

# Quality Assurance of Research: are UASs Really that Different?

Natascha van Hattum-Janssen  
Leon Cremonini

Saxion Research & Graduate  
School



# UASs and Quality Assurance of Research

- Universities of Applied Sciences (Hogescholen) since 1993, research started in 2001
- Practice-based research:

## 1.1 Practice-based research

Researchers at universities of applied sciences (also referred to as 'institutes' in this document) carry out practice-based research in which they formulate the research questions through question articulation together with the professional field. This research is evidence-based, methodologically sound and ethically designed. In co-creation with various regional, national and/or international partners, researchers look for insights, solutions, innovations or ways to address different societal issues. The strength of practice-based research at universities of applied sciences lies in the interplay between professors, researchers, students, external partners and lecturers in conjunction with professional education, professional practice and the research domain. This leads to creativity, entrepreneurship and critical innovation capacity and contributes to sustainable knowledge development, knowledge sharing and the application of knowledge. The practice-based research of universities of applied sciences makes for institutes with substantive state-of-the-art education that train students to become valuable professionals. Moreover, practice-based research contributes to talent development; not only the talents of students, but also of lecturers, researchers, staff of the institute, and professionals in the field in the region and beyond<sup>1</sup>.

# Assessing Quality of Research

- QA seeks to:
  - uphold and improve research produced by knowledge institutes and
  - demonstrate to external stakeholder that the research is relevant and a sound investment
- Relevance of research at UASs means impact on:
  - professional field and broader society
  - education
  - research domain

*(Sector Protocol 2023-2028)*

- Assessment of research predominantly aimed at academic outputs versus broader impact as defined by the sector protocol
- Need for specific indicators
- Fitting in QA policies

# New Quality Assurance Policies since 2023



# QA Foundations

## Saxion

- Presidency
- Schools
- Research Advisory Board
- Clusters
- Team Quality Assurance Research
- SRGS
- Education

## Professional field

Cluster

### Formal quality assurance

- External evaluations
- Midterm reviews
- Internal/external accountability
- ...

### Dynamic quality assurance

- KOS
- NCCRI
- Peer review
- Intervision
- ....

