

**QUALITY ENHANCEMENT: A NEW STEP IN A RISKY BUSINESS?  
A FEW ADUMBRATIONS ON ITS PROSPECT  
FOR  
HIGHER EDUCATION IN EUROPE.**

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**INTRODUCTION.**

We have gathered together here to address, dissect our views on, and exchange our perceptions of the potential Quality Enhancement and the application of risk analysis may both have as new and potentially significant additions to the instrumentality of the Evaluative State. Like most issues that have to do with weighing up of Quality, and with the conditions and criteria associated with valorizing knowledge, the implications follow from the way the happy descriptor is operationalized and the implications that, in turn flow from the process of operationalization, are to say the least, delicate. They are delicate, given the economic situation most of our higher education systems currently confront. This situation they have in varying degrees had to face over the past three years or more. And, even the most unbridled of economists can give no clear statement as to how long the situation is likely to last.

One of the more salient features of the Evaluative State is the weight it places on “policy as action” as opposed to “policy as reflection”. Absence of speed, failure to fall in with the expeditive ethic, we have been told these 20 years past till we are all blue in the face, is a manifest evidence of inefficiency, of resistance to change, of obduracy in the face of the beneficent workings of the Prince and his efforts to harness higher education to speeding up the transition of our nations towards the Knowledge Economy. Concentration on other than the immediate and the short term is not always the essence of our business. And policy as reflection, tends sometimes to be seen as “swinging the lead”, dereliction of duty and an implied unwillingness wholeheartedly to embrace the responsibilities the Prince wishes us to assume.

Yet, the purpose of our meeting is precisely this: to step aside from “policy as action”. Instead, we have the opportunity to spend the next few days examining what the main construct for operationalizing and developing Quality, efficiency and enterprise (Neave, 1988) namely, the Evaluative State, has achieved. And within that broader framework, to weigh up the significance that Quality Enhancement and Risk-factoring hold out for shaping it further.

There are many ways we can move on this. I, for my part, will move in from a long-term perspective to these issues by taking an historical approach. Historians are sometimes useful in holding up such a mirror. But the holding up of mirrors can also be a risky business indeed. As with Caliban in the Tempest, the holding up of mirrors tends to enrage those who see such reflections as caricatures. Still, if you want to know where you ought to go, it is as well to know how you came from where you have come. It's sometimes a consoling experience.

## THE EPIDEMIOLOGICAL TEMPTATION.

Precisely because policy in the Evaluative State is increasingly time enforced, reflection is a necessary step and never more so than today. Without it, the higher education community *sensu lato* has little means of resisting what is sometimes called the “Epidemiological Temptation”, that is to rush to do something because others are doing it. Or to rush because, if we do **not** do it, the accusation can be leveled at us by those who do, that *they* are at the cutting edge of “policy as action” and therefore ‘keeping up with ‘the competition’. We, by the same token, are not. Without reflection, however, the danger is very real that “policy as action” simply degenerates into “policy as psittacisme”: (parrot fever).

I will set out the development of the Evaluative State in Europe in terms of four broadly chronological stages. These are:

Stage 1 Origins, Scope and Purpose:

Stage 2 Refining Procedures, Re-defining Ownership.

Stage 3 Quality Enhancement: an Evolutive Dimension.

Stage 4 Higher Education as a Risky Business.

This *tour d’horizon* interprets both Quality Enhancement and Risk factoring as successive stages that place new interpretations and open the way to new insights on the Evaluative State. I will argue that Quality Enhancement and Risk factoring represent Stages 3 and 4. I will also set out the specificities and identifying features of each stage. Prior to this and as a general background, I will attend to the more significant driving forces that came together to form the Evaluative State. I will examine variations in the aims and purposes that different nations laid upon their edition of the Evaluative State.

