

# Quality in Higher Education: A Theoretical Study

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Those responsible for design and delivery of programmes of higher education are faced with many challenges not the least of which is the assurance and control of quality in their work. While quality in higher education is assessed by the state, the academic community and the market in different ways and for different purposes and as the locus of control of decisions relating to quality is shifting from an autonomous academic community to the state and the market, nevertheless the key aspects of quality assurance in higher education are critical self-reflection by those involved and dialogue between academic staff and their peers in the wider community.

負責設計及提供高等教育課程的人面對很多挑戰，其中之一就是要確保高質素並加以控制。雖然高等教育的質素是由國家，學術界及市場用不同方法及為不同目的而作出評估，而向來由自主的學術界決定質素問題，也漸轉為由國家及市場決定；不過確保高等教育質素重要的還是有關人士能批判地自我反省，以及學者們與社會上的同輩交換意見。

## Introduction

There is at present rapid development of degree level education in Hong Kong. Those involved in this provision often assume that the programmes they currently offer are of an acceptable standard holding a view which is based on tradition and personal experience and usually lacking a basis in systematic study (notwithstanding the validation of courses by the HKCAA within the polytechnic sector). This is not at all an uncommon situation. Eichelberger (1989) defines tradition or appeal to authority as a way of knowing which uses an unexamined acceptance of the pronouncements of a respected person. Personal experience provides a way of knowing based on knowledge from internal revelations based on our professional and personal lives. Williams (1991) gives a succinct explanation of this phenomenon which is valid also in Hong Kong. A general assumption of excellence prevails and favourable comparisons are made with international standards.

The assurance of quality, other than in research, relies principally on the External Examiner system with its claim of ensuring comparability of academic standards within discipline boundaries and across institutions. It may be said that the present system shows evidence of self confidence (if not complacency) legitimized by a selective student entry system and impressive graduate success rates which

mitigate against any significant internal or external scrutiny of quality. Questions can be readily dismissed by reference to academic freedom and autonomy and a denial of the ability of any but the expert to pass judgement on academic matters. The stress on subject expertise as the foundation of academic autonomy is clearly enunciated in the Reynolds Report (1986). Because of this, only academics, it is claimed, are capable of monitoring their own standards. This theme is also described in Barnett (1987, p.298) where he says that the processes of quality assurance in universities occur less in formal interactions established for that purpose than as tacit aspects of the internal collegial life of the university. An alternative, less positive, reading of this situation might prompt doubts about the extent of the existence of quality maintenance.

Elton (1990) argues for greater recognition of the importance of a research based approach to the aspect of an academic's work which relates to teaching. He comments on how strange it is that academics, who in their research would never carry out anything without an understanding of the underlying theory that informs their subjects, do not consider that the teaching aspect of their work deserves to be undertaken upon a similar theoretical basis. He describes the present situation as medieval and cautions that any attempt to establish criteria for excellence based on the present situation might freeze the practice in its present unsatisfactory state.

## Binary Line

In 1965 the British Labour Secretary for State, Anthony Crosland, rejected the proposal of the Robbins Report to allow the British universities to take the main responsibility for higher education. Crosland's decision resulted in the creation of the binary system as an explicit government policy where there was a university sector and a public sector. This became known as the binary line. The polytechnics were to be community based under the control and ownership of the local education authorities (LEAs) and provided locally based students with vocational courses tailored to nearby employment opportunities. The distinctions between the two sectors were also significant in differences in per capita costs per student, staff student ratios and funding for research. Thus the fundamental objective of the binary system was to try and create a diversity of institutional types which would perform different but equally valued functions. While the "binary dimension" to the debate in UK is rapidly disappearing with the transfiguration of almost every polytechnic into a university, in Hong Kong the situation described by Moodie in 1988 (p. 10) may still pertain.

"The binary dimension to the debate on quality lies in the fact that, judged by the conventional criteria of quality established by and within the university world, the polytechnics are inferior institutions".

