

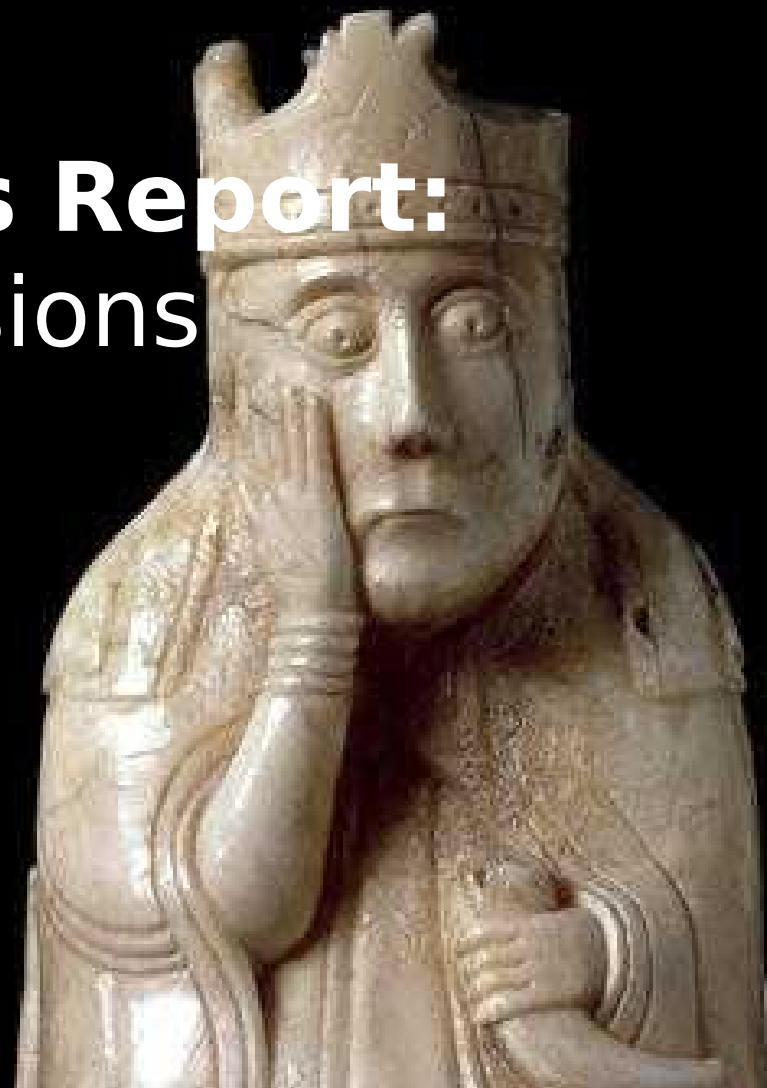
IBAR

Final Synthesis Report:

Tentative Conclusions

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Durham University

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ESG

The ESG, as is widely recognised, are intended to provide unifying general guidelines to the forty-seven participating sectors of higher education and to operate, in effect, as an instrument to support and steer the development and formation of the European Higher Education Area.





“It must be remembered that there is nothing more difficult to plan, more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to manage than the creation of a new system. For the initiator has the enmity of all who would profit by the preservation of the old institution and merely lukewarm defenders in those who should gain by the new ones.”

Policy

'most policies are ramshackle, compromise, hit and miss affairs, that are reworked, tinkered with, nuanced, and inflected through complex processes of influence, text production, dissemination and, ultimately, creation in contexts of

Ball (1990)



Institutional focus

The links between supra-national and national levels and handled via a range of agencies – government ministries and national or regional quality agencies.