## THE DANGERS OF OVER-FOCUSING.

The Evaluative State is the product of economic crisis. A close scrutiny of the timing of the early moves towards the Evaluative State, the setting up of agencies and procedures, norms and criteria by which Quality was defined, ascertained and identified, were the outcome of earlier economic difficulty. The press for greater efficiency, squeezed higher education expenditure were amongst the most powerful drivers at the onset of the Evaluative State above all in the late 80s in the UK and the Netherlands. But, economic crisis was not the whole picture. Even so, the point may be made that in such systems as France, Spain and Portugal towards the end of the last century reining in public expenditure came eventually to play its part in shaping the Evaluative State in those countries as well. However, in both the UK and the Netherlands, New Public Management and the Neo Liberal construct were both central in re defining higher education’s purpose – to respond to “the market”. They also shaped the instrumentality and the function of the agencies set up to verify higher education’s course. In other words, higher education’s strategic purpose henceforth lay in generating those skills and that knowledge, held to sustain the Nation’s competitive viability in a region destined for closer integration on the one hand, and as a condition for successful transition towards a “Knowledge-based” economy on the other. In this, higher education had a dual mandate: first, to put in hand inner reform, the better second, to sustain that broader transition at nation state level and hopefully

uphold the nation's wellbeing within the new conditions emerging from the Knowledge Economy. (Horta and Heitor, 2011)

Put succinctly, the focus on Quality and the verification of performance - the central purpose of the Evaluative State – served to “steer” higher learning towards what two of our colleagues term the “quasi-economic university”. (Teixeira and Dill, 2011) and others “the entrepreneurial university” (Clark, 1998, 2003)

#### THE SCOPE OF OUR DEBATE.

The origins of the Evaluative State were coterminous with economic crisis. Indeed, steering by quality and performance sought explicitly to improve both adaptability of higher education to the market and the speed of response by individual establishments. From this, it is safe to conclude that, at the very minimum, higher education today, regardless of the particular variant of the Evaluative State individual nations set up, is more responsive by far than it was to the vagaries and fortunes of that market. (Neave, 2012, p.207) To believe otherwise would be a dangerous exercise in self-delusion as well as being a thoroughly pessimistic interpretation of what has so far been achieved.

#### EXCHANGE, BORROWING AND THEIR ASSUMPTIONS.

When we debate the implications of the procedures that have been brought together under the rubric of Quality Enhancement, their phrasing and their source of origin are important. They can also serve to distinguish stages in the dynamic rise of the Evaluative State. As a descriptor, Quality Enhancement appears so far to be a development rooted in the English-speaking world. Nor is it a coincidence that what, from a European setting, may be seen as a third phase in the Development of the Evaluative State should hail from these parts. Nor is it surprising, that the nations longest wedded to the principle of “market driven” higher education should also be those with solutions of promise. They have had time to develop them. Whereas those who seek to weigh up the importance of these measures seek to save time – once again an example of the “expeditive ethic” that lies at the heart of the Evaluative State.

Take-over or borrowing from others has long been a feature of comparative education. In the United States, this was the key contribution Abraham Flexner, one of the founding fathers of Comparative Higher Education, made during the Thirties. Today, take-over and borrowing have acquired a new intensity and a new status. They fuel both Globalization and, nearer to our own doorsteps, are one of the more powerful elements in that adventure Europe has been following this quarter century past – namely, creating a Continent-wide, multi-national higher education system. This is what both the European Research Area and the European Higher Education Area are both about. (Neave and Amaral, 2011, pp. 2- 4; Neave and Veiga in press) Take-over and borrowing legitimate the process of globalization. They underline the importance of the European agenda by advancing it. They demonstrate empirically the advantages one system may derive from closely observing what those who hold themselves as leaders are doing.

## HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY AS COMPLEMENTARITY.

Clearly, what was once a marginal activity in education – the comparative dimension – now fulfils a central function. Its centrality in turn reflects a shift in education policy from comparison to complementarity, from scholarly curiosity to practical issues posed by the movement of students, researchers and staff across systems and between them. Complementarity– that is, the capacity through exchange and collaboration for the apparent strength of one system of higher education to assist in remedying the shortcomings of its neighbours and partners (Neave and Amaral, 2011, p.6) - makes a number of assumptions about the nature of what is exchanged, just as certain assumptions are also made by the designers of the instrument or procedure. As with any exchange, the value of the “gift” differs indeed for he who contemplates accepting it just as it does for he who offers it, regardless of what Portia said to Shylock.

