

ENQA Members' Forum 2024

Quality on a schedule? The complicated relationship between QA and time



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Dr. Oliver Vettori, WU Vienna / ENGAGE.EU



Time as the Greatest Mystery?



„(Time has) a different rhythm in any different place and passes here differently from there“ (Rovelli 2019: 16f)

Temporalities in higher education

- *'time is at the core of any form of education'* (Decuyper & Vanden Broeck, 2020: 603)
- the different temporalities of academia cannot be separated from the indicators that govern academic life and define success (cf. Felt 2017)
- Higher education as a 'timescape in which participants manage their own and others' time according to normative frameworks' (cf. Bennet & Burke 2018: 914)



Chronopolitics: Time as a technology of governance



the political use of clock time as a close companion of modernisation, including regulating time as well as defining and imposing time norms (cf. Adam 2003)

Periodicity and rhythm: Improvement in cycles



- Frequency of review cycles impacts approach to IQA/EQA
 - with huge differences across the EHEA (between 5 and 10 years for a cycle, including differences between institutional and programme level within one system)
- Action plans (as well as strategic plans) are packaging ambitions into temporal units
 - Leading to risk-averseness and quick fixes

Regularity and continuity: the temporal cages of „improvement“



- The two-fold meaning of “continuity”:
 - regularity and repeatedness (e.g. measurements)
 - growth and advancement (e.g. improvement)
- Problem of trajectorial thinking and comparing quantities over time
 - unreflected use of “time coordinates”
 - Overinterpreting changes in data

Timescales and time budgets:

- Follow ups on conditions and recommendations rarely consider time budgets and institutional timescales
 - Oriented at methodological framework rather than at organizational realities
 - can differ considerably between (and sometimes within) national systems
- Cost for QA is not calculated as full cost, in particular time wise



The unreflected temporal norms embedded in quality standards



The need to reflect different aspects of time



Further reading:

Vettori, O. (2023). No time for improvement? The chronopolitics of quality assurance. *Quality in Higher Education*, 29(3), 407–420.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13538322.2023.2189454>

Felt, U., (2017) 'Under the shadow of time: where indicators and academic values meet', *Engaging Science, Technology, and Society*, 3, 53–63.

Compton-Lilly, C. (2016), 'Time in education: intertwined dimensions and theoretical possibilities', *Time & Society*, 25(3), 575–593.