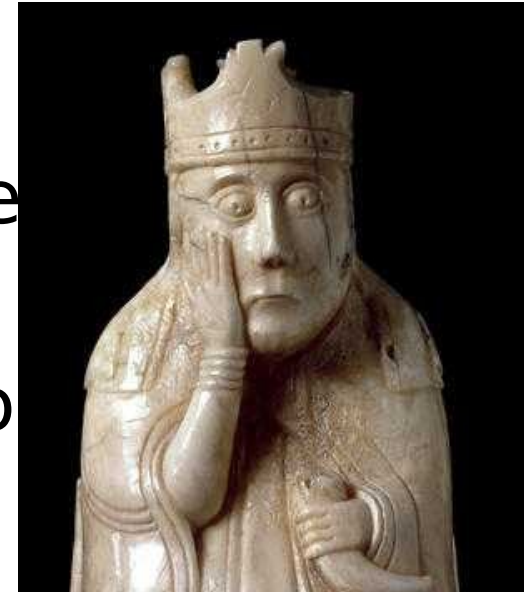
Greater complexity is to be expected when the *institutional* level becomes the focus, and indeed this is apparent in our findings .



Issues emerging

52 barriers, 28 effective practices

ESG has come in at a specific point
in time



Do we expand? Or complement it with other
processes and mechanisms?

ESG is a common denominator

How does ESG engage teachers
and students?

Issues of trust (of politicians,
governments, agencies)

At institutional level there is a tension
between development of a quality
culture and centralised control
management



How do we reduce complexity

We can't have full diversity.

It's inconclusive whether the QA
activities surveyed closely followed the
ESG guidelines.



Are tensions good or bad?

National structures and process governance are probably better understood when aligned with institutional concerns and priorities

The balance between what is a good practice and what could turn into a barrier is very fine



Context and translation

The research findings of the IBAR project show that context, institutional logics and the particular dynamics of an organisation emerge as key forces. ESG is primarily process-led but many of the findings outlined earlier highlight the significance of *context*.



The implementation of quality at institutional level is dependent upon a host of interrelated factors which can serve as barriers or drivers.

These include:

attitude	path dependencies
leadership	planning & managerial commitment
adequate resourcing	stakeholder resistance or non-engagement
clear policy signalling	staff training and development
effective communication	effective measurement
historical tradition	feedback loops

Cultures

Policy has always to be filtered, in its institutional translation, through organisational (and disciplinary) cultures, contingencies and path dependencies, with their relative degrees of dynamism, flexibility or rigidity.



‘Cultural traffic’ (Alvesson 2002)

‘Culture easily refers to everything and nothing’. (p.22)

He points up the ‘complexity, variation and tolerance for incoherence of cultural values, ideas and meanings’ (p.192).

What we have observed in the contexts of practice surveyed in IBAR is an example of what he terms ‘multiple cultural configurations’

‘Multiple cultural configurations’

compass,

social glue

sacred cow

psychological *blinkers*

world-closure ‘culture makes [social reality] appear given, natural and, when it comes to basic premises, impossible (or at least very difficult) to question (p.35)

disorder, (ambiguity, uncertainty, multi-facetedness, fragmentation, confusion, risk and dissensus). Culture as disorder marks ‘the non-systematic, fluid and contradictory character’ of organisations (p.34).



Organisation cultures (Alvesson 2002) cont'd

Perhaps more optimistically institutional cultures also serve as

exchange-regulator

‘a control mechanism that can handle complex exchange relations’ (p.31). This can provide stakeholders with ‘intellectual tools and a long memory’ to enable them to evaluate ‘fair rewards in the long run’ (p.31), and , perhaps, in ESG terms a more positive prospect of policy implementation or translation.

Translation

Institutional context may be perceived as an issue which serves to undermine intended quality processes, but is probably better recognised as a significant issue of meanings, preferred uses of language and different presumptions about priorities.

These are critical determining factors that should not be overlooked.



Compact

A future challenge for the continuing operation of the ESG is to ensure that these observed tendencies are accommodated in any evaluation and that EHEA institutions have opportunities for interpretive and developmental dialogue about both QA and QE.

A long term goal for ESG might be to reach a compact that fully accommodates institutional perspectives and aspirations.