## THE BLESSINGS OF GIVING AND RECEIVING.

In theory, three sets of assumptions are made. The first, often argued by international agencies, is that individual techniques, procedures and practices are themselves “value neutral” on the grounds of their objective or quantifiable nature. A variation on this line of argument holds such items have necessarily to be introduced because they show a proven efficiency in fulfilling the successful attainment of objectives in one system, which a second seeks to attain. It is more blessed to receive than to give. Not surprisingly, there is a negative version to this calculus, namely, that if one is not blessed by the receiving, one is most certainly cursed if one rejects it. This latter line of suasion is often brought to bear in urging individual nations further down the path of the Bologna and Lisbon agendas. It is known in the trade as “naming and shaming”. (Gornitzka, 2007) Finally, there are the assumptions the donor implicitly makes. These assumptions are not greatly dissimilar from those made by the receiver, with one additional and very considerable taken for granted. Precisely because the “donor” holds himself to be successful, so he presumes that in part such success may be attributed to the practices, instrumentality and ways of proceeding he has devised and which are “tested and proven”. They have made him *primus – or secundus – inter pares*. So the same happy outcome – or, the avoidance of continued national ignominy – will follow as a result of others following his example. This is determinism of a very high order. What the donor tends to play down in this higher education version of “*la mission civilisatrice*” is that the practices he proffers are themselves the outcome of negotiation that rested on cultural, political, historic and for that matter economic norms that underlie and permeate his own higher education system. No less important, it is precisely these norms and the margin of manoeuvre they permit that shape the way decisions were reached in the first place. (Neave, 2012b, p.158) They are not always the same elsewhere.

## QUALITY ETERNAL AND THE EVALUATIVE STATE.

It is a truism of the most elementary kind to say that the quality of teaching and learning has always been the European university’s constant concern and that from the earliest of times. Even in the Middle Ages, who had the right to found and establish universities, who awarded the status of “Recognized Teachers” and who conferred on individual universities the privilege of awarding recognized degrees was

the subject of bitter acrimony and mutual disregard between Pope, Holy Roman Emperor, Princes and later Nations. (Nardi, 1992, pp.77 – 105) So is it still today. Quality lies at the operational heart of the Evaluative State. For that reason, it shapes a very particular relationship between higher education, government and society. Technical procedures, indicators and instruments of judgment, objective though they are in the way they are applied, also serve a broader purpose. Procedures uphold existing patterns of authority. They may equally set up new ones. Either way, how a procedure is made to operate and the ends to which it drives set the outer bounds to the relationship between university and the collectivity - be it economic or social.

Once we go beyond Quality Assurance and see Quality Enhancement as a sub-set, or as an “add on”, new interpretations emerge. What may be interpreted in terms of procedure and practice as convergence – the sibboleth of both the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Agenda – takes on an unwonted variety. *Ex unum plures* rather than *e pluribus unum*. It does not of necessity follow that taking on similar procedures means we have similar purposes in mind. Still less does it mean that the political values or economic priorities driving the Evaluative State forward in one country have similar weight in another. We do well to give some attention to the macro economic and political circumstances that accompany the unveiling of Quality Enhancement. This aspect is no less important in trying to weigh up the possible impact and consequence in a system of higher education where cultures, whether political or academic, do not necessarily share the same vision or show the same degree of consensus that Quality Enhancement apparently commands in its countries of origin.