In Hong Kong it is clear that the binary line is well defined and not likely to fade fast in the near future notwithstanding the striving of the polytechnics to attain university status. The establishment of a binary system in Britain arose from the government's wish to ensure the standards of degrees taught by many different institutions under the control of a number of local authorities. Their solution was to have a *central* degree awarding body, namely the CNAA. The establishment of the HKCAA to validate degrees of institutions who offer *their own* degrees and which are funded centrally by the *same* body which funds the universities makes the Hong Kong binary system difficult to understand in terms of the arguments used to set the system up in Britain (where it has now been abolished). Current debate in Britain centres on assuring quality within the entire higher education sector with no difference being made in terms of accountability between the older universities and the newcomers which have emerged from what was previously the previous public sector. While considerable public money and effort is spent in Hong Kong on making sure polytechnics provide education of an appropriate standard, there has not

yet arisen any similar debate on how, or indeed whether, the universities should explicitly assure the community of their standards.

## Definitions of Quality

"But if you can't say what quality is, how do you know what it is, or how do you know that it even exists?" (Pirsig, p.182.)

The concept that quality has no meaning except in relation to purpose or function is discussed by Ball (1985), Reynolds (1986) and others. Higher education and its institutions have many purposes. Those that fund it and those who are its clients have their own priorities too. For this reason it is essential to start a discussion on quality by defining both what is meant by the term and to put it into context. In describing the difficulties in addressing issues of quality Ball states that intellectually and academically this is one of the most challenging ventures we might undertake. It is also a sensitive issue among those concerned yet of critical importance. De Weert (1990, p.59) says that the only way we can find a secure basis to assess quality is by first acknowledging that institutions of higher learning are goal directed. These goals then provide a framework with both internal and external dimensions upon which quality can be assessed. Barnett (1987) does not define quality per se but emphasises two key aspects of quality maintenance, namely critical self reflection by those involved and direct dialogue between staff and their peers in the wider community. The essential requirement is for evaluation to become part of a continuing process of critical self reflection on the part of the course team rather than simply a spasmodic response to external demands. Moodie (1986, p.34) puts the question of defining quality into the context of higher education with its wide variety of objectives and possible performance indicators. He ascribes the cause of the subjectivity of criteria used in the evaluation of such a complex phenomenon to there being no widely agreed criterion of quality and the fact that complex phenomena are measurable along many different dimensions. In a later paper (Moodie, 1988) he contrasts the overtones of quality in the USA (where access is a key issue), and the UK (where cost effectiveness is linked closely with quality). At its best, he says the American debate makes no pretence that the pursuit of excellence demands the same standards of performance in a institutions of different types and with varying missions.

The Lindop Report (1985) lists various important determinants of quality. Resources and profes-

sional and industrial contacts are seen as critical in assuring quality together with the course structure, the academic staff, academic structure and management, and students. These elements are clearly reflected six years later in the recent publications of the Academic Audit Unit (1991). Williams (1991) avoids defining quality explicitly and prefers to take the approach of seeing whether quality assurance systems are appropriate for the purposes they are designed and used for and whether they work effectively.

Although we cannot easily define quality, self-reflection and dialogue between academics, the government and the community are nevertheless a *sine qua non* feature of its existence.

### Importance of Quality

Warnock (1990) emphasises the importance of quality because, among other reasons, in future years, institutions will be further challenged by an expansion in the number of students with varying needs and expectations, all of whom must be well served. This is the situation in Hong Kong with widening access to higher education created by an increase in the number of degree places. Warnock's definition of quality echoes that used by Williams (1991), Barnett (1987), Moodie (1986), de Weert (1990), Ball (1985) and Reynolds (1986). She says that teaching,

"will be judged good by whether or not it contributes to the achievement of purpose; and that higher education has a variety of purposes, though all of them related to the life chances of the student".

Therefore quality is held to exist by those involved in higher education if they perceive that the process provides them with the outcomes to which they ascribe value in higher education. Quality is most likely to exist when those involved are part of an on-going process to check its existence. Through a debate on definitions of quality we can raise awareness of, and derive explicit definition of, the most valued outcomes of higher education as they are perceived by the institutions, the community and the government.