Leadership & governance

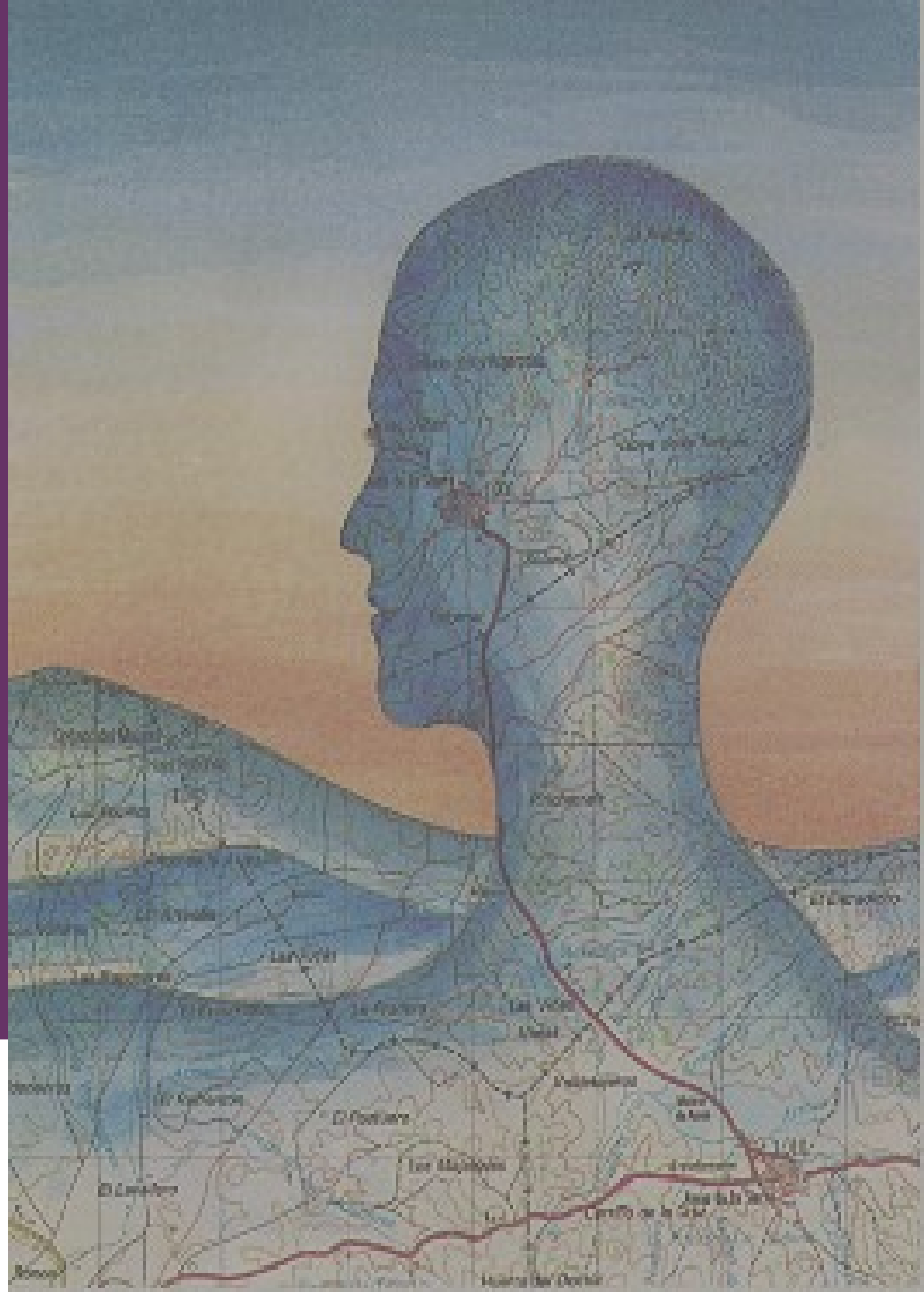
In order to achieve that goal we believe more attention needs to be paid to interpretations of quality by institutions, leaders, governors and key stakeholders such as staff, students and employers.