Developmental perspective

Not a goal in itself

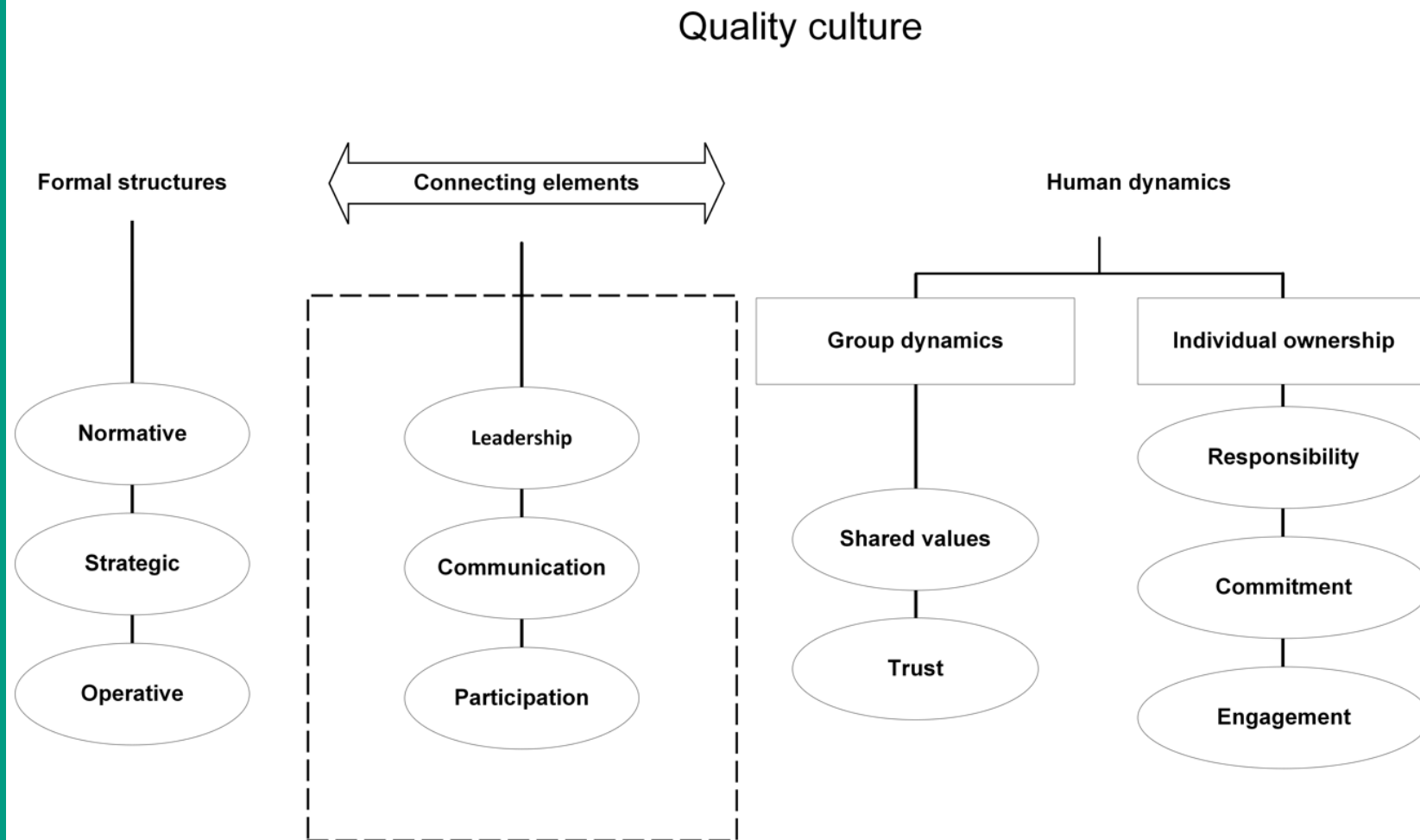
Insight in the numbers

Nobody's care

The story behind the numbers

*Quality assurance of research contributes to the organisation and execution of practice-based research with impact*

# Quality Culture: the Leading Principle of QA policies



# New Indicators

- Based on the new BKO (Sector Protocol)
- Related to all four standards of the BKO
- Addressing recommendations of external panels for basic and optional indicators
- Addressing the concerns of the research groups regarding usefulness for research
- Contributing to the creation of a quality culture



# Saxion's Participatory Process to Develop new Indicators

## Standard of the Sector Protocol

2. The research unit makes transparent what its contribution is to the development of professional practice and society at large

## Critical Success Factor

Contribution of research to the professional practice and society at large

## Rationale

Research that contributes significantly to the professional practice and society at large will collaborate with partners from these contexts: the in kind or in cash contributions of these partners as part of the total turnover of a project are a good indication this collaboration.

## Indicator

Proportion of (in kind and in cash) contributions of external project partners (private or public) of the total project turnover

## Data Source

Project description card in the project administration system

*Feedback from the institution's Presidency, the research centres, the schools' presidents, QA staff, and other stakeholders used to produce the final list of indicators*

# Insights in the Numbers

From old to new indicators for research:



| Quality standard of previous sector protocol                                                                                                                                                                 | Basic performance indicator                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. The research unit has a relevant, ambitious and challenging research profile and research programme.                                                                                                      | <div>1.1 The percentage of project volume contributing to the focus areas of Saxion as part of the total project volume</div> <div>1.2 The percentage of project volume contributing to the regional strategic agenda of Saxion as part of the total project volume</div>                                                                                                                     |
| 2. The research unit makes transparent what its contribution is to the development of professional practice and society at large, of education, and of the research domain.                                  | <div>2.1 The in kind and in cash contributions of external partners compared the total project volume</div> <div>2.2 The contribution to education through different educational activities (guest lecture, supervision of assignments, supervision of thesis, etc.)</div> <div>2.3 The percentage number of hours dedicated to research as part of the total number of hours available</div> |
| 3. The research unit’s research complies with the standards applicable in the field with regard to conducting research.                                                                                      | <div>3.1 The result of the integrity dialogue</div> <div>3.2 The results of the peer reviews</div>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 4. The way in which the unit is organised, the deployment of people and resources, and the internal and external partnerships, networks and relationships, make it possible to achieve the research profile. | <div>4.1 The primary, secondary and tertiary funding sources</div> <div>4.2 Amount of FTE and number of people</div> <div>4.3 Presence of a quality system</div>                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

## Lessons and Discussion (1/2)

Reforming how we understand and evaluate research quality at UASs requires a clear foundation beyond external and internal accountability.

The contribution of QA to the impact of research, particularly in the context of UASs must be explicitly understood

Continuous stakeholder involvement is key for effective QA and securing broad support, facilitated by a clear purpose and feedback opportunities for all.

## Discussion

(How) should QA practices at UASs differ from those at research universities to foster a quality culture fit for UASs and contribute to a high-quality, relevant higher education system??

## Lessons and Discussion (2/2)

Research performance indicators establish prerequisites for impact; they do not just serve as *ex post* measurement tools. This does not preclude broader discussions about impact.

*For example, research contributions to education within the UAS are necessary for impact on education. This emphasizes that the responsibility for quality research primarily lies with the research groups, not with rigid or formalistic QA policies.*

The role of performance indicators is not just static metrics to measure outcomes, but to contribute to the development and continuous evaluation of QA. Performance indicators are the beginning of the QA process, not the final step.

## Discussion

*Does the approach taken by Saxion UAS successfully promote and maintain a quality culture suited to the needs of UASs?*

Thank you for your  
attention



**Dr. Natascha van Hattum-Janssen**

*Advisor on Quality Assurance of Practice-Based Research*

*Saxion Research & Graduate School*

[n.vanhattum@saxion.nl](mailto:n.vanhattum@saxion.nl)