

# Clustering External Quality Assurance Benefits. Challenges. Options.



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# External Quality Assurance



- Accountability (publicly-funded institutions)
- Sets standards of quality (institutional and programme)
- Aims to protect students and their experiences
- Aims to maintain reputation of awards/degrees
- Aims to support developments
- Strives for comparability across national institutions
- Strives for compatibility with international institutions

# Clustering – HOW?



- By institutions (similar profiles)
- By faculties/departments across institutions
- By programmes across institutions
- By programmes within institutions
  - ⇒ accreditation by domain/field
  - ⇒ accreditation by groupings of fields
  - ⇒ accreditation by level of teaching (Bachelor, Master's, PhD)
- By standards reviewed

# Clustering – WHY?



- Managing limited human resources
- Reducing burden (effort and time)
- Reducing costs
- Maintaining oversight of sector
- Stimulating developments
- Identifying substandard practices

# Clustering – WHEN?



## IF? – Cultural patterns of behaviour

- After (at least) a full cycle for sector
- When maturity is demonstrated => when internal systems can take on the responsibility of driving quality
- When existing standards are achieved and exceeded consistently
- When exhaustive external procedures seem to render fewer benefits and just be seen as burdensome

# Clustering – CHALLENGES



- No longer comprehensive information at institutional level
- No longer detailed information regarding specific programmes (what students are interested in)
- Chances of issues/problems slipping through the net
- Insufficiently strong or functional alternative options
- Resources having to be moved rather than optimised (setting up alternatives can also be costly)
- Limited possibility for interinstitutional comparisons (ranking)

# Clustering – BENEFITS



- More responsibility by the institution
- More good practice generated internally
- More sector oversight
- Stronger sense of comparability
- More opportunity for standards development
- Less resource-intensive (?)
- Better focused attention on some key elements



# Clustering – ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS



- Use of data (ongoing)
- Monitoring and/or periodic/cyclical light touch assessment, possibly by random sampling
- Replacing with risk-based system
- Combining with risk-based system
- Instituting a strong public complaints system (if culturally appropriate)
- Instituting a strong “punishment/reward” system