## ***PART TWO.***

### **STAGE ONE: ORIGINS, SCOPE AND PURPOSE.**

When we examine the early moves towards the Evaluative State, the observer is struck by the marked differences in rationale that drove it forward as too the differences in strategic scope and purpose. Constructing the Evaluative State mirrored the quest for quality, efficiency and enterprise in higher education (Neave, 1988, pp. 7 – 23). True, no other European State had gone so far as Portugal by nailing the flag of Quality assessed to the mast of higher education and including it in the Constitution of 1976 under the heading of article 76 paragraph 2. (Amaral and Carvalho, 2008) Thus, arguably Portugal’s drive towards the Evaluative State, which incidentally began here at Porto almost twenty years ago, built on a degree of formal continuity largely absent in France, Britain and the Netherlands. Until the promulgation of the Portuguese Higher Education Guideline Law of 2007 which reorganized Portugal’s universities and polytechnics around the tenets of Neo Liberalism – that is, competitive deflation, market flexibility and de-regulation (Gayon, 2012)– shaping the Evaluative State sought more to improve established patterns of authority in higher education. The beginnings of the Portuguese Evaluative State were far from being “Root and branch” in nature.

Likewise with earliest example of the drive towards the Evaluative State - France. The first step in 1984, created the *Comité National d’Evaluation* - an independent body reporting, not to the Minister in charge of Higher Education, but to the President of the Republic. The CNE was launch pad of the French Evaluative State. It

introduced systematic external review of higher education. (Staropoli, 1987, pp. 127 - 131) And whilst its purpose was very clearly to “enhance quality” its objective did not, as current English and Scottish initiatives propose, focus on those aspects, which elsewhere fall under the rubric of *Hochschuldidaktik*. Rather, the French interpretation of enhancing quality focused on “delivery” of new courses to meet spiralling student numbers, greater diversity of demand - in a system rapidly moving from mass to universal higher education. Initial priorities sought to enhance the quality of provision by speeding up the rate of delivery.

#### SIMILAR PROCEDURES, DIFFERENT AIMS.

In the early moves towards the Evaluative State, both France and Portugal shared a broadly similar concern: to increase the knowledge on higher education, publically available and up to date.

In Portugal, the Rectors’ Conference, which set the pace, saw Quality assessment from two perspectives: first, to consolidate Pedagogical Autonomy which the government had conferred on public sector universities by the Act of 1988; second, to improve the efficiency of *national* policy-making by providing national authorities with that detailed information of institutional development and achievement, hitherto lacking. (Neave and Teixeira, 2012, p. 26) Quality evaluation was thus a lever to improve Ministry efficiency. (Neave, 2012a, p.129)

In France, institutional review and evaluation aimed at a different target group and had a different purpose: to provide empirical and grounded examples of how other establishments were currently meeting change in student demand. Public reviews of quality were more a gentle prodding of the Academic Estate to be more adventuresome, an Academic Estate hopefully encouraged by knowing what other French universities, *grandes écoles* and *instituts universitaires de technologie* were doing already. The prototype version of the French Evaluative State sought to encourage greater boldness at the institutional level to speed up the pace of adjustment at sector level. (Neave, 2012b, p.194) The essential purpose was to open a ‘lateral’ flow of public information between institutes of higher education.

Neither in France nor in Portugal were the first steps towards the Evaluative State drawn from arguments based on Neo Liberalism or New Public Management. On the contrary, French legislation that launched what was to become the Evaluative State dismissed both privatisation and the notion of higher education as a “consumer good”. Rather, Higher Education was represented as it had long been, as a “public service” under state responsibility. The legislator was excruciatingly careful to retain “the established rights” (*droits acquis*) of both Academic and Student Estates, as well as the basic principle that underpinned internal governance – participant democracy. (Neave, 2012a, pp.70 – 73) That neither Neo Liberal doctrine nor New Public Management figured in the theoretical underpinning of either the Portuguese or French model of the Evaluative State in its first stage is significant. The Evaluative State displayed clear national differences and priorities. Nor were Portugal and France the only examples of alternatives to the Anglo Saxon strain of the Evaluative State. Neither Spain (Neave, 2012, pp. 105 – 118) nor Italy (Veiga, Amaral and Mendes, 2008, pp. 53 – 67.) drew on Neo Liberalism or New Public Management as the

central constructs beneath the Evaluative State as had been the case in the UK and the Netherlands.

