

Craft, Alma (Ed.) *Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Proceedings of an International Conference*. London: The Falmer, 1992, pp. vii, 250 pages. Price: \$78.00. Reviewed by Paula S. Brook, Adult and Higher Education, University of Alberta.

The timing of this conference on Quality Assurance in Higher Education and its proceedings was propitious, with the growing emphasis on accountability and quality in universities. Over 100 representatives from accreditation bodies and from higher education spent three days in Hong Kong in 1991 discussing quality assurance issues. This publication is one attempt to facilitate understanding and exchange of perspectives and developments about quality assurance.

In addition to learning about quality assurance in higher education in nine countries (Australia, France, Germany, Hong Kong, India, the Netherlands, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States), the reader is also presented with a comprehensive but succinct overview of the respective higher education systems. Also covered in the book are quality assurance experiences in one professional area (engineering), one non-governmental organization (OECD), and three institutions in Hong Kong (Polytechnic, Open Learning Institute, University). The first chapter on the general topic of higher education quality assurance presents an excellent discussion of the key issues, terms, and processes by which quality is assured in educational institutions. Diagrams are used to complement the discussion and are themselves of high quality — both conceptually and visually.

The analogy of orange juice is used to clarify and simplify quality measurements, with higher education quality equated to quality in orange juice — “it is multifaceted. Thus it is better to consider a ‘quality profile’ than to give a single measure for quality” (p. 13). Quality in higher education is not to be confused with cost or efficiency, does not have to be measured by externals, does not have to involve an objective, quantitative score, and does not have to be norm-referenced. But it should include measures, levels, and standards about inputs, processes and outputs: teaching, learning, programs, students, staff and employers.

There are three methods of conducting accreditation as reported in this book. The self-study approach, the peer review process (e.g., external evaluation), and that performed by an agency (such as a government agency or professional body). European countries tend to utilise governmental agencies to assess quality; the United States and United Kingdom use accrediting programs or institutions (such as an Engineering Society or Middle States Association of Colleges).

I found the book informative without being repetitive or boring. I was disappointed in the lack of a chapter on Canadian developments, although Canada was represented at the conference. There is no mention anywhere of the rationale for chapter (country) inclusion. And I found it odd that there was a chapter on the German experience, since there is no system of quality assurance in the country. In fact, that chapter is incongruous with the book; the discussion is divided between a generalized explanation of quality assurance in industry (which is addressed adequately in Chapter 1), and the higher education system which "seems to be a classic example of a system with equality and equivalence characteristics" (p. 51). This academic confidence is buttressed through the elite (i.e., quality) selection of faculty, where unity of research and teaching are assumed, and professional control is institutionalized in the allocation of public research money.

The appendix lists an abbreviated abstract of six additional papers which were presented at the conference and a short biographical statement about the contributors. Also noted is the formation of an International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQUAAHE), as an outcome of this conference. A minor notation associated with this 234 page book is its quality paper. You keep thinking you've caught two pages each time you turn the page. the thickness is so different from many current books.

I would recommend this book heartily for those who want to pursue an introduction to quality assurance in international higher education. Alma Craft has done an excellent job of editing the papers into a coherent and somewhat equivalent presentation style. The reader is almost caught up with the excitement of these conferees as they exchanged information about their countries and institutions. Two quotes from different parts of the book seem appropriate in summary: "...academic autonomy is a right which carries with it the responsibility for maintaining high standards of tertiary education" (p. 230); and "What is clear is that quality in higher education is a pervasive, but elusive concept, is multifaceted, requires judgments by people with experience, and cannot simply be equated with excellence" (p. 15).