Moreover, consideration needs to be taken of how leadership and governance interpret / translate ESG and (hopefully) can be shown as committing to its overarching p



Further targeted research could helpfully pursue these dimensions, explicitly focusing upon institutional logics and dynamics.

There is a strong case for extending the sampling to question policy makers and managers at national,

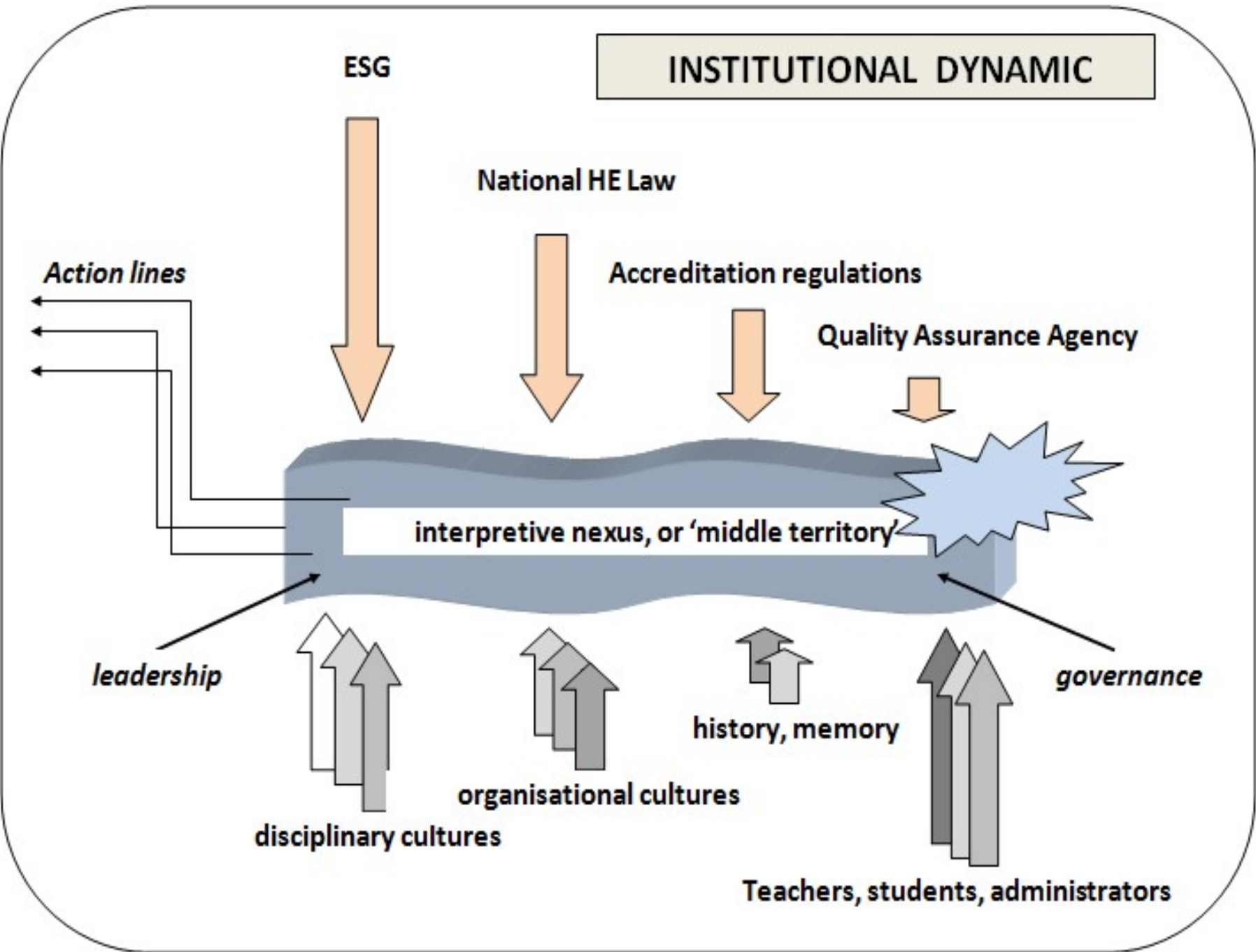


Nexus