## **STAGE 2. REFINING PROCEDURES, DEFINING OWNERSHIP.**

The second stage in shaping the Evaluative State, both in Europe and Britain, turned involved two dimensions: the internal refinement of procedures and the definition of ownership. Viewed schematically, each passed through two phases. During Stage 1, developing internal procedures entailed a detailed and systematic review of individual HEIs, a procedure, painstaking, time-consuming and costly. In France, institutional review was extended to cross system reviews of disciplinary areas, higher education's performance in particular regions. Retrospectively, Stage 1 was an exercise in mapping out, identifying and validating a limited number of indicators that were both discriminatory – in the precise meaning of that term – and sensitive. The burden of Stage 2 set in place benchmarks or standards of expected performance and, in certain systems, such as Sweden, saw the proposal to “lighten“ the review cycle” and convert it into ‘alert system’ to identify and to examine fully only establishments showing obvious difficulty. (Hogskolverket, 2005)

### **OWNERSHIP: FROM ‘HONEST BROKER’ TO EVALUATIVE STATE.**

Though individual cases will certainly show difference in chronology, the question of ownership or the administrative locus of the Evaluative State likewise marks the transition from Stage 1 to Stage 2. Both in Britain and Portugal, the first steps on the road towards the formally organized Evaluative State, were made by university leadership: by the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals, in the shape of the Jarratt Report of 1985 (Jarratt Report, 1985). In Portugal, the Conference of Portuguese Rectors. (Neave, 2012a, pp.131-135) In France, definition of ownership followed a different route. Ownership was vested in the *Comité National d’Evaluation*, and its independence underpinned by the Comité reporting on a two yearly basis, not to the Ministry, but to the Head of State. (Neave, 1996, pp.61 – 88) In all three instances, their initial profile resembled that of an “honest broker” rather than as Principal in a relationship of Principal to Agent. (Neave, 2012a, p.195) In Portugal, the model of honest broker model built explicitly out of Pedagogic Autonomy, which five years previously had been conferred on public sector universities.

Key to Stage 2 in the saga of the Evaluative State, was the “relocation of ownership” – relatively speedily in the UK, more protracted in both France and Portugal. It saw responsibility of refining assessment procedures placed into Agencies of Public Purpose: the British Quality Assurance Agency in 1997, and the Portuguese *Conselho Nacional de Avalacao do Ensino Superior* in 1998. In France, the gradual ousting of the *Comite National d’Evaluation* from its original status of relative independence was cautious and incremental. Nevertheless, its merger in 2007 with the *Association pour l’Evaluation de la Recherche et de l’Enseignement Superieur* (AERES) effectively moved it back into the national process of policy formation rather than standing as honest broker to one side of it. (Neave, 2012a, p. 198)

In both France and Portugal, redefinition of ownership and its administrative location assumed the weight of law, in France with the Law of August 10<sup>th</sup> 2007 which

reorganized the “new university” and in Portugal, exactly one month later with the passing of the Higher Education Guideline Law. From the standpoint of the adepts of Neo Liberalism and more explicitly, New Public Management, here were most satisfactory examples of “sinners come to repentance.” Legislation moved these two systems firmly onto the second stage in the saga of the Evaluative State.

#### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE EVALUATIVE STATE.

I have spent a little time in developing the thesis that different nations attach different priorities and purposes to Quality Assurance. Effectively, the Evaluative State is far from monolithic. On the contrary, that one nation devises a generically similar procedure is not necessarily the way it is perceived nor the purpose to which it is put in another. There remains one final question prior to addressing Quality Enhancement and the proposal to include “risk management” as further procedures to underpin Quality. It is this: What has the Evaluative State achieved so far? Where does it fit in that central task of government and national administration, which the late Burton R Clark described as ‘system coordination’ (Clark, 1983) today presented in terms of ‘system steering’?

