

The Perceived Impact of Quality Audit on the Work of Academics

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Abstract

Quality audit has become the dominant means of assessing the quality of university teaching and learning. This paper addresses this international trend through the analysis of academics' perception of quality audit. It presents a new way to understand quality audit through the interpretation of how frontline academics in England perceived and valued the audit culture and its practice. The paper reveals that quality audit was regarded as symbolic regulation instead of power control over the work of individual academics. The increased awareness of the importance of good teaching practice was related to the fact that the internal audit process set up within the institution worked more effectively, and was seen as more legitimate, than the external one. There is evidence that academics' notion of professionalism has affected their attitudes towards the audit and its related quality mechanisms.

Keywords: quality audit, perception, tension, professionalism

Introduction

Quality audit has become central to ways of talking about administrative control in the UK since the late 1980s (Power, 1994, 1997). By the early 1990s, audit became the main way used to ensure that institutions were providing higher education awards and qualifications of an acceptable quality and at an appropriate academic standard, and that institutions were exercising their legal powers to award degrees in a proper manner (QAA, 2006). According to Shore and Wright (2000), quality audit refers to not only an inspection regime but also a culture and a concept which is developed in the process of evaluating the public sector, because it is designed to produce among academic staff new norms of conduct and professional behaviour.

Literature reveals that there are issues of power and values underlying the operation of quality audit. A number of empirical studies (Hoecht, 2006; Morley, 2003; Newton, 2000; Shore & Wright, 2000) have emphasised the nature of quality audit as concerned principally with power control rather than the improvement of undergraduate learning and teaching practices. For example, the audit diverts academic staff time towards administrative jobs, and it may undermine the quality of teaching and learning (Harvey, 2005; Morley, 2003; Newton, 2000). There is a concern that some academics would become compliant with the audit rather than seeking to bring about a change in the learner or practise a diversity of approaches to teaching (Harvey, 2009; Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2003). The compliance culture is argued to have dampened creativity and slowed down the responsiveness of the university to a rapidly changing environment (Harvey & Newton, 2007; Henkel, 2000; Kogan *et al.*, 2000).

However, these studies mainly focused on the period when the Teaching Quality Assessment (TQA) (1993-1995) and the Subject Review (1995-2001) were used as national quality evaluation methods. Both the TQA and the Subject Review are known for their tight control over the work of academics and the university. The TQA was conducted by subject peer reviewers to assess the quality of teaching and learning at institutional level (Taggart, 2004). The Subject Review replaced the TQA in 1995, and became focused on assessing teaching at subject levels (QAA, 2003). The Subject Review was later replaced by the Institutional Audit of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in England (QAA). The Audit is perceived as 'light touch' management to ensure that an institution's quality systems are working effectively to maintain quality and academic standards (Harvey, 2005).

There are few studies revealing whether evolving quality audit methods have affected academics' perception of the audit and its practice. Very few studies have examined the impact of quality audit through the study and comparison of audit related quality mechanisms. This paper seeks to address this gap in the literature by examining how 'frontline' academics (i.e. academics with undergraduate teaching responsibilities) in England understood quality audit and its impact on their work, in particular their classroom teaching practice.

The term 'quality audit' used in this paper refers to not only an audit culture but also a process of using audit-related quality mechanisms to assure the quality of university teaching and learning. The impact of quality audit was analysed by studying how academics valued quality mechanisms and how they compared the effect of different quality mechanisms on their teaching. Quality audit achieves its effect through the implementation of the quality mechanisms which are either imposed upon institutions by external agencies, or are separately created within the institutions (Power, 1997). The external mechanisms check the performance of the internal mechanisms which, in turn, regulate the work of academics.

This paper aims to further develop theories of quality audit, building on the work of Power (1994, 1997) and Shore and Wright (2000), and by providing an in-depth case study of how quality audit was perceived to have affected the work of academics. The research findings provide an insight into whether quality audit is perceived as power control over individual academics, how audit-related quality mechanisms affected undergraduate classroom teaching practice, and how academics' notion of professionalism interacted with the practice and perceived legitimacy of quality audit.