Such enquiry would seek deeper insights into institutional context and practice, and ascertain if it were possible to ***outline an interpretive nexus, or 'middle territory', where top down and bottom up perspectives and initiatives could fruitfully create action lines.***

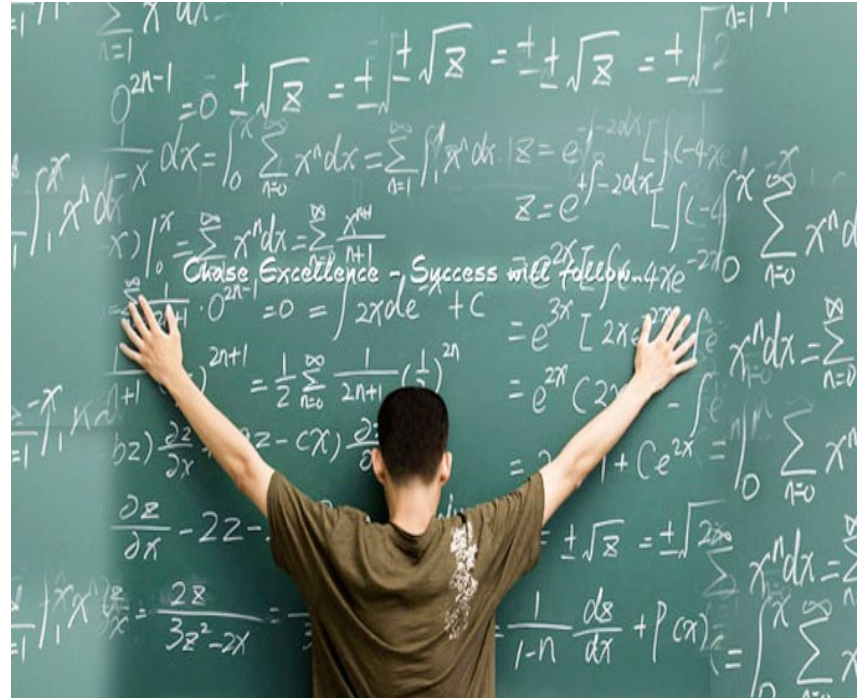
Follow up research could profitably





An ESG Vignette:

Improving Teaching Quality



Lenses:

- Implementation staircase (Reynolds & Saunders 1983)
- Street level bureaucracy (Lipsky 1985)
- Cultural traffic (Alvesson 2002)

