

Quality Assurance in Higher Education

A Discussion Document prepared by the EPC Working Party on Quality Assurance

Foreword

This Occasional Paper was prepared by the Engineering Professors' Conference Working Group on Quality Assurance in Higher Education, set up as part of the on-going EPC programme of quality improvement in education. The members of the working group are 'quality' specialists in the field of manufacturing. One of the first tasks of the working group was to consider draft guidelines which have been published by the BSI and others for the application of British Standard 5750 'Quality Systems' to Higher Education, and to suggest any desirable alternatives.

The recommendations of the working group, for the development of quality systems appropriate to HE, are presented in this document. It is not an interpretation of an existing standard, but has been derived from the fundamental principles of quality assurance, and combines a structure and content equivalent to that of the British Standard with material from the Notes for the Guidance of Auditors published by the CVCP Academic Audit Unit. An important additional aspect of the EPC approach is the explicit requirement for a quality improvement process, which is fundamental to Total Quality Management.

The EPC approach emphasises that although quality must start at the highest level of an institution, it then cascades down to all staff in academic departments, and in support and administrative services, who are responsible for planning, documentation and accomplishment of the necessary measures. It is good to see that the authors have stated clearly and unambiguously:-

All the procedures proposed in the EPC quality system Specification and Guidelines are aimed at the objective of providing essential information for the improvement process. rather than creating additional administrative structures, documents and records for their own sake. It follows that the test of each proposal when developing a quality assurance system is- 'will it help us improve quality?'

This document deserves the most serious consideration, at a time when external scrutiny of the quality of education provided by an institution, possibly linked to funding, is on the agenda.

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Chairman of the Engineering Professors' Conference

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Summary

This document proposes a model of quality assurance for Higher Education Institutions, and has been prepared as an alternative to the adoption of British Standard 5750 'Quality Systems'. To assure and improve the quality of