Research methods

This paper draws on data from interviews with sixty-four academics and from substantial document analysis. The researcher adopted theoretical sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and chose these academics from seven different departments/schools among five faculties in a pre-1992 university in England. A pre-1992 university refers to an institution which had the status of a university before the provisions of the Further and Higher Education Act (1992) came into force. The seven departments/schools were chosen for their top scores in their faculty evaluation of teaching as a result of QAA institutional audit. The case study university is well-known for its teaching excellence, despite being research-intensive. This university is used to provide an illustration of how quality audit may have affected other pre-1992 universities in England.

Gender, age, seniority, length of experience, and type of work contract were considered in selecting the interviewees to provide a cross-section of views since according to Newton (2000) views on quality are far from uniform. All the interviews were conducted in accordance with the principles of ethical research practice in the educational field. Informed consent was obtained to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the interviewees.

There were two main phases of interviews in this research. The first phase included sixty-four semi-structured interviews. It used an interpretative research paradigm (Holliday, 2002) to investigate academics' views of and attitudes towards the audit and its related quality mechanisms, and the perceived impact of quality audit on their undergraduate classroom teaching practice. The mechanisms studied were classified as internal and external. Internal quality mechanisms are those established within the case study university, including peer observation, student course

evaluation, annual programme review, and the approval system for new and revised programmes. External mechanisms are those imposed upon the institution to assure the quality of university teaching and learning. They covered the QAA Institutional Audit, external examining, the National Student Survey (NSS), and quality review by Professional Statutory and Regulatory bodies.

The data analysis of the first-phase interviews revealed frequent use of terms by interviewees such as ‘bureaucracy’ and ‘professionalism’ to refer to audit. The second-phase interviews were conducted as an email follow-up shortly afterwards in order to explore further the meaning of and possible contradiction between these terms. Thirty out of the original sixty-four interviewees agreed to second-phase interviews. This phase of the study examined how academics’ notion of professionalism interacted with the quality audit process, and in particular how their professionalism affected their attitude towards audit-related quality mechanisms.

Perceived symbolic regulation of quality audit

It has become a compulsory practice for an English university to establish and improve its internal quality mechanisms to assure the QAA that these mechanisms work well to maintain the quality of teaching and learning. Interviewees perceived the requirement to prepare paperwork, which explains and justifies internal quality mechanisms, as representing university compliance with institutional audit and they found this process burdensome. This finding corresponds with the view of Carr and Jennings (2009), Gosling and D’Andrea (2001), Harvey (2005) that quality audit focuses on measurement and external accountability, which takes away academic ownership of the audit process.

There was a sense among interviewees that a bureaucratic power relationship existed between the QAA and their university. However, most interviewees interpreted this power relationship as being symbolic rather than having an actual control on their individual academic work. This finding differs from the arguments of Morley (2003) and Shore and Wright (2000) that audit exerts real power control over academics. This symbolic, rather than real, regulation was seen to be due to the inconsistent implementation of quality mechanisms.

Inconsistent implementation of quality mechanisms

There was evidence in the research that some audit-related quality mechanisms had been implemented inconsistently within the departments/schools. For example, some interviewees found it easy to ignore mechanisms such as peer observation, annual programme review, and the National Student Survey. This inconsistent implementation suggests that quality audit has not become or was not perceived as an effective management tool within the university sector.

At an informal level, peer observation had long been established in the seven departments/schools studied, but how it occurred in practice varied considerably. In three departments staff reported little recent activity. Although academics interviewed felt that peer observation provided benefits in development terms, an overriding concern was that its use had changed into one principally to inform quality assurance and promotion decisions. One interviewee from the faculty of science observed that peer observation was used in a defensive way to discourage external evaluation of teaching:

The suggestion was made to us that if we didn't start doing it (peer observation) that someone external will come in and do it, so it is internal quality assurance and people see it as part of the overall quality assurance package. (Interviewee 8)

This statement shows that peer observation in this case has been deployed as part of a defensive institutional reaction to external audit, resulting in academics becoming more cynical about its real purpose. It suggests that the purpose of peer observation is migrating from one that was essentially informal and developmental to a means of heading off criticism and external scrutiny. One reason for this changed attitude is that teaching was perceived as a private activity by the interviewees. As well, academics generally do not want to provide negative criticism that might undermine their colleagues' confidence (Peel, 2005).