### Language of Quality

Quality in higher education is assessed by the state, the academic community and the market in different ways and for different purposes. Quality within the academic community is talked about in terms such as peer review, research activity, professional standards, and the need to preserve academic freedom. However with the shift towards more public accountability the language of quality which is used within the state or in a market situation is now being applied to academic programmes. The vocabularies of quality which are used by these three groups differ:

TABLE 1

*Examples of the Terminology of "Quality" (adapted from Barnett, 1991)*

State	Market	Academic Community
Efficiency	Customer satisfaction	Peer review
Accountability	Fitness for purpose	Research
Inspection	Right first time	Standards
Quality assurance	Total quality management	Gold standard
Quality audit	Mission statement	Autonomy

Those to whom higher education is accountable and who control higher education through the allocation of funds and resources are demanding quality assurance and public accountability. The service offered in higher education is student centered and attempts to be as individualized as possible; it tries to celebrate differences in minds, to raise the mean and the variance, which is the very opposite situation to that which pertains in a market orientation where the goal is making everything as similar as possible. There are serious weaknesses in using the approach

of Total Quality Management or the application of BS5750 (or its international equivalent ISO 9000) within higher education. Warnock (1990) comments on the use of an adaptation of BS5750 by some polytechnics. While recognizing that "total quality" corresponds to the ethos within an institution where staff and students share the same goals, she cautions that the concepts of industry are no more than metaphors when applied to higher education even though they may be extremely illuminating.

The values ascribed to higher education will

differ between interested parties and these various values will each be measured by a separate set of standards.

## Performance Indicators and Quality

“Uncritical use of these indicators may seriously damage the health of your university” (University Management Statistics and Performance Indicators, CVCP, 1989)

Almost universally there has been some move towards the use of numerical measures (AVCC, 1988, p.1). There are different contexts in which to employ indicators and there are different indicators which are appropriate. However, the need for institutions to be accountable will not be met by the adoption of a set of performance indicators but by their use in the context of expert review and evaluation of academic performance and in decision making on resources and staffing. The Jarratt Committee (1985) proposed three groups of indicators. Internal indicators including admission and graduation data, external indicators including research records and graduate employment and operational indicators relating to the activities of individual departments. Johnes and Taylor (1990) have tried to design a set of performance indicators which will be useful in evaluating the activities of higher education. They identify four types of information which should be acquired (p.51) and use the techniques provided by production theory to investigate the way in which inputs are transformed into outputs. The use of performance indicators, however, is not straightforward. Inputs within higher education are often used to produce more than one output (for example, the amount of research funding could be used an indicator of staff quality but must also have an impact on teaching quality) and there is no way to estimate input and output relationships for specific outputs (Johnes & Taylor, p.52). Performance indicators based on added value, drop out rates, admission ratios, number of first class degrees and so on give only a very small part of the picture of quality in higher education. Perhaps the only way to measure performance is to take an extremely broad view of what universities do and the processes they use thus avoiding undue reliance being placed on a range of quantifiable indicators.

Within higher education what counts as quality is contested and these different views generate different performance indicators. In an unpublished lecture given in Hong Kong in 1991 Barnett showed that this relationship can be represented in Figure 1.

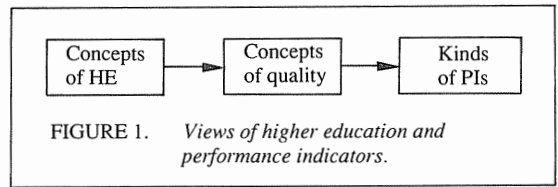


FIGURE 1. *Views of higher education and performance indicators.*

For example, if the dominant ideas in higher education represent higher education as the producer of highly qualified manpower then such a point of view leads to quality being defined as how successful graduates are at work. When higher education is seen as a training for a research career then quality is measured by the research profiles of the staff. If we see quality in higher education as the efficient management of teaching provision the resulting effect is the development of broadening access, a change in the student profile and the adoption of performance indicators which measure throughput and efficiency such as SSRs and non-completion rates. If quality in higher education is seen as its success in widening life's chances then the institution adopts flexible admission policies and measures its success in the growth of student numbers and the range of entry qualifications. None of these views look at the quality of the process but all look at higher education as a system and compare inputs and outputs. If one adopts a conception of higher education which is educational in character and reflects concerns with the students' minds then such a conception might include the initiation of people into academic disciplines, the development of the student's individual autonomy and integrity, a cross disciplinary formation of general intellectual abilities and perspectives and the development of critical reasoning. This conception does not easily lend itself to the use of quantitative performance indicators. Because of the accent on summative evaluation and regulation and a model of quality control tends to give greater weight to goals which are measurable than those which are not (de Weert, 1990). Becher (1989, p.165) summarizes this. It is, he says,

“.. unjust and inappropriate to lump together for administrative purposes different institutions, different institutions, different subject departments and different individuals taking little or no account of the variety of characteristics which they may between them quite reasonably display”.

