Societal Engagement and Quality Assurance in Irish HEIs

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Overview

- National Context
- Research Aim and Methodology
- Mapping the Landscape
- Analysis and Findings
- Conclusions

National Context

- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)
- Higher Education Institution (HEI)
- Annual Institutional Reports (AIQRs) and CINNTE Cyclical Review Process

Questions?

- What are the features of community/ civic engagement within Irish HEIs?
- What is the relationship between QA (internal and external) and the community engagement activities of the HEIs?

Methodology – Mixed Methods

- Documentary Analysis
- Semi-structured Interviews
- Short Case Study
- Limitations

Mapping the Landscape

EUROPEAN

- Recommendation of the Council of Ministers (2007)
- Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020)
- European Standards and Guidelines (2015)

NATIONAL

- Social objects of Irish universities
- Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 in Ireland
- Higher Education Authority Systems Performance Framework
- QQI Quality Assurance Guidelines

Analysis and Findings

- Important strategic objective for all HEIs
- Different approaches to operationalising community engagement
- Campus Engage case studies
- Rich and diverse landscape of activities
- National framework for measurement and evaluation

Relationship with…

Internal QA

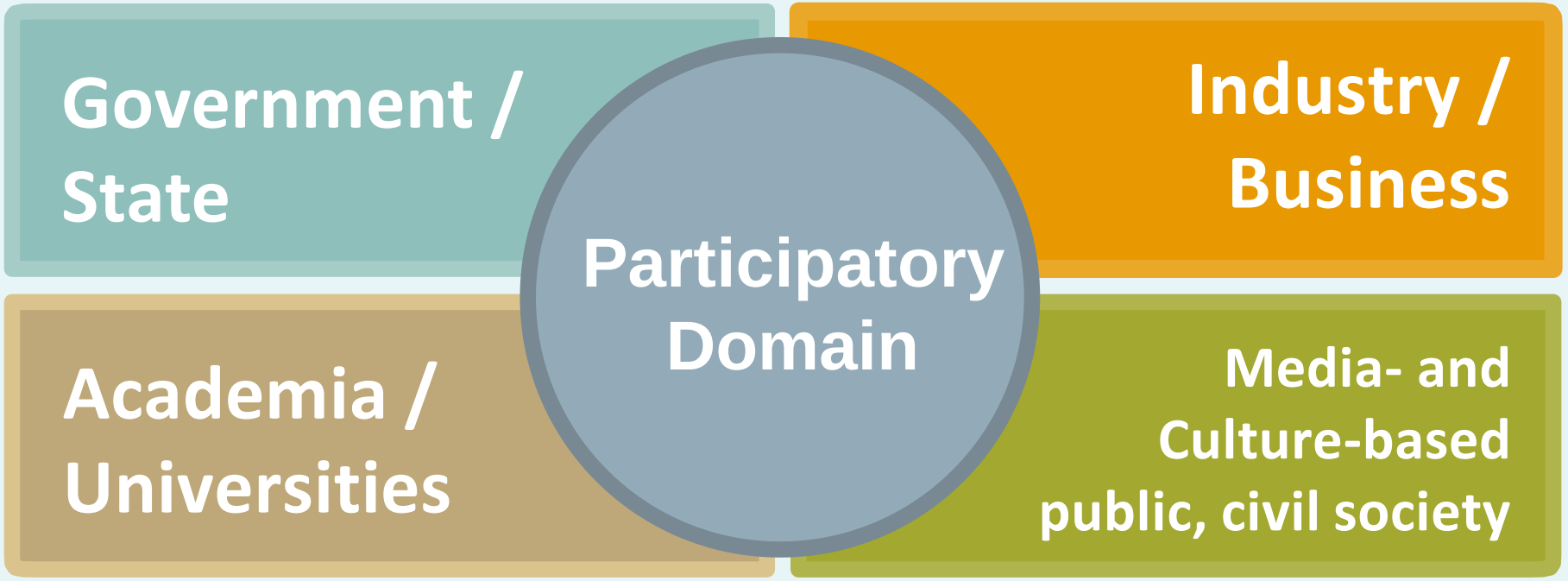
- Reference to civic engagement in 5 AIQR reports
- Effectiveness and impact measures not provided
- Role of internal QA not clear
- No systematic integration

External QA

- No explicit reference in external cyclical review
- Only considered if explicit institutional objective

Case Study

Dublin City University



Community Engagement

- Engagement Plan
- Goals and Values
- President's Award for Engagement
- Evaluation of Implementation
- Quadruple Helix Model

DCU - Internal QA and Community Engagement [1]

- Not explicitly incorporated in QA
- Not reported on through AIQR
- Evaluation not embedded within IQA
- Activities included in internal reviews

DCU - Internal QA and Community Engagement [2]

- Co-ordinated, strategic and planned approach
- QA taking over engagement agenda?
- Effectiveness difficult to measure
- Mechanism for self-assurance

Qualitative Analysis – Emerging Views [1]

- Case study reflects qualitative interviews
- Negative relationship with institutional ranking
- Resistance to further external requirements
- Internal and external QA do not have role

Qualitative Analysis – Emerging Views [2]

- Concern that QA inhibits engagement
- Current review already includes engagement
- Institutional freedom for organic growth

Interviewee Quote

[It is] … important for student societies …
to have the freedom …
to do what they want to do …
[they] can be more creative
with what they want to support.

