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**Abstract**

Since 1992, the assessment of the quality of the teaching and learning process in the United Kingdom has generated considerable political controversy. This article traces the evolution of the quality regime to the present day, which appears to signify that the contemporary arrangements are underwritten by a measure of political consensus and an emerging interest in moving beyond quality assurance to quality enhancement. The focus of the article is to provide an interpretation of the British quality agenda that recognizes the inevitability that higher education policy will be shaped by compromises arrived at between dominant political interests. And yet policy is also driven by ideas, and the article interprets the shifting quality agenda as a conflict of values about the relationship between state, the wider society and higher education. As interest in creating quality regimes for teaching and learning spreads to other systems of higher education, the question arises as to what, if anything can be learnt from the British, and more especially the English, experience? (HRK / Abstract übernommen)