After 16 Years of Publishing Standards, Do CAS Standards Make a Difference?

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Using members of professional associations who are a part of the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) consortia as a sample, this study investigated who uses CAS Standards, how and why they are used, and whether CAS Standards are associated with enhanced student learning. Using a quantitative analysis, this study found that 61% of the sample had heard of CAS, vice presidents were significantly more likely to have heard of CAS than those with other job titles, and CAS materials are used more as guides than for self assessment. Only 24% of the sample indicated that they measure learning outcomes, and of those 41% stated that there is a connection between student learning and CAS Standards.

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) published its first set of standards in 1986. The credibility of these standards was based on inter-association consensus for the purpose of establishing professional standards for student development/services and programs and for graduate school preparation of professionals entering the field of student affairs (CAS, 1980). Since 1986 subsequent standards have been published in 1997, 1999, 2001, and most recently 2003. According to Jacoby and Thomas (1986) these standards offer essential components of student affairs programs regardless of the organization's structure. These essential components (i.e., standards) are written as "must" or "shall" statements for 28 functional areas (e.g. housing and residence life, commuter student programs and services, academic advising, campus programs, visitors services) plus master's level professional preparation (Miller, 2001). "Should" or "may" statements, called guidelines, are offered as descriptors of ways to enhance program quality beyond the essential. Standards and guidelines are written in the following categories: mission, program, leadership, organization and management, human resources, financial resources, facilities, technology and equipment, legal responsibilities, equal opportunity, access and affirmative action, campus and community relations, diversity, ethics, and assessment and evaluation. All 28 CAS functional area standards are based on common core "general" standards. These general standards, similar in all functional area standards, provide the foundation upon which specific functional area standards are founded.

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The first Self Assessment Guide (SAG), which offers criteria measures in an assessment format for conducting a self study, was first published in 1988. SAGs allow for easier utilization of the CAS Standards (Byran & Mullendore, 1991). The self-assessment guides "provide the perfect means to judge compliance" with standards (Gold, 1995, p. 68).

Since the first CAS Standards were published in 1986, CAS has grown not only in the number of its consortium members (that now includes 32 professional associations) but also has broadened its focus. Originally named the Council for the Advancement of Standards for Student Services/Development Programs, CAS changed its name to Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education to acknowledge involvement by associations and functional areas sometimes found outside of student affairs (e.g., American College Health Association, College Information and Visitor Services Association, College Reading and Learning Association).

The purpose of this study was to assess the impact of CAS on professionals in CAS member associations. Specifically, the researchers sought to explore who uses CAS Standards, how and why they are used, and whether CAS Standards are associated with enhanced student learning.

Literature Review

There were two influences that encouraged the creation of CAS Standards. First, because establishing standards is necessary for any profession, the creation of standards in student affairs was a natural progression as student affairs continues to mature into a profession from a burgeoning field (Miller, 1984; Paterson & Carpenter, 1989). Paterson and Carpenter stated that CAS Standards represent "a major step forward in the efforts toward becoming a profession" (p. 125). Second, assessment to obtain or maintain accreditation has increasingly become a necessary part of higher education as government agencies and the public seek to hold institutions more accountable for student learning (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). The CAS Standards represent the will of student affairs professionals to set their own standards rather than to have others outside the profession who are possibly uninformed as to its purpose, values, and goals set them. "Student affairs clearly announced its determination to control its own destiny" (Byron & Mullendore, 1991, p. 29).

The CAS Standards are "evolving documents" (Byron & Mullendore, 1991, p. 29). Functional area standards are revised every five years and beginning with the 1997 standards book, a new standards book has been published every two years. Each new "bluebook" includes revised standards as well as new standards for emerging functional areas (i.e., student leadership programs; visitor services; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender programs and services).

Utilizing CAS Standards

There are a number of uses for the CAS Standards. They include program development, continuous improvement, self-study for accreditation or review, staff development, student development, program planning, program evaluation, acceptance of and education about student affairs services and programs, political maneuverability, budgetary assistance, framework for ethical practice, and standardized language in functional areas (Bryan & Mullendore, 1991; Gold, 1995; Jacobs, Hayes-Harris, Lopez, & Ward, 1995; Mann, Gordon, & Strade, 1991; Winston & Moore, 1991). They also provide "criteria by which programs of professional preparation can be judged" (Miller, 1991).