Conclusions – Features of Engagement

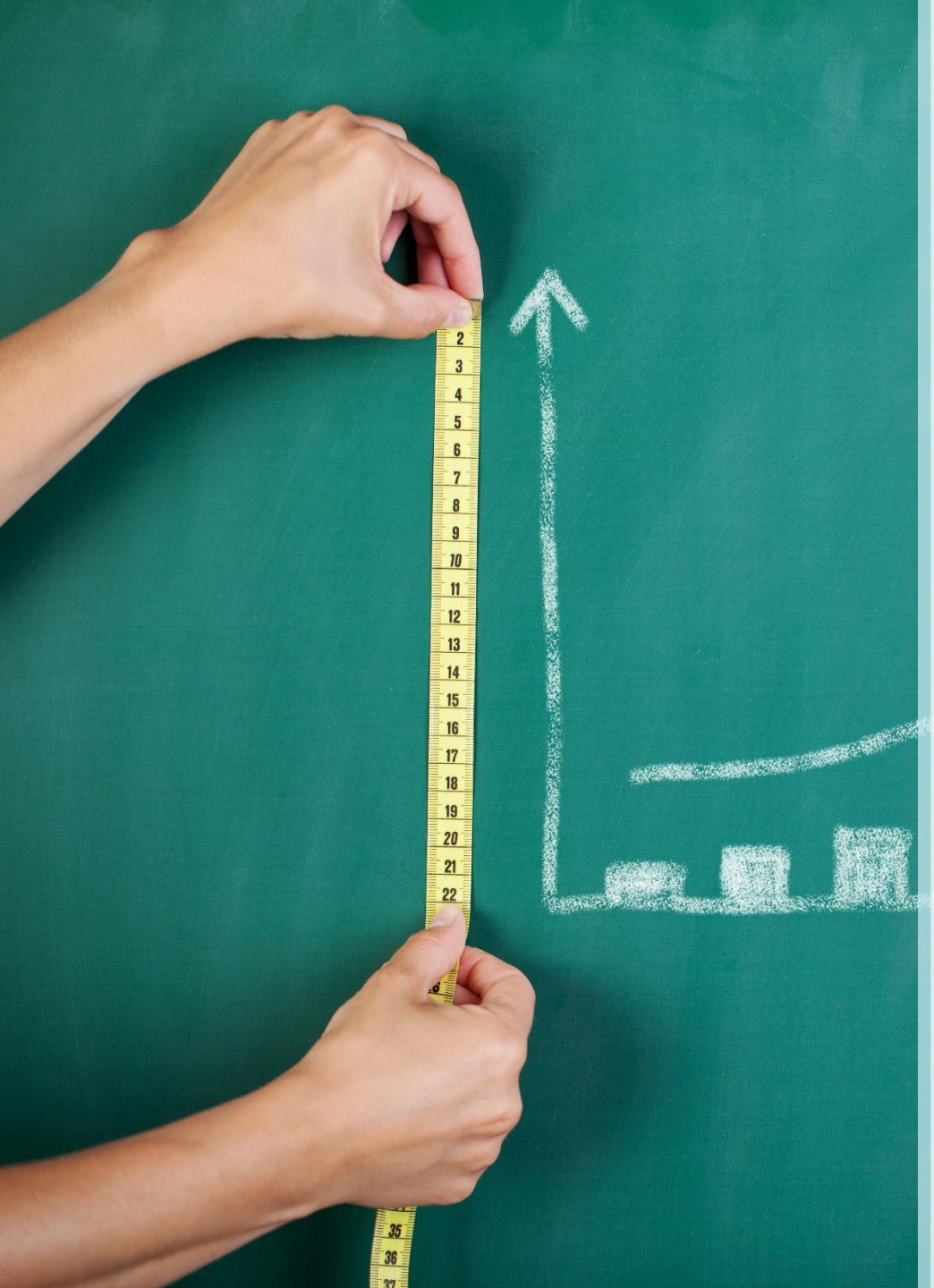
- Embedded feature with Irish HEI strategies
- HEIs are active and creative participants
- Diverse range of activities
- Perceived to be of benefit
- Features in all institutions

Conclusions – Relationship between QA and community engagement

- Supports in ‘embryonic stage’
- Differing perceptions and views
- QA stifling engagement and innovation?
- Seen as part of systems of control
- QA perceived as tool to support accountability

Conclusions

- Legitimacy of QA depends on staff support and collaboration in process
- QA at odds with ethos and language of community engagement



For Institutions

- How do you know what you are doing is right?
- How do you know what you are doing has impact?
- Difficult to measure but not impossible.

For External QA

- Do we need to rethink the language and concepts of QA?
- Could QA be used as a tool for change? To test boundaries?

Final Reflections

- ESG definition of quality assurance
- Evolution of QA systems
- External QA could highlight engagement
- Inclusion of engagement in review
- HEIs to articulate their engagement activities
- Evolutionary not revolutionary

Thank
You!