Peer observation is an example of a tool how interviewees used to resist audit-related work, which resulted in a 'game playing' attitude among them towards audit-related mechanisms. 'Game playing' refers to practices adopted by academics that represent mock or inauthentic compliance (Carnell, 2009; Lucas, 2006). This includes using language and espousing support for practices, without believing in the importance of such processes to improve the quality of teaching and learning in practice.

The inconsistent implementation of quality mechanisms is related to a strong view among forty of the interviewees that the audit process was ineffective in relation to the money and time spent preparing for it. One explanation for this view was that as the QAA moved toward a much lighter touch system of audit, its emphasis on subject inspection disappeared in favour of an audit of the institution's academic systems and standards as a whole. This lighter touch system became less relevant to the subject-based interests of individual academics, and was thus considered as symbolic, bureaucratic and time consuming. For example, a male lecturer in a science

school explained that the priority of academics was research or teaching, and they did not want to spend time doing quality audit-related tasks:

The only real conflict I see is time - time to ensure that quality audit is satisfied is time potentially lost to other professional duties. (Interviewee 37)

Academics' resistance to quality audit corresponds well with the argument that academics believe that their authority derives from a discipline-based professionalism (Becher & Trowler, 2001; Dearlove, 1997; Solbrekke & Karseth, 2006). They therefore defied external audit activities which were considered as an intrusion of their professionalism and did not relate directly to their discipline.

Academics' notion of professionalism

All thirty interviewees in the second-phase study argued that they were 'professionals'. This closely mirrors how a number of researchers have characterised the nature of academic work (Halsey, 1992; Henkel, 2000; Musselin, 2007; Wilson, 1979). According to Wilson (1979), university is the place where the traditional professions are trained and developed, for example, law and medicine; the professional ethos for academics has deep roots; and academic work has attributes of traditional professions, such as special expertise, moral integrity, and control over who practices. These attributes are discussed in detail by Freidson (2001), Johnson (1972), and Larson (1977).

The interviewees' understanding of being professionals varied. Eighteen interviewees who worked in a subject accredited by a professional body normally took 'being professional' to mean being a member or being recognised and accredited by a professional body. The rest of the interviewees, whose work was not allied to a

specific professional field, regarded their activities as constituting a profession because it had three main features. These were the possession of skills that require a high level of education and qualifications; commitment to standards and rules set by the academics' discipline; and the freedom to determine their own work practice with peer governance. These features suggest that the interviewees felt entitled to control their own work and they perceived their practice as tied to a disciplinary identity because their expertise was linked to their subject specialism.

Perceptions of high levels of education and qualifications suggest that academic work has a knowledge base that requires a lengthy period of apprenticeship (Wilson, 1979). There is a parallel between the way in which academics set standards of achievement (and modes of behaviour) in respect to the discipline and the importance professionals in other occupational settings ascribe to their professional codes (Friedson, 2001). These standards and rules constitute the touchstone of the discipline and interviewees were keen to assert their importance to their sense of professional identity. Assumptions about the self-regulating nature of academic professionalism invest universities with a special authority. It leads to the claim that academics have the right to exercise autonomy in managing their own teaching where they use their professional knowledge and skills for the benefit of students and wider society (Wilson, 1979).

Tension between academic professionalism and quality audit

Interviewees' notions of professionalism had produced antipathy towards administrative measures used to judge the quality of university teaching and learning, as they perceived the measures as simply paperwork, and producing no real benefits for lecturers or students. For example, a male lecturer in a science faculty argued that

this administrative exercise was in direct opposition to the professionalism of academics:

Quality audit can rapidly become an administrative exercise, i.e. simply a way of formalising on paper what is being guided by our own professionalism anyway. It then serves to add to stress and divert energy from activities that are more deserving of our highly qualified input. (29)

It was a common assertion among interviewees that they would only accept the standards of conduct operated within their own disciplines. About one third of interviewees in the second phase interviews were sceptical of the QAA assessors. They did not acknowledge the assessors as their true peers and described them as people from outside their discipline who did not have deep academic knowledge of the assessed subjects. A manager-academic interviewee explained that academics normally associated the assessors with those being less qualified or never having achieved a high level in academia:

Actually, why would someone choose to be a QAA assessor? In some cases, it would seem to be that they would really not be going somewhere with their academic career, so this is sort of a sideline. They won't become the top researcher, so they become a QAA assessor instead. It may be unfair but it was the perception. (5)

This quote suggests that there was a lack of trust in the way quality audit, especially its external quality mechanism, measured quality. The preparatory paperwork for audit was perceived as contrary to a sense of autonomy associated with being a professional. This tension, according to Freidson (2001), is due to a perception of professionalism as a unique form of occupational control that professionals use to promote and facilitate their own occupational changes without interference.