On a warning note he cautions (p.169) that

“...too forceful an imposition of the extrinsic values of accountability and relevance on the intrinsic values of reputation-seeking and quality control by peer group judgement can only lead to intellectual subservience and thence to academic sterility”.

He concludes (p.171)

“...the more it becomes necessary to recognize the academic scene as disjointed and compartmentalized, the more essential it becomes to turn towards an apprehension of that scene in its entirety”.

We see that presently the state, in Hong Kong as in other countries, tends to build into its resource allocation performance indicators which reflect efficiency. An example is the necessity for institutions to report space utilization statistics to the UPGC. The state is concerned with the control of resources and keeping spending in check. The state also controls the type of course offered. Examples can be found in the replies from the UPGC to institutions Academic Development Plans where a number of proposals are rejected. States also increasingly wish to compare institutions and to make legitimate comparisons. The recent comparison of building costs per square meter between the HKUST and CPHK is a case in point. They need performance indicators which are easy to handle – thus we see the use of numerical performance indicators which fit this need. The false premise that numerical performance indicators are value free may make them appear attractive but can be a method by which the state exerts control over higher education. Numerical performance indicators are often insensitive to context and the different missions of various institutions. Conjoining the different entities of *quantity* and *quality*, such as by depicting performance indicators is fundamentally illogical.

In Hong Kong the UPGC normally requests from institutions performance indicators which are internationally classified as simply *background* to *quality*. With indications of growing financial constraints and perhaps even citizens' charters the need for better measures of process and value added may not be far off.

### Different Views of Quality

Higher education has itself not always been explicit about what quality is. Therefore the imposition from outside of an inappropriate or inadequate model to judge quality is a reflection of the lack of effort from within higher education itself. In various ways higher education must show that it is using money properly and giving students good experiences. An acceptable way to judge performance should be developed through negotiation between the state, higher education and the market. This recognizes the interplay between the three parties and acknowledges the validity of the different needs and aims of those involved and addresses directly the

question of how to investigate the issue of quality by a set of methods.

The appropriate combination of self assessment, peer review and performance indicators will continuously change and this change should be sustained and planned for (de Velt, 1991). No one approach would individually be acceptable to all parties but by having a variety of complementary approaches we can allow the concerned parties to derive the type of assurance of quality which is desired for their own purposes. When we are dealing with the evaluation of higher education we find ourselves in systems of a multi-layer nature. De Velt (1991, p.179) describes this well.

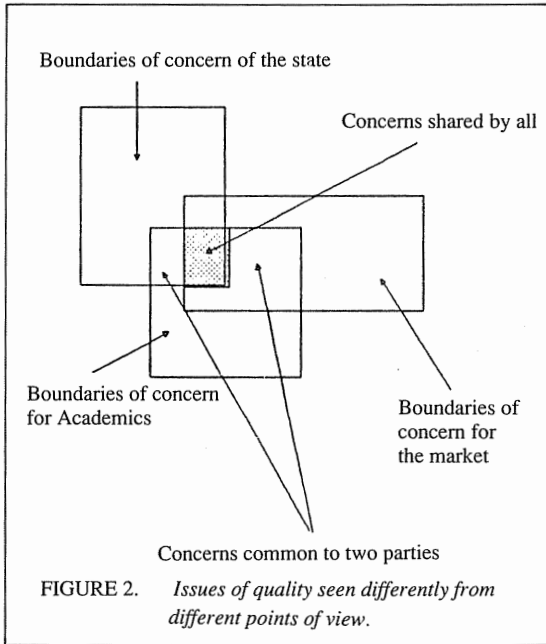
“That means we find ourselves in a multi-actor environment with semi-autonomy for many actors, with no monopoly for any actor, in which all the actors influence themselves, have their own partially different set of objectives and constraints and all cooperate in a public or semi public system of evaluation. So, because of the diversity of the objectives and positions of the actors, evaluation systems (unless they are secret) will always be multi-functional. And the functions are potentially contradictory”.

