

EQUIPE CASE STUDY
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**Under siege from quality initiatives -
making them work for adult learners**

Introduction

This case study will discuss how my institution has tried to meet all the demands from external parties regarding quality. It will discuss how we have treated our staff to ensure that these quality initiatives impact appropriately. How staff have been kept fully informed so as not to demotivate them has been key. Another lesson is how to ensure the needs of the learner has not been lost through a period of chaotic change. Finally I will discuss how it is essential that quality initiatives must complement each other and not impact on each other to the detrimental effect of staff and the learner.

Over the last few years university continuing education in Britain has been under constant bombardment from the UK Government, funding agencies and others to raise standards and to 'establish and sustain a culture of continuous improvement' (Raising Standards in Post-16 Learning 2001, 2). A climate of external scrutiny and audit has been imposed.

Goldsmiths College University of London has a large department of Professional and Community Education. We have strived to meet the needs, firstly of the learner but at the same time meeting the needs of the all the external pressures related to quality in the higher education sector.

Quality and Change

The International Organization for Standardisation (ISO) defines quality as the 'totality of characteristics of an entity that bears on its ability to satisfy stated and implied needs'. Edward Sallis in Geoffrey Doherty's book says 'quality is key to any college's survival and success'. (Doherty, 1994, 226)

There are countless definitions of quality and some argued that it is more difficult to define what quality is rather than what it is not. A cliché, 'quality is a journey not a destination' is apt. Perhaps this best describes all quality initiatives and is an indication of what is required in today's climate with the emphasis being on quality provision.

The adult and continuing education culture has to continue to change if it is to remain a driving force in the field of education. There is now fierce competition and the learner is aware they have a choice and can attend the college or access the e-learning that provides the best provision to meet their learning needs.

We are currently going through a period of emphasis on globalisation which, in turn, according to Edwards, increases 'economic competition and is a requirement for flexibility'. (Edwards, 1997, 14) This in turn has impacted markets marking way for 'customised market niches' rather than a mass market. Consequently this has effected change on the whole working practice and the definition of skills. (Edwards,

1997, 14) Although globalisation does not impact adult and community education per se its effects do. The resultant affects in culture are shifting with the post-modern emphasis being on 'style and taste' rather than 'functional qualities'. (Edwards, 1997, 15) Students who are enrolling now are demanding a more diverse programme. Apart from the vocational agenda they wish to enhance their lives in other less instrumental ways. Programmes need to be provided and as always the emphasis must be on quality of provision.

The Doughnut Principle

University adult educators must be professionals in their outlook in order to compete and provide this quality education for the learner.

Charles Handy in his book *The Empty Raincoat* discusses the 'doughnut principle of management'. (Handy, 1994, 65-79) He uses the simile of a ring doughnut - the centre of the ring being the compulsory tasks that have to be carried out by management, but within the confines of the dough ring the staff can work freely. Handy also quotes Ian Gibson, chief executive of Nissan Motor Manufacturing in Britain. Gibson takes this principle further and talks about the implications of a diamond doughnut where it is tough, inflexible and has rigid lines of reporting and communication without any room for change, flexibility or manoeuvre. He compares this with the Japanese organisations whose doughnuts are mud and can be easily shaped and moulded in response to external forces. (Handy, 1994, 172)

This doughnut principle can be adapted and applied to my College in order to respond to the period of chaotic change and onslaught of quality initiatives. However, I feel, there would need to be a minor change and in keeping with post modernity I would adopt a *chocolate* doughnut principle. The centre ring would remain as the mandatory tasks and the outer *chocolate* ring can be warmed and moulded, indicative of staff training and the introduction of the changes. Whilst 'warm' the doughnut would be flexible to accommodate the rush of change that is currently happening. The doughnut would cool and set until it had to be warmed again to accommodate the next performance monitoring initiative that was forwarded to the College and the staff. Whilst the doughnut is warm it would be flexible to mould and check but not too flexible that chaos would reign and the staff would have free licence to work without any attention to standards and quality. This fits the Goldsmiths culture where creativity is king!

Total Quality Management

TQM is an acronym often used in relation to quality initiatives but its meaning is not always clear. TQM is not in itself a standard to aim for in our higher education context, but is indicated as a quality improvement initiative. Sallis and Hingley in Doherty indicated that there are 3 systems of quality assurance for a University to chose between and one is TQM. (Doherty, 1994, 12) It is discussed that once TQM is established that it should be improved all the time and it is the responsibility of **all** staff to better the systems to identify the problems and negotiate solutions.

