. You might write the doings of all the convents of the world on the back of a postage stamp, and have room to spare.’ ~ Finley Peter Dunne

‘Journalism largely consists in saying "Lord Jones is dead" to people who never knew Lord Jones was alive. ~ G.K. Chesterton

‘If one morning I walked on top of the water across the Potomac River, the headline that afternoon would read: "President Can't Swim.” ~ Lyndon B. Johnson

Thank You!