The state will need to know that its investment in the tertiary sector is being used well. Comparability between institutions by the use of acceptable PIs may not be disadvantageous to higher education as a whole. International comparisons can be used to point out inefficient systems. Weifang (1991, p.157) illustrates his argument that higher education in China is costing a lot due to inefficiency. He supports his case by comparing SSRs and room utilization statistics in China with those in other countries.

The UFC in the U.K. has started making funding decisions for British universities based on assessments of quality derived, in large part, from measures of publications. If fair and equitable measures were available then the growth in their use and influence could be acceptable and beneficial.

The market's needs may be satisfied through a quite different vocabulary of quality but there will be some overlap in what both the market and the state see as showing quality to exist. We are dealing with a variety of ways of seeing quality, not islands of quality visited by only one or another party in the quest to assure itself of the existence of quality in higher education. Different parts of the continuum appeal to the needs of different sectors. This is illustrated in Figure 2.

While this relationship and interaction is acknowledged, it is strongly asserted that it is the work of the academic to devise and produce the continuum. Neither the market nor the state has the need to use the continuum of quality assurance which the



academic has. As providers of higher education we are accountable to both the market and the state and also to ourselves. By addressing the whole issue of quality from within higher education we can reassure ourselves that we are doing a good job as well as arming ourselves with valid data when we have to have discussion with representatives of the state or the market. Neither the state nor the market needs to speak the vocabulary of quality of the academic but the academic must be a "quality polyglot" so that he can talk to all parties using a language of quality appropriate to the others' needs and concerns.

This assumes that academics can no longer be the sole arbiters of quality. Those controlling and performing the evaluations must understand the needs and values of the state, the market and higher education. They must adopt measures of performance satisfactory to all three, making explicit the values which are being represented in terms which carry validity in relation to the needs of those concerned.

### Self and Peer Evaluation

The key aspects of quality assurance in higher education are critical self-reflection by those involved and dialogue between academic staff and their peers in the wider community. Many mentions in the literature are made to the value of peer review. This is common to all parts of the world including Australia, the United States of America, Canada and Europe. Alberta's Private Colleges Accreditation

Board lists self-study as an important instrument in course approval. This may not reflect the same priorities as other universities say in Hong Kong, but the emphasis on self appraisal is still the recognised means of quality assurance. In the Policies Procedures and Standards of the Accrediting Commission of the Association of Independent Colleges and Schools, Washington, self evaluation is defined as "...the most important phase of the accreditation process". The Council of graduate Schools in the United States has adopted a process of evaluation in which an intensive self evaluation which is introspective and analytical is required. It encourages institutions to determine the quality of their programs through an assessment of outcomes concerning the attainment of the stated objectives. Frazer (1990) emphasises his conclusion that real and enduring quality can only come by the actions of the universities themselves and sees the role of agencies such as the HKCAA as being to help those engaged in higher education to be self critical and reflective. He sees self evaluation working best when strongly supported by peer review in the field and that means seeking advice from those in industry, commerce and the professions as well as from student feedback.

This theme is taken up by Becher (1989, p.60) who sees responsibility for quality control as being a collective responsibility distributed across the whole membership of a given group. His research shows the principle of mutual judgement by informed specialists to be well-founded in that only those with mastery in the field are seen as capable of making authoritative appraisal within it. Peer review can serve to maintain overall standards as well as recognize individual excellence.

Warnock too supports internal self evaluation as being the most effective and appropriate method for higher education institutions (p.23). Williams (in Moodie, 1986, p.36) agrees that the expertise of experts is of paramount importance in setting and judging standards but raises the question of "*Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*". It is the process by which standards are set and the mechanisms of evaluation which should be considered important. He cites the advantages of self regulation including relevance and flexibility of response to changing circumstances; the capacity to assess performance according to many different criteria; and internalization of these criteria such that internal conflict is minimized. However, he also warns of the dangers of a conflict between self-regulation and self-interest. De Weert (1990, p.57) gives the example of the French President Mitterand who, when he set up a committee for the evaluation of universities, said,

“L'Évaluation objective des forces et des faiblesses des universités est le contrepartie même, normale, de leur autonomie”.