TQM is not a standard in itself but the use of a standard or charter mark could lead to TQM. Sallis in Doherty considers that TQM is considered as to be a large scale wholesale improvement whereas Kaizen is a small scale 'step by step improvement'. (Doherty, 1994, 234). In my opinion it has become just another acronym and that we

would be better advised to follow the acronym CI - continuous improvement. Tony Hann in Doherty remarked that 'TQM was more than going round smiling at everyone'! (Doherty, 1994, 26)

Many Japanese firms use the known techniques of quality circles (QCs) or quality improvement teams (QITs). These working parties take small steps forward towards quality - Kaizen - continuous improvement. British companies have also adopted this principle to their advantage.

In my opinion some institutions who have adopted TQM achieve the relative charter mark and then perhaps coast until the next inspection or monitoring visit. Continuous improvement or as the Japanese refer to Kaizen, is always striving to improve. With the current changes and systems being forced on adult learning institutions would be, in my opinion better advised to adopt the Kaizen principle and introduce it to their staff in order that quality provision can be provided for the learner. Changes could be introduced on a gradual step-by-step scale dispelling fear and encouraging and promoting confidence in the changes.

Self Assessment

One definition of self-assessment is 'a structured way of involving staff in evaluating provision.' (Kenway & Reisenberger 2001, 3) My College had many staff who were shocked at this way of analysing performance, they deluded themselves into thinking that their teaching performance was exemplary. Therefore the first task was to re-educate the staff to analyse their own performance.

Training sessions are important, starting with the senior management team and cascading down throughout the organisation. The staff attend performance review sessions and are fully supported by their managers.

The results are that the majority of staff willingly identified their strengths and their weaknesses and were able to evidence this. As you can see the 'chocolate doughnut' principle came into play, the doughnut was warmed by fully briefing the management team, staff were committed to attending the training and the response was extremely positive in the majority of cases. However, with all new initiatives there were some problems because there were some staff who did not respond as we had hoped.

There are different perspectives staff can have on quality initiatives that I discovered why some staff did not respond to the training. I identified within our own staff base the people who had not responded well to the change of accountability for were closet 'cultural restorationists'. (Edwards, 1997, 64).

PLEASE SEE THE CHART AT THE END FOR A BREAKDOWN OF THIS. 'Contesting Provision for Adult Learners'

These 'cultural restorationists' are staff members who have been teaching for years in the same way, adapting in their own subject but not overall to meet the ever changing demands of the quality initiatives. This minority group of staff have found themselves isolated and further training has been offered in order to warm up their part of the doughnut.

Shore and Wright discuss inspection in their article and indicate that in many cases upon arrival of these outside quality inspectors

what is witnessed is 'an artificial and staged performance'. (Shore & Wright, unpublished, 22). It is known, according to Shore that inspections 'generate a climate of tension' and also can 'acquire characteristic features of ritual' rather than a true teaching performance. In my opinion this can certainly be the case in some instances however, what was discovered in my College was that in the majority of cases a true teaching performance was witnessed, but the main difference was a productive peer observation scheme, in spite of the external audit and certainly not because of it!

Edwards discusses 5 aspects of change: 'its nature; the speed, the contested nature of change, the problems and the changes in the self.' (Edwards, 1997, 24) As a College we try to address all of these to instigate a feeling of confidence in the peer review process rather than any feelings of worry or despair.

Quality management colleagues have themselves been in chaos. Charles Handy discusses the Theory of Complexity and the Theory of Chaos and indicates that it is very uncomfortable in the middle of change but from chaos, institutions can learn and move forward. That is what we are doing and I will explain how. (Handy, 1994, 17-19).

The staff whose performance was affected were approached and training and support was offered. Their reaction again continued to astound. It was apparent to me that a number of the staff base - the closet 'cultural restorationists' could simply not handle change and many have left rather than face what they felt was humiliation. In any case, staff are closely monitored via student evaluation and feedback through course monitoring procedures.

Mentoring Scheme

The College has a mentoring scheme for all new academic staff. The mentoring scheme was another initiative set up to initiate new academics in the quality of teaching that was required.

Tutors who wish to be mentors are trained and the ethos is that they disseminate good practice and help through confidential support and peer observation of their mentees.

Lessons to be Learned

The management of the College has been rather reactive, rather than pro active in the issues of quality in teaching and learning. My institution has tried to prepare for institutional audits by instigating teams but what had been demonstrated was how this system had impacted one on another to the detrimental affect on both staff and the learner. Some become cynical of the 'quality industry'.