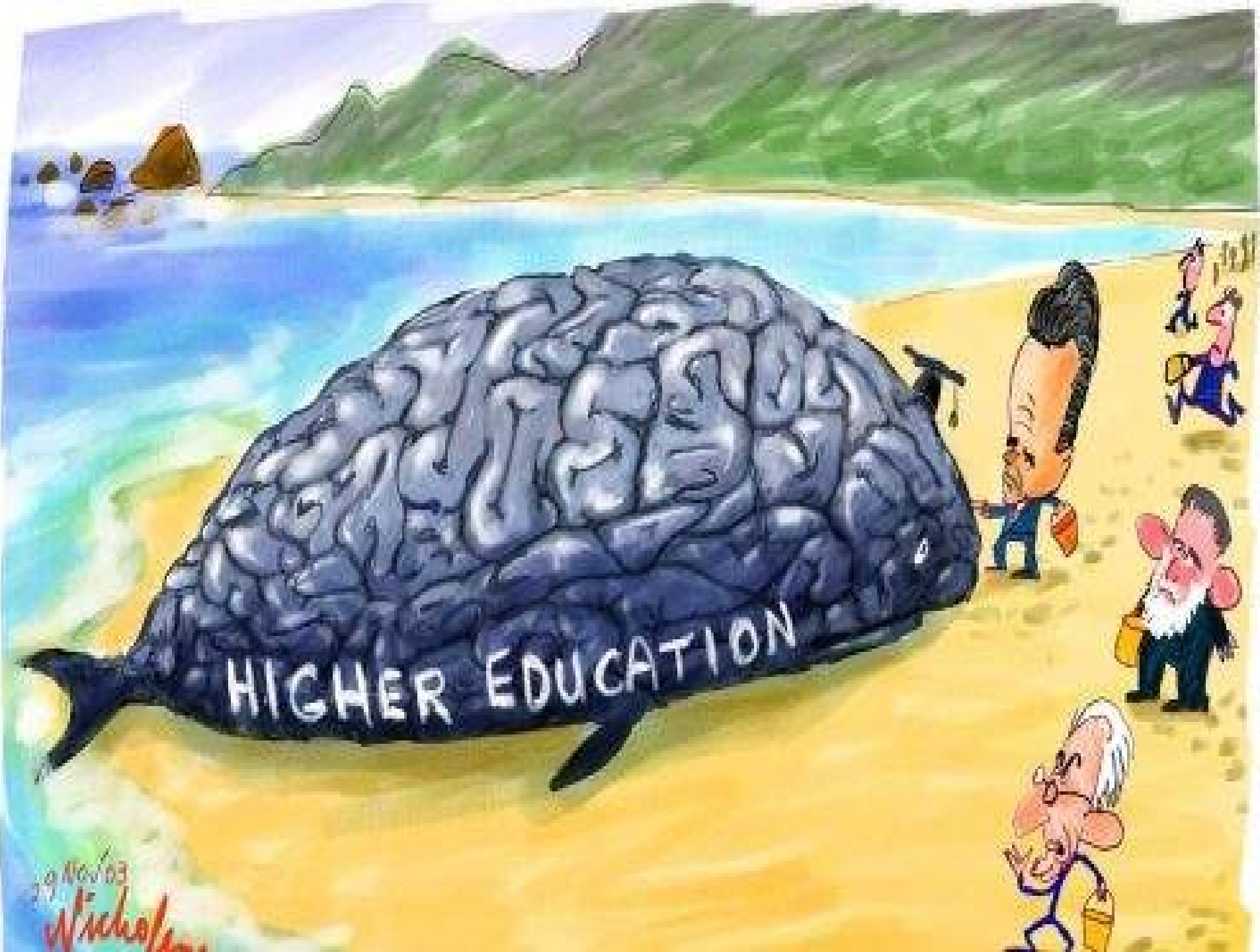
Barriers

Financial factors. The economic downturn had led to low teachers' salaries, ruling out the possibility of financial motivation to undertake further professional development (Portugal, Poland and Latvia).

Teachers perceived themselves coping at the front end of the system to prop up an inadequately resourced sector. The ESG was not considered to address such a state of affairs adequately.

Rather, the content of ESG standard 1.4 and the accompanying guideline implicitly formulate expectations of teaching quality improvement within HEIs, but form the ***assumption of a stable and positive financial situation.***

No guidelines are given to the HEIs experiencing deficiencies in this respect in a climate of austerity and economic stringency. ***Indeed financial insufficiency can be seen to pose a serious threat to the implementation of ESG Part 1 in HEIs in all its aspects.***



HIGHER EDUCATION

9 Nov 03
Nicholas

Further barriers ...



HEIs hold no competitive advantage against better-paid positions offered within industry or business, resulting in an outflow of gifted employees from HEIs (Poland, Latvia).