The CAS Philosophy

CAS stresses the use of self-study to maintain educational quality. Through inter-association collaboration credible standards can be established upon which to conduct a self study. Because an organization that represents the profession at large should be charged with establishing standards (Miller, 1991), the CAS philosophy dictates that the broader the collaborative effort the more credible and valid the standards. CAS Standards and guidelines are written with "consensual validity" in mind (Miller, 1991, p. 48).

The CAS Process

CAS suggests that student affairs organizations conduct a CAS study by establishing a broad-based committee including staff, faculty, and students. Determining whether an organization complies with the standards must be based on documentation and supporting evidence. The self-study committee must then create a follow-up plan based on recommendations from the self study.

The Impact of CAS on the Profession

There are several studies that have sought to explore the impact the establishment of CAS Standards has made on the profession. In 1989, Marron found that the distribution of the standards was not sufficient. Hence, only minimal utilization was found and the long-term effects were not predictable. Marron also found that more public institutions use CAS Standards than private institutions. Mann et. al (1991) found that less than one-third of the 130 campus leaders in student affairs divisions surveyed perceived any changes due to the establishment of CAS Standards. Fifty-one percent of those surveyed used the standards, 33% did not use, and 16% were unaware of the CAS standards. Those who did report change reported a strong emphasis of change in three or four areas. Participants noted that CAS Standards were used to evaluate individual units, measure achievement, and set goals and objectives. In

the comments section, 15 examples of specific use of the CAS Standards were noted.

In a more recent study, Cooper and Saunders (2000) surveyed 107 leaders in student affairs divisions to investigate the perceived importance of the CAS Standards. The researchers asked if the CAS "must" statements were of importance to student affairs practice and if participants needed additional training or knowledge to comply with the CAS Standards. The researchers found that all of the CAS Standards "must" statements were viewed to be at least of some importance. Those "must" statements deemed most important were those of broad organizational concerns such as legal, ethical, and financial issues. Those of less importance were responsibilities of specific roles (i.e., revising and disseminating mission statements). There were statistically significant differences by race and gender at the $p<.05$ level. Women were significantly more likely than men to state that setting goals and selecting staff on the basis of education, work experience, and personal attributes were important standards. Women more so than men expressed more need for training in establishing procedures for providing appropriate professional development opportunities for staff. African American participants rated 10 CAS "must" statements as significantly more important than did White participants. These included the following: leaders must recruit, select, supervise, and develop others in the organization; evidence of effective management must include clear sources and channels of authority; evidence of effective management must include effective decision-making and conflict resolution procedures and accountability systems; programs and services must establish procedures for providing appropriate professional development opportunities; as well as others.

Criticisms of CAS

In collaborative efforts of revising CAS Standards, several criticisms have been frequently noted. Criticisms include that the standards are too prescriptive, are based on inputs rather than on outcomes, and are not available for free (Barrett, personal communication; Love, 2000). The graduate preparation program standards have been criticized for not allowing institutional programs to create unique niches (Love, 2000).

Methodology

The current study is more comprehensive than those discussed above in that it seeks participants from all of CAS member professional associations and at a variety of organizational levels within an institution. Surveying members of professional associations who belong to the CAS consortium, this study, sponsored by CAS, sought to explore who uses CAS Standards and Guidelines,

how are they used, and if there is evidence that CAS Standards and Guidelines have enhanced student learning.

In the summer of 2000, member associations of CAS were asked to participate in this study by providing address labels of a random sample of 5% of their membership. Twenty-two professional associations agreed to participate (see Table 1). These members were sent a survey asking for demographic information including their position title and institution where they were employed. Additionally they were asked whether they had heard of CAS, what CAS materials they had used or read, how they had used the CAS standards and guidelines, and whether CAS had influenced learning at their institution. Respondents were also given the opportunity to comment on the survey items. A total of 5,506 surveys were mailed. Of those, 1,481 surveys were returned from members of 23 professional associations for a participation rate of 27% (see Table1). No follow-up mailings were sent.