Part of this autonomy is the recognition that institutions of higher education themselves are primarily responsible for the quality of their education. M.A. Staropoli, secretary of the French Comité National d'Évaluation states that the aim of this committee is

“less to wield permanent powers of balance or control than to try to develop the academic system's own capacities of evaluation and hence to permit the whole system to regulate itself”.

Self reflection and evaluation are recognised universally by academics and within higher education as the most appropriate and effective means of quality assurance.

### Framework for Quality

Checklists of conditions or mechanisms necessary for good quality to exist within higher education abound. While steering clear of defining quality nevertheless a pre-requisite framework for quality assurance within higher education is well documented (Academic Audit Unit, 1990; Warnock, 1990; Frazer, 1990; HKCAA, 1991; Elton, 1990). There is general agreement on what should exist although not everything appears on everyone's list. These criteria are summarized here: There should be mechanisms for quality assurance in the following:

1. provision and design of programmes of study with an identifiable framework of critical self evaluation;
2. teaching, learning and communication showing clarity of aims and objectives and confidence in their validity and relevance;
3. policies regarding all aspects of curriculum development, operation and management;
4. relation to academic staff with professional development in both subject and teaching knowledge and staff appraisal; and
5. taking account of and acting on the views of external examiners, students, employers and professional bodies.

Detailed lists of desirable characteristics of teachers and learners are found in Frazer (1990, pp.14-15). Barnett also adds a list of characteristics of a desirable review system (1987, p.295). The challenge to those involved in higher education is to link these concepts with the value systems of the market and the state.

### Shifting Locus of Quality Control

Barnett (1990) has a clear view on where higher education finds itself. With the rapid growth in higher education more professions have taken to recruiting their members from higher education and in turn higher education has extended its services from the elite professions of the law, medicine and the church, to provide courses geared to an extensive range of professions. In addition many graduates enter general occupations which do not require a definite professional training. The reasons for this are that modern society is founded on a knowledge base and higher education, as an institution for the preservation and dissemination of knowledge, is a key institution in that kind of society. Knowledge particularly in its dominant forms in engineering and technology has become a productive force in its own right resulting in an incorporation of higher education into the central framework of modern society. This leads to a discussion about the locus of quality control in higher education which today lies in a tripartite arena between three different interest groups, namely the academic community, the state and the market. This has an obvious parallel in Frazer's (1991) diagram of the locus of accountability of higher education to the various groups who have vested interests in it and influence over it. This appears in Figure 3.

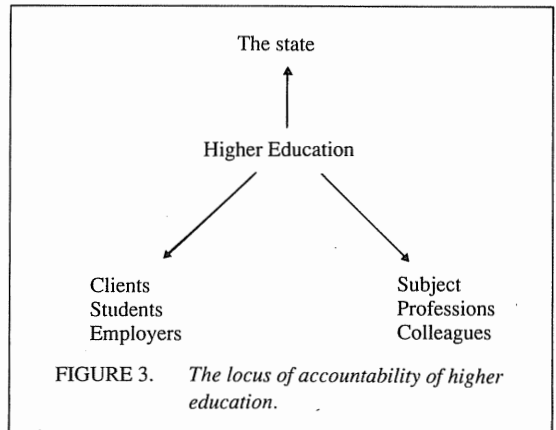
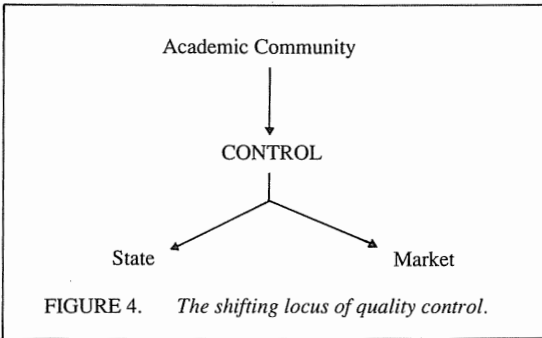


FIGURE 3. *The locus of accountability of higher education.*

This represents a shift from the past when the academic community operated virtually autonomously and provided courses which were rarely subject to external scrutiny or judgement. The analysis of Frazer's model is, however, more complex than the diagram in Figure 3 implies. This tripartite struggle to control quality should not really be depicted as a series of simple lines with no interconnections. The UPGC institutions are affected by

policies of the state represented by the UPGC, the Hong Kong Government, the HKCAA and so on. The institutions also respond to the market (student demand, professional bodies) and the state is also affected by the people who comprise the market. Figure 4 illustrates the various forces in play.