Recruitment of academic staff also suffers in quality terms. Owing to low earnings of academic staff, this leads to 'negative selection'. Academic positions are only sought by individuals who had not found success in other, better paid areas of the labour market.(Poland)

Excessive workloads at the street level, combined on occasion with the necessity of individual staff sustaining several full-time positions were found to loosen an employee's relationship with their HEI

Compounding factors

Instrumentalist attitude to work predicated on monetary reward rather than other intrinsic professional benefits

Privileged status afforded to research endeavour over that of teaching. This was found to have a demotivating effect on staff in regard to teaching quality improvement in all IBAR participating countries, but particularly so in Portugal, Poland, Latvia and Slovakia).



Dundee
University

Student feedback on their learning experience was noticeably low in Portugal, Poland and

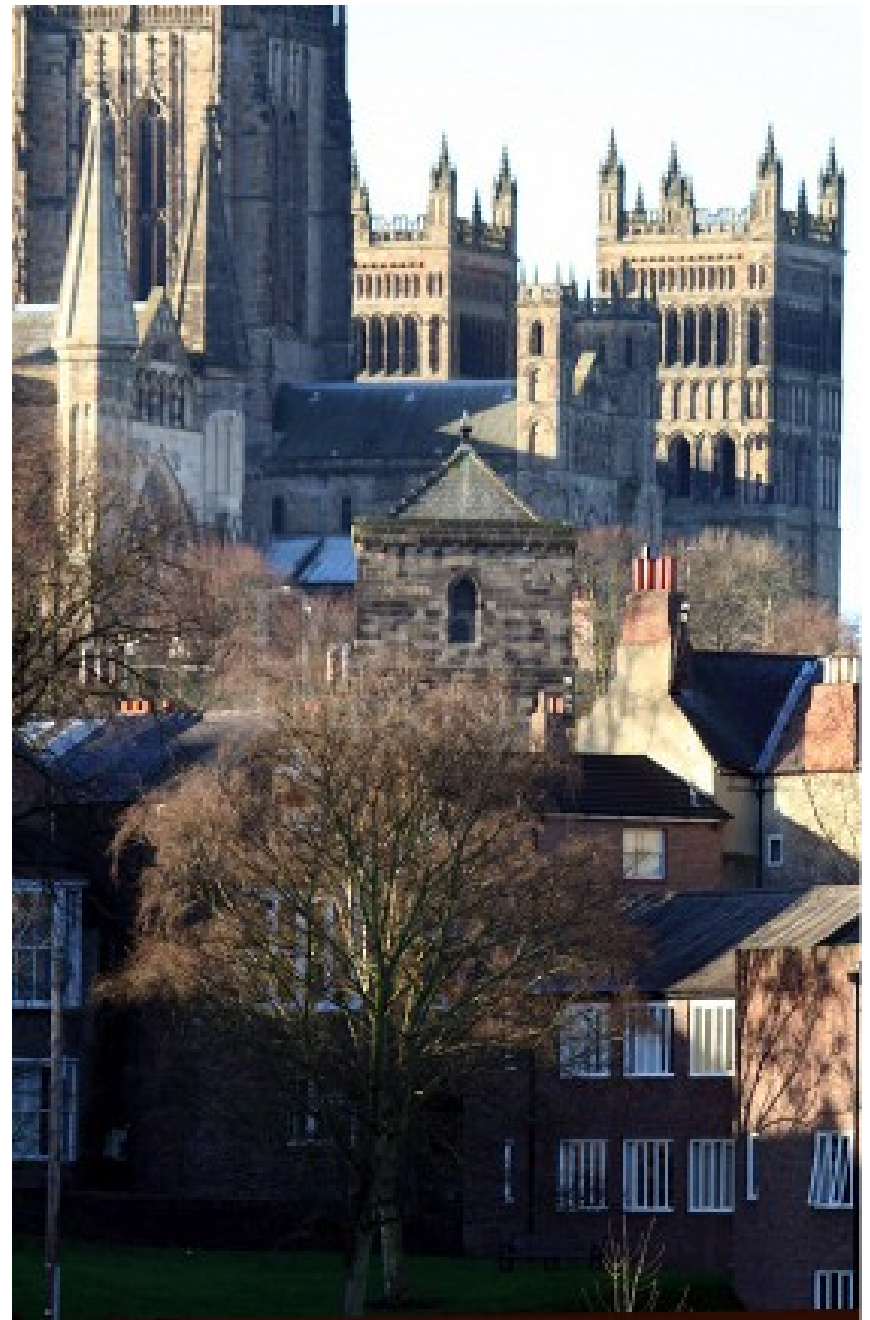
Tensions between academic
and administrators