It was common for interviewees to use arguments about their professional identity as a means of criticising the legitimacy and the 'scrutiny' of audit. They believed that their professionalism would enable them to meet the high standards

expected in their work without it needing to be monitored by external quality mechanisms. This view of their professionalism is associated with a collegial culture which encourages academics' belief in their professional status in their subject area, and which values academic autonomy and freedom (Dearlove, 1995, 1997). The collegial culture is considered to be more prevalent in UK research-intensive universities than in teaching-intensive ones (Lueddeke, 2008; McNay, 2006).

Increased awareness of good teaching

Despite the perceived tension between quality audit and academics' professionalism, there was an acceptance among interviewees that an increased awareness of the importance of good teaching had occurred as a result. This suggests that quality assurance has produced a new, more improvement-oriented culture of university teaching. Twelve interviewees found the audit process has encouraged them to think critically about the nature of teaching and the aims and objectives of the curriculum. This as a result made them become more reflective about their teaching practice. One teaching Fellow working in a social science department expressed the view that the audit had stimulated him to improve his teaching and had, in a positive sense, pushed other academics to stay 'on their toes'.

I think most things will be done better, when they know that someone is checking. If you are going to clean the fridge, for example, when you know that someone is going to check, so you might do it, not just flush the dust. You know someone is checking and marking on it, and you might lose your job, if you don't do it well, then do a better job.
(49)

The increased awareness of the need to improve teaching practice suggests that the audit process has resulted in a culture change with regards to academic conduct and professional behaviour, similar to that suggested by Shore & Wright (2000). While a

positive development, it is important to acknowledge that the extent to which such culture change has occurred is quite limited since this view was held by only one fifth of interviewees in the study.

Preference for internal quality mechanisms to external ones

In respect to the increased awareness of good teaching practice, interviewees attached most importance to internal quality mechanisms which are closely module or course related, such as student course evaluation and peer observation. The belief in academic professional authority had enabled the majority of interviewees to put more trust in the internal quality mechanisms to measure their work than the external mechanisms. They were more familiar with the internal mechanisms, and found these mechanisms more closely related to their academic work and the particular needs of their discipline than the external ones.

Knowledge of quality mechanisms

The interviewees, unless they held a management position, had better knowledge of the internal mechanisms than of the external ones. For example, most interviewees below the level of department/school head knew little of the NSS and the institutional audit of the QAA. However, they knew a lot more about the internal quality mechanisms, for example, student course evaluation. This familiarity was related to the fact that the internal mechanisms had been in place for much longer and checked interviewees' work more frequently than did the external ones.

One example is student course evaluation which occurs regularly throughout the academic year, while the institutional audit happens every five years when the institution is visited for only a few days. This intensive visit by the QAA was

perceived to have caused more stress for the department/school than from conducting regular student evaluation. Very few interviewees found this intensive visit to have had a significant impact on their undergraduate classroom teaching practice, though it could have affected the overall policies of the institution.

Length of working experience also affected interviewees' knowledge of the external mechanisms. For example, interviewees in their early academic career turned out to know less about the QAA than those in late career. This is illustrated by the fact that 5 out of the 8 interviewees who had no knowledge of the QAA had worked in the university for less than 5 years such. They had been in the university for too short a time to have the chance to know about the QAA. As for the more experienced interviewee, who had worked for over 10 years in the university, their lack of knowledge could be explained by reference to the ending of Subject Review in 2001. The QAA institutional audit became less visible to the individual academic, so these interviewees showed little or no interest in the audit activities.