This is very simple description of complex interactions within which the institutions themselves are both proactive and reactive. The state's control is exercised mainly through the widening scope of the HKCAA, the use of performance indicators by UPGC to compare institutions, and the UPGC's control over which new programmes an institution will be funded to offer. The significance of market forces is changing through the huge increase in the number of places mainly created by the creation of HKUST and the new programmes being offered in the polytechnics. It will rest with the institutions of higher education themselves whether the locus of control shifts toward the state and/or the market or whether all parties can arrive at an equitable cooperative approach where all are equal partners in the debate.

### Cultural context

Looking at the cultural context of Hong Kong is important. In an analysis of the professional bureaucracy Redding (1990) shows that the massive variety of work done in a university means that the main coordinating work can only be done by the academics themselves and that this process whereby professionals within the university form the core is a fundamental basis for its organizational structure. The way such an organization thrives depends on an accepted authority and common ideology. This provides academics with autonomy but means they are loosely controlled thus, in principle, fostering the growth of highly motivated and skilled people. However, the danger within this framework is that outside agencies may attempt to impose direct requirements thus threatening the autonomy of the system through

the imposition of bureaucratic controls and particularly inappropriate performance indicators. If this tendency is allowed to continue it can result in driving out quality and destroying effectiveness. Redding argues that there is a potential impact of culture on such an organization. Asian cultures, according to Redding, characteristically evince high amounts of personalism and obligation-bonding and rest on sensitively perceived hierarchies. Westerners tend to stress participation and individual need-fulfillment, widespread empowerment and openness of communications. Redding concludes that the specific threats to higher education in Hong Kong are that its isolation may cause a lessening of the impact of professional norms on standards of behaviour in a discipline. As this is a primary source of standards control, particularly in the peer review process, this could be considered a serious effect. The obvious existence and promotion of a "culture of care" (in particular regarding quality), within an institution justifies claims that Academic Boards and Senates exercise real control of standards. Validation, especially in the Hong Kong context, may serve as a means of developing professional and institutional self-confidence and helping justify autonomy and status. Its role is thus symbolic and motivational rather than normative, a system that ensures that people think seriously and consistently about all aspects of their academic work (Church, 1988).

### Summary

The preceding review of the literature has focussed on issues of defining and assessing quality in higher education. A major finding has been that quality has no meaning except in relation to purpose and function; quality assurance systems should be evaluated to see if they are appropriate for the purpose for which they are designed and whether they work effectively. Institutions themselves should make their missions public and clearly known and adopt appropriate quality assurance systems to ensure that they are meeting their own goals. Researchers and educators over many years have consistently concluded that critical self-reflection by those involved and dialogue between academic staff and their peers in the wider community are key aspects of quality; members of the academic community should themselves make measurements of particular characteristics of quality as not doing so leaves open the possibility of the imposition from outside of inappropriate or inadequate models to judge quality. The language of quality that is relevant to the funding



bodies, the public, and the institutions of higher education may differ. It is ultimately the responsibility of the tertiary sector to develop a series of performance indicators which reflect their own concepts of higher education and also those of the other parties who have an interest as consumers or as providers of resources. It is in this way that academics can best ensure that public accountability is achieved without compromise of academic standards or deviation from their own institutional missions.

The locus of control of quality is shifting from an autonomous academic community to the state and the market; the political aspect of state control of education can have a latent impact on university freedom. A systematic advanced and enabling level of higher education is important to the continued success of Hong Kong and the continued autonomy of higher education is best guaranteed by the academic community taking responsibility to ensure that they do what they consider best and take care to provide convincing evidence of their success in meeting the requirements of those who control the funds.

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