The tensions between central
level and departments



Cultural contrast

UK Professional Standards Framework (HEA 2013), is proving a strong driver towards teaching quality, but this is far from the case in most EHEA countries. The UK was found to be 'an outlier' in this



Upshot

- relatively weak drivers in terms of European and national probationary or qualification requirements
- ineffectual institutional drivers in terms of central strategies and policies for teaching quality improvement (poor professional development requirements and opportunities, lack of student feedback as a quality driver)
- insufficient resourcing by national administration
- capacity in an ‘implementation staircase’ or a ‘street level bureaucracy’ for the stakeholders to wield discretionary power and undermine initiatives.
- ineffectual translation of ESG statements into national quality assurance policy.
- National administration of HE unable to ensure quality

We cannot rely on the state because the state has many other concerns than HE. So what other sources are available to us?



Free sector and let fees rise, argue Lords

Peers believe education will improve if political meddling is reduced. **Melanie Newman reports**

Universities must be freed from state not, and never should be, agents of the state."

own resources £5,000 to year per student to undergraduate teaching fee has helped, by large and unsus Oxford ha

Tax all graduates, says Blackstone

V-c provokes debate with suggestion of a levy on all degree holders, past and future. John Gill reports

A graduate tax on everyone who has benefited from higher education, including those who went to university years ago, has been shrinking away from the debate about fees in advance of a review of tuition fees. He said:

(Times Higher Education)

- Increased fees
- More international students
- More postgraduate students
- Research and consultancy
- Alumni donations
- Merger (demographics)



UNIVERSITY LN

CLOSED

UNIVERSITY



A globalised world

The HEIs in our study, and throughout the EHEA, pay attention to national agendas but in a globalising world many *are not restricted to these agendas alone*.

Whatever the chosen focus of these institutions, the emphasis on institutional governance, leadership, management and strategy implies that institutions should see themselves as active and responsible players.

Emergence of new institutional logics to be better positioned against competitive global rankings?



Engagement: issues of high & low fidelity



How tightly coupled should the ESG regulatory framework be?

A 'high fidelity' policy initiative seeks conformity with prescribed outcomes whereas a 'low fidelity' intervention would tolerate a reasonable degree of openness and variation in the ways in which a particular organisation might wish to approach and finally achieve specific requirements of the ESG.



CONTEXT	INFORMING NOTION	IDEA OF QUALITY	GAINS	RISKS	TRUST
High Fidelity	convergence, and alignment	consistency, conformity to standard	coherence, consistency and reliability	stifles innovation, insufficiently context-sensitive, tokenism, compliance	low trust of variation
Low Fidelity	importance of context, tolerance of variation	engagement, innovation, variation	taps into grain, impact on practitioners, fosters motivation, sense of ownership, relevance	restricted to specific enclaves, practice fragmented	high trust of local practice
Managerial	effective resource deployment, 'joined-upness'	transformed practice	better matching of resources to strategies, greater efficiencies	resistance, conflict, 'noise', non-compliance, judicious subversion	low trust of local practice
Consumerist	market competitiveness, institutional positioning, strong brand, competition	fitness for purpose, value for money, excellence	student-centred provision, consumer satisfaction, improvement of student learning	distortion by the market, stifling of innovation, reputational damage	high trust of the market



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