Perceived relevance to academic work

The perceived relevance to academic work is the second main reason that interviewees preferred internal mechanisms to external ones. While the Professional, Statutory and Regulatory bodies which control teaching and curriculum content of a professional/vocational programme were seen as representing relevant and legitimate interests, the NSS was considered distant from the work of individual academics. The QAA institutional audit and external examining were perceived as the least relevant to interviewees' teaching, only testing whether internal mechanisms were in place or not. For example, a Director of Quality Assurance in the Faculty of Arts argued that the external mechanisms were not involved with an individual academic's teaching:

The external quality assurance mechanism is not supposed to have a direct impact on teaching. In theory, they are not testing quality of AAA (name of the university). What it's testing is 'Does AAA have its own mechanism for controlling quality and are these mechanisms working properly?' (6)

Interviewees argued that external quality mechanisms were unnecessarily complicated and ultimately of little real value in improving teaching quality. They considered the process to consist of little more than a 'paper trail' which cost them a huge amount of time that could otherwise be spent on improving the quality of their teaching. There was a concern that the process had encouraged a gap to open up between what was recorded on paper and what academics actually did in practice.

One implication of interviewees' preference for the internal quality mechanisms is that the internal audit process set up within the institution worked more effectively than the external one. This suggests that external mechanisms, especially those associated with the QAA, have limited perceived benefit among academics. For example, nearly one-third of interviewees took little notice of the QAA institutional audit. This lack of interest meant that there was no real communication or subsequent learning linking the QAA element of the quality audit process and academics teaching practice. This attitude acts as a barrier to quality audit making a difference to the work of academics or the learning of students. When academics have little knowledge of the external mechanisms, the 'expectation gap' (Power, 1994, p. 6) between the audit and actual practice tends to be larger because interviewees are less likely to take any account of the quality audit.

Interviewees' preference for internal quality mechanisms was also related to their beliefs that academics should be able to determine their own work practices, as their authority derived from a discipline-based professionalism. They therefore paid

more attention to the course/unit-related quality mechanisms which were considered more relevant to their work practice than the external ones.

Prioritised internal quality mechanisms

Of the four internal quality mechanisms studied, interviewees described student course evaluation as the most useful and relevant to their undergraduate classroom teaching practice, followed by peer observation. The annual programme review and the approval system for new and revised programmes were described as bureaucratic and 'distant' from their work and not taken as seriously as a result.

The merits of student course evaluation

Interviewees regarded quality audit as the main driver for them to take up both student course evaluation and peer observation, but they treated the evaluation more seriously. The main reasons were: peer observation was perceived as confined to assessing the performance of early career academics; its guidelines were too complicated to follow; and the observation practice had not achieved as much of an effect on teaching when compared with student course evaluation. For example, a head of school who had worked for over 20 years in a medical-related course explained that peer observation worked well for early career academics:

It (peer observation) fits very well for young staff, because they want to do it and they want to get the feedback and they want to learn. It doesn't work well on people like me (laughter), because it is very hard to get motivated to do that. (10)

Interviewee 10 suggested that academics' probation period had made peer observation a compulsory practice among early career academics to help them learn from experienced colleagues. According to Douglas and Douglas (2006), since early career

academics are still on a 'learning curve' and need to develop their own teaching style, peer observation provides them with an opportunity to reflect on their own teaching practice.

Perceived effect of student course evaluation on teaching

In contrast, student course evaluation was perceived as more useful in getting to know students' needs, and in encouraging academics to become clearer about their teaching expectations, as well as to make them more aware of how they could improve. The majority of interviewees found the evaluation a useful practice in providing them with a way of seeing what students liked and disliked.

For example, a female lecturer in a social science department argued that the result of her student course evaluation had increased her opportunities to reflect on teaching, which as a result improved her teaching practice. She sometimes changed her approach to topics in class due to the evaluation results:

Sometimes, it [student course evaluation] is really useful, for example, you teach course work on real politics and a bunch of students say: 'I really think we should cover this topic and we haven't covered that.' Oh, we think: 'That is a good topic and we could include that, you know,' so that kind of thing I think is really useful. (21)

The change of teaching methods and teaching content corresponds well with the argument that student course evaluation is a valid, reliable and useful indicator of teaching quality because it provides crucial information about the quality of courses (Marsh, 2007; Richardson, 2009; Wilson *et al*, 1997). Four interviewees in the faculty of social science had changed their textbooks since they received feedback that they were considered difficult by students. For example, a female lecturer made this view explicit:

The most practical matter, one case for the unit taught, was that textbook was difficult. ... I quite agreed with the comments, so I made a change of the textbook. (22)

Interviewee 22 further commented that she had started to give students handouts far in advance of her lecture due to the evaluation feedback:

That is the same for the lecture notes. I always pass to them three days in advance. While in the past, I would only pass to them the day before, or even the morning before giving the lecture in the afternoon. (22)

It had become a common practice among many interviewees to not only give students handouts in advance, but also provide more handouts. The use of new technology, such as PowerPoint and Blackboard, is another change introduced due to student course evaluation. For example, an interviewee in charge of quality assurance in the faculty of science found that the evaluation had led her to use new technology to benefit student learning:

The use of technology and use of PowerPoint improves learning. I think Blackboard has grown up as a result of student pressure... (9)

The above examples suggest that student course evaluation was perceived as the most effective quality mechanism. Interviewees took it seriously and made instructional changes or improvements, according to the evaluation results. This finding is similar to the argument by Moore and Kuol (2005) and Nasser and Fresko (2002) that student course evaluation could be used to improve teaching performance. However, a different, less positive view of the changes in practice reported here is that the adjustments made, such as changing textbooks considered too 'difficult' and providing more hand-outs, are symbolic of the 'dumbing down' of higher education in response to a consumerist culture (Hayes & Wynyard, 2002).

Conclusion

Quality audit has become an international trend to assess the quality of university teaching and learning. This paper has interpreted its effect from the perspective of academics in England. It revealed how they understood and valued quality audit and its practice, and how audit-related quality mechanisms have affected their undergraduate classroom teaching practice.

In contrast with the argument of Power (1997) and Shore and Wright (2000) that quality audit represents power control, this paper reveals that most academic interviewees perceived the QAA institutional audit as symbolic regulation over their work since the audit had more influence on the university as a whole than on individual academics. This symbolic regulation raised a question as to whether the costs of the quality audit operation were justified in relation to its limited beneficial effect on academics' undergraduate classroom teaching practice.

Despite this, the research reveals that quality audit was not perceived as a pointless process. Interviewees acknowledged its positive impact on increasing academics' awareness of good teaching practice. They argued that quality audit had motivated academics to think about teaching aims and objectives, and encouraged them to become more reflective about their teaching practice. This finding is similar to the view of Shore and Wright (2000) that quality audit has produced a culture change which influences academics' conduct and behaviour. However, the culture change identified in this research appears to be rather limited as this view was held by only one fifth of interviewees.

Academic interviewees tended to relate the increased awareness of good teaching to internal quality mechanisms which occur at the level of the course/module. They described these mechanisms as useful tools to get to know

students' needs and to make instructional change. Interviewees in general had better knowledge of the internal mechanisms and perceived them as more closely related to their teaching practice than the external mechanisms.

Based on the research findings, this paper argues that it is important to revise the quality audit system into one where academics can take the lead and feel engaged. One possible way is to raise the profile of teaching evaluation practice conducted by subject peers, for example, external examining. The raised profile together with the development of a national training system of external examiners might raise academics' sense of professionalism and facilitate delivery of its claimed benefits of an assured quality of teaching and learning. The other possible way is to minimise 'paperwork' by cutting the bureaucratic demand of external quality mechanisms such as the QAA institutional audit. This change would reduce university costs and help to develop a sense among academics that they should be responsible for the audit process due to its efficiency and relevance to their work.

Interviewees' preference for internal quality mechanisms suggests that these mechanisms are important and useful although they could be revised to become more effective and more teaching related via the development and sharing of good practice. Interviewees' reluctance to engage with peer observation, for example, might be reduced by reforming it into a more collaborative and less formal model incorporating reviews of assessment design and feedback practice (Gosling, 2005). This could put observees more at ease, and create the space and opportunity for observers and observees to talk more informally about how to improve teaching. Academics could then use the observation as a real chance to reflect on their teaching practice.

Although interviewees were supportive of enhancing teaching practice within the university, they argued against the scrutiny of quality audit, particularly the

QAA's institutional audit. One reason for this attitude was that interviewees held a strong sense of professionalism, and they were reserved about the concept of quality audit and the audit design in practice. They particularly disliked being assessed by people perceived as being outside their disciplines, because they felt a tension between quality audit and their professionalism. This perceived tension raises a question to be explored in future research: how to fit quality audit with its agenda of improving the quality of teaching and learning in a more effective way, while minimising the conflict with academics' professionalism.

Notes:

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