The answer lies in the question, namely the shift of system oversight from coordination to steering. In Continental Europe – but not in the United Kingdom – coordination was primarily grounded in elaborate legal codification, regulation and oversight exercised by central – or, in the case of Germany, Provincial and Federal – Ministry. The “State control” model of coordination rested on the ‘principle of legal homogeneity’. As the term implies, legal homogeneity applied uniformly across a particular higher education sector or institutional type (Neave and van Vught, 1991) It rested on a number of assumptions. Prime amongst them were

1. that legal intent was reflected in institutional reality.
2. that change and adaptation at institutional level took place as part of an internal organic process that proceeded from within the twin “freedoms” of teaching and learning (Wissenschaft und ihre Lehre sind frei. Lehr und Lern-freiheit)
3. that major system adjustment which, by definition demanded legislation was both exceptional and worked out over a period of ten to fifteen years. (Neave, 2012a, p.13)

Few of these assumptions have survived the advent of the Evaluative State. There is, however, a more nuanced interpretation: namely, that the Evaluative State as indeed quality assessment and quality assurance as its prime operational instruments, rather than rejecting these assumptions, converted them into hypotheses that required regular empirical verification. In short, legal intent was no longer construed as necessarily eliciting immediate institutional “take up”. Nor could the burden of proof for institutional response be left unattended once higher education’s mission was redefined as meeting the immediate needs of the market and upholding the nation’s competitive stance.

#### THE EVALUATIVE STATE. WHAT IT HAS DONE.

As the prime vehicle for weighing up quality, what has the Evaluative State brought about? This is a necessary backdrop to our discussing Quality Enhancement. From an historical perspective and one focused on mainland Europe, the impact of the

Evaluative State falls in three domains. First, its procedures have revealed - and that in high detail - an institutional dynamic that, whilst doubtless present before, could not adequately be taken fully and rapidly into account in systems of higher education wholly dependent on the workings of legal homogeneity. Understanding higher education's dynamics no longer rests on the presumptions explicit in legal codification. Second, irrespective of the particular variant that individual systems of higher education have set in place, the Evaluative State turns around the notion of conditionality. (Chevaillier, 2004) Like the process of evaluation on which conditionality is based, conditionality is bounded by standardized indicators of expected performance, mediated across different sectors of higher education (Santiago, Carvalho, Amaral and Meek, 2006, pp. 139 – 148) That is, benchmarking. Third, the Evaluative State, as well as standardizing measures of performance also standardizes the period over which they are assessed. (Neave and Teixeira, 2012, p. 39) in the shape of the review cycle.

#### A SUPPLEMENTARY INSTRUMENT. THE STATE EVALUATIVE AND EVOLUTIVE.

From a long-term perspective, the impact of the Evaluative State is this: it has supplemented an historic mode of administrative control over higher education - legal codification -with a second system of oversight. This second system turns around time restricted performance and its verification in which the overall goals of higher education are driven primarily by forces external to higher education – competitive demand, the provision of services to the Knowledge Economy, the creation of those 'skills' deemed necessary for the well-being of that economy. Last but not least, the generation of appropriate knowledge as the basic capital in that self-same construct of the Knowledge Economy. To the historic principle of legal homogeneity, the Evaluative State added an immensely powerful instrumentality, running in parallel to legal codification. It is, moreover, an instrumentality that may be made to have its own internal dynamic by setting and, if necessary, resetting or adding to the range of activities for which accounts may be demanded and rendered. In short, the Evaluative State has created a second form of homogeneity. This second form is both evaluative and evolutive.

#### STAGE 3. QUALITY ENHANCEMENT: AN EVOLUTIVE DIMENSION.

Quality Enhancement may be seen as quintessential of that evolutive process. Like ET, however, it is not alone. Throughout this *tour d'horizon* I have set particular weight on the “evolutionary dynamic”, in terms of ownership, the drive towards benchmarking and, in one or two instances, the development of “lighter” evaluation techniques. It is not coincidental that the concept Quality Enhancement should emerge from English speaking systems. Clearly, Quality Enhancement – defined as “deliberate steps at institutional level to *improve* (our italics) the quality of learning opportunities”(QAA, 2008 para 4.4.18, p.19) represents a form of accounting to the Student Estate and as such newly targetted. There is good reason for such a step. England and Wales have been amongst the earliest to move on “cost shifting” from the public purse to the individual's pocket, irrespective of whether it is a case of “cash on the barrelhead” or a life-time levy. Whilst the same principle is now recognized by most systems of higher education in mainland Europe today, few if any public sector establishments have undergone so massive an increase in student fees as has been the case in England from 2005 onwards, let alone the hike in 2012. This is not to say that

the current crisis, above all in Southern Europe, may not force governments further in the same direction.