The staff need to be complemented on the time and effort that they put in as dedicated facilitators of learning. When done, this had a positive effect in building up the damaged areas and helped to promote real quality across the College. **The emphasis was and should always be put on the positive aspects of the quality process.**

Our institution is all about providing quality provision for the learner. We should ensure that staff are aware of this and have the necessary tools to successfully execute their role. This seems like common sense but is not always common practice.

It is essential for the institution to adopt methods via training and development to meet not only the requirements of quality initiatives but also the needs of staff and the learners. This is where Shore and Wright's article discusses the audit culture. They say, "**In short, we need to make our discipline's 'culture' more explicit for ourselves, and not merely at the behest of external inspectorates.**" (Shore & Wright, unpublished, 17). We are all bombarded with quality initiatives and standards dictated by others but our responsibility as facilitators of adult learning is to the staff to prepare them to provide quality provision for the learner.

CONCLUSION

The culture of university continuing education is moving from the sometimes world of the 'amateur' to the business like world where accountability is paramount and the needs of the learner uppermost in the minds of everyone.

Our quality systems must be maintained as in the Japan systems of CI Continuous Improvement. These systems must be carried out with clear definitions of what is required ensuring good open lines of communication. The audit system must not rely on fear or staged performances but on a clear system of measured performance. As I discussed earlier, with our systems of inspection, our College is endeavouring to measure the teaching and learning in order to provide quality provision for the learner. Self evaluation and a reflective practitioner approach is a positive way forward. In order to work well any training must be comprehensive and judgements must be made against clear criteria and not at all subjective. However what we had not anticipated was how this impacted other areas internally and the resentment of certain staff to scrutiny.

Despite our best efforts the results of the external review impacted our internal arrangements and informal 'soft' support systems including the mentoring system. In future for our College and for others it is essential that the wider picture is considered so that these internal quality systems are devised to work in harmony rather than work against and impact each other adversely.

As a result of these externally imposed systems the staff morale fell and it was only with effective training that lasting damage was avoided. **Staff development is the key issue, as I have discussed, when dealing with change and the introduction of any new quality system.** I endeavour to inspire confidence and work *with* the academic culture in order to avoid the negative effects of quality systems working *against* each other.

Sometimes it seems like we are subject to fads and fashion of the quality industry and are quality initiative 'victims.' It helps that we are willing to share our experience of external scrutiny and the lengthy paper trail that audit in the UK requires. But it would appear to me that as institutions are busy preparing for inspections, compiling portfolios of evidence to impress the inspectors they are at risk of forgetting the learner! **They appear to be forgetting the fundamental principles of why we are here: to provide quality**

teaching for the learner, guidance for them ensuring equality of opportunity. I am convinced that when the hysteria of all the changes have died down common sense will prevail once more and we will work together to meet the learners' needs.

Staff training and development has a crucial role. In my view it is essential that institutions 'warm the *chocolate*' by training the staff so they are able to cascade the theory from the policies and initiatives into practice throughout the institution.

Working together with colleagues we will be ready and prepared to embrace the next set of changes in the quality agenda. As Mike Kent reports in TES, 'Performance Management won't last. It's just an initiative. There'll be another one along in five minutes' (TES, 15.03.02, 5). I will be ready.

MCH
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Contesting Provision for Adult Learners

	Cultural Restorationists	Modernisers	Progressives
Form of Analysis	Provision too permissive. National culture and academic standards under threat	Provision too staid, academic and anti-industrial. National economic performance under threat.	Provision too staid, reinforcing dominant interests. Rights and equity under threat.
Definition of Provision	The academic, the cultivation of literary and aesthetic sensibilities and the reproduction of culture. Moral subordination.	The needs of industry and the economy. Applied knowledge, flexible skills, correct attitudes.	The needs of citizens. The cultivation of critical skills, knowledge and understanding to function in a complex social formation. Moral questioning.
Modes of Control	Stronger state control over institutions and curriculum. Proscription of non-subjects and 'politicised' curriculum.	Consumer control/ influence, with employers in positions of critical influence. Responsive to the requirements of the market	Learner control/ influence. Forms of democratic accountability. Responsive to the requirements of the community.
Styles of Practice	Formal relationships between tutors and learners. Summative assessment and selection. Competitive individualism and an emphasis on cognitive skills.	Innovation, shift of emphasis from teaching to learning. Formative assessment and development. Co-operation, group work and an emphasis on process, social skills and ways of knowing	Learner centeredness. Negotiated curriculum. Emphasis on formative assessment where required. Co-operation, group work and an emphasis on process and 'empowerment'.

R. Edwards: 'Changing Places' (1997)