#### ISSUES POSED BY QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMPARATIVELY VIEWED.

Precisely because Quality Assurance is firmly embedded in the UK Quality Enhancement may be seen as a logical outgrowth and follow up of Quality Assurance. In Portugal, however, the legitimacy that comes from “the practice embedded” whilst rapidly acquiring weight and substance, is less mature. In its *present* configuration, the Evaluative State in Portugal has been in place for four years at the most. The potential Quality Enhancement has as a policy option depends on how far what it set out to achieve – or to rectify – has been achieved in its *pays d’origine*. It also depends on how far it may be made to serve similar goals by those envisaging its importation.

Here again, as I have stressed throughout this presentation, it is as well to distinguish clearly between Quality Enhancement as technical procedure and the circumstances and “domestic values” into which it is inserted. (Neave and Teixeira, 2012, pp. 49 - 52) Implementation will be particularly important for our discussion. So will the impact it is hoped the procedures *will* have as against those they *do* have. This latter aspect is crucial. “Time-based” procedures, which are an identifying characteristic of the Evaluative State, set great store on the rapid conversion of intent into established practice.

There are cogent reasons for drawing a careful line between procedure as policy and the immediate context into which it is launched. Such considerations are, potentially, highly significant in Portugal. They call for great care to be taken so the changes in structure, process and responsibility that may follow from taking up Quality Enhancement are not associated with measures of austerity, above all by the Academic Estate. Certainly, “Knowledge Management” figures as *l’air du temps* in higher education generally and in science policy very especially (Heitor and Hector, 2011, pp. 179 – 226). Whilst Knowledge Management may not necessarily invoke the delicate issue of authority re-located, it poses the issue of the *de facto* balance of responsibility between Academic and Administrative Estates. Is knowledge to be managed by “knowledge communities” or by management “professionals” extending their remit to manage knowledge as opposed to servicing it?

Agreed, a recent report from England, which examined how a number of universities aligned different activities around Quality Enhancement, noted that no single definition of Quality Enhancement emerged. (QAA, 2008, paras 2.9; 4.3.6) Clearly, many paths lead to salvation.

#### TWO THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON QUALITY ENHANCEMENT.

From a Portuguese perspective, the current state of Quality Enhancement in England suggests the blooming of a thousand flowers. It is greatly encouraging and a clear pointer to what Clark alluded to as “the bottom-heavy nature” of higher education (Clark, 1983). Such variety seemingly provides an empirical - though retroactive justification - for strengthening institutional autonomy which the Higher Education Guideline Law of August 2007 brought about. There is, however, a further interpretation of “Quality Enhancement”. That is to see it within the analytical

framework Burton Clark devised in his pioneering study of the “entrepreneurial university” (Clark, 1998). Seen from the perspective of “innovative periphery” and “central driving core”, one would be justified in drawing the conclusion that the ‘innovative periphery’ in British universities today shows great variety in the ways it displays innovation and creativity.

#### FROM PRODUCT TO PROCESS.

Quality Enhancement, seen as Stage 3 in the evolution of the Evaluative State, marks a further step in that broader thrust of bringing into the public arena that “private, implicit knowledge”, which higher learning has of itself. This step is noteworthy. It appears to enlarge the remit of the Evaluative State from the identification and verification of product – or *outcome* – into the domain of *process*. The Evaluative State is today concerned not just with *what* is done. Now, it is concerned with *how* it is done. Quality Enhancement is then a further and excellent illustration of the Evaluative State’s evolutionary dynamic. From the standpoint of an earlier paradigm, by adding Quality Enhancement to Quality Assurance, the Evaluative State moves firmly into what was once deemed “the private lives” of higher education. (Trow, 1976, pp. 113 – 127) namely teaching, regardless of whether it was routine or innovative, inspiring or tedious. From the perspective of Principal Agent theory, the Evaluative State qua Principal is clearly engaged in redefining both its remit and, in so doing, extending the information it requires from higher learning qua its Agent. (Dill, 1997)

Others will give a more focused account of this development. The question I want to pose, however, has to do with ‘the inherent dynamic,’ that has driven the Evaluative State forward over the past two decades. What light does this sustained dynamic shed on Quality Enhancement? Is the way Quality Enhancement is currently construed necessarily the last word to be had on it? This is highly unlikely, above all in times of unprecedented economic crisis. There are two very good reasons for taking this view. The first stems from the intelligence the Evaluative State now possesses about the immediate and present condition of higher education. The second is a derivative function of the first: namely, the intelligence available about the state of higher education may also serve to weigh up and assess the appropriateness of national policies that have brought it to this condition. (Neave, 2012a, pp. 138 -139) Whether Quality Enhancement can be seen as a remedy to previous oversights, others are better placed than I to give an answer.

#### **STAGE 4. HIGHER EDUCATION AS A RISKY BUSINESS.**

In Stage 2 and Stage 3 of its dynamic the Evaluative State forged new instruments for plotting performance, output, institutional achievement, cost and in certain instances, tracked student transition from higher education to work. Such a battery of instruments serves various agendas: accountability, checking “the reaction time” to national priorities, and in this capacity, provides a back-channel for indirect “steering”.

New instruments do not just bring new insights and new norms of institutional performance. They also bring with them new perceptions of higher education as well as embedding them in higher education’s discourses. They provide a new account

and thus new explanations for institutional behaviour. As a potential instrumentality and as a new lease of life – or prospect of death - in the groves of academe, Risk-taking opens a new and hitherto unbroached possibility: that of institutional failure.

To point out that government and its advisers in their intent to open up higher education completely to “the market”, also admit that failure is the price that may have to be paid, is unkind. Unkind though it is, higher education, like the Scout must “be prepared”. The cynic will point out that it is less devastating for institutions to fail in a fully market driven system, than to have them fail in a system partially supported by public finance. Institutions failing is after all proof of the purgative effects of competition. But whether the government can be made responsible for the *débâcle* is far less evident in a higher education system fully driven by market forces than when higher education is financed from public pennies.

The salient feature of Risk taking is not that it stands as yet another example of grafting onto to higher learning and research, techniques and a dead vocabulary, forged in the corporate sector. Once risk-taking as a technique and as an instrument are injected into higher education, institutional failure no longer reflects the inadequacies of public policy. It reflects rather, the incompetence of the individual university, its leadership, its teaching staff, its “goods and chattels, ox, ass, man servant, maid servant and all that in it is”. If the English government’s avowed intent to proceed onto a system fully market-driven is taken in conjunction with Risk-taking as an institutional responsibility extended to the academic domain, from a broader strategic perspective the juxtaposition takes on all the dimensions of a “damage limitation exercise.” If some institutions fail – and it would be exceedingly good to know what the operational definitions of failure are - others will nevertheless succeed. Responsibility for failure falls on the individual institution, not on the consequences of national policy. Thus, risk-taking fences off institutional failure from policy failure. Instead, the responsibility for the situation national policy creates is “off-loaded” onto precisely those individual institutions least able to deal with the situation that policy has created.

Still, from an historic perspective, Risk calculus has immense symbolic importance. The symbolic importance of risk factoring lies in the final evaporation of that vital optimism which drove higher education forward over the past fifty years. Optimism is now in cold storage for the next evaluatory cycle at the very least. With the sober contemplation of failure, we have also to contemplate what in France is known as “la fin des trente glorieuses”. The three “golden decades” from 1950 to 1980, are definitely over. How long the blizzard will last, not even the most canny economist or hedge fund director will hazard an opinion.

Risk calculus, I would suggest, is redolent with technocratic pessimism. Realistic, it might be, unavoidable even. But by admitting the possibility of institutions failing, we turn our backs on the 50 year adventure that drove higher education onward and upward. Whether risk calculation is another way of using the market to ration higher education, only time will tell. Henceforth, higher education is indeed a risky business.

Thank you for your attention.

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