It is interesting to note the influence in the results of the "cross pollination" of professional association membership. In other words, there were instances of members of one professional association indicating using CAS standards in a functional area indirectly related to that professional association. Also, several participants were sent more than one survey as they were members of more than one CAS member professional association.

Results and Discussion

This section will discuss who is most likely to use CAS Standards and at what institutions are they most likely to be employed. Also, what particular CAS materials are used and for what purposes they are used will be explored. Results are derived from both a statistical analysis and broad themes generated from open-ended questions. Participant quotes are offered to illustrate specific examples.

Who Had Heard of CAS Standards

Sixty-one percent (n = 890) of the 1,481 respondents had heard of CAS. Of the respondents who had heard of CAS, 51.6% were from public institutions and 48.4% were from private institutions. Of those who had heard of CAS in the sample, 42% were directors and associate directors, 19.8% were vice presidents and associate vice presidents, 17.6% were deans and associate deans, 10.8% were assistant directors and coordinators, and 3.3% were faculty. Using a Pearson chi-square statistic ($p<.05$) it was found that there were significant differences regarding who had previously heard of CAS by job title. Vice presidents/associate vice presidents were most likely to have heard of CAS (85%), followed by 69% of the deans/associate deans, 60% of the directors/associate directors, 54% of the assistant directors/coordinators, and 38% of the faculty members (see Figure 1).

Table 1

Survey Sample Rates of Professional Organizations

Organization	Number of Surveys			
	Sent	Returned	Return Rate	% of Total
AAEA	57	27	47.4%	1.8%
ACCA	200	5	2.5%	0.3%
ACPA	760	218	28.7%	14.7%
ACCED	240	51	21.2%	3.4%
ACUHO-I	875	255	29.1%	17.2%
ACUI	161	40	24.8%	2.7%
AFA	66	22	33.3%	1.5%
ASJA	145	35	24.1%	2.4%
CIVSA	15	4	26.6%	0.3%
CACUSS	63	14	22.2%	0.9%
CRLA	98	20	20.4%	1.3%
NACADA	200	62	31.0%	4.2%
NACA	17	8	47.0%	0.5%
NACAS	90	26	28.9%	1.7%
NACE	230	23	10.0%	1.5%
NADE	109	28	25.7%	1.9%
NASFAA	296	87	29.4%	5.9%
NASPA	779	256	32.9%	17.3%
NAWE	280	66	23.6%	4.5%
NCCP	20	10	50.0%	0.6%
NIRSA	150	36	24.0%	2.4%
NODA	250	40	10.0%	2.7%
SACSA	405	115	28.4%	7.7%
MISC		33		2.2%
TOTAL	5,506	1,481		

Note. AAEA=American (Am) Association (Assoc) for Employment in Education (Ed), ACCA=Am College (Coll) Counseling Assoc, ACPA=Am Coll Personnel Assoc, ACCED=Am Collegiate Conferences & Events Directors (Dir), ACUHO-I=Assoc of Coll & University (Univ) Housing Officers-International (Int), ACUI=Assoc of Coll Unions Int, AFA=Assoc of Fraternity Advisors, ASJA=Assoc for Student Judicial Affairs, CIVSA=Campus Information & Visitors Assoc, CACUSS=Canadian Assoc of Coll & Univ Student Services, CRLA=Coll Reading & Learning Assoc, NACADA=National (Nat) Academic Advising Assoc, NACA=Nat Assoc for Campus Activities, NACAS=Nat Assoc of Coll Auxiliary Services, NACE=Nat Assoc of Colleges & Employers, NADE=Nat Assoc for Development Ed, NASFAA=Nat Assoc of Student Financial Aid Administrators (Admin), NASPA=Nat Assoc of Student Personnel Admin, NAWE=Nat Assoc for Women in Ed, NCCP=Nat Clearinghouse for Commuter Programs, NIRSA=Nat Intramural Sports Assoc, NODA=Nat Orientation Directors Assoc, SACSA=Southern Assoc for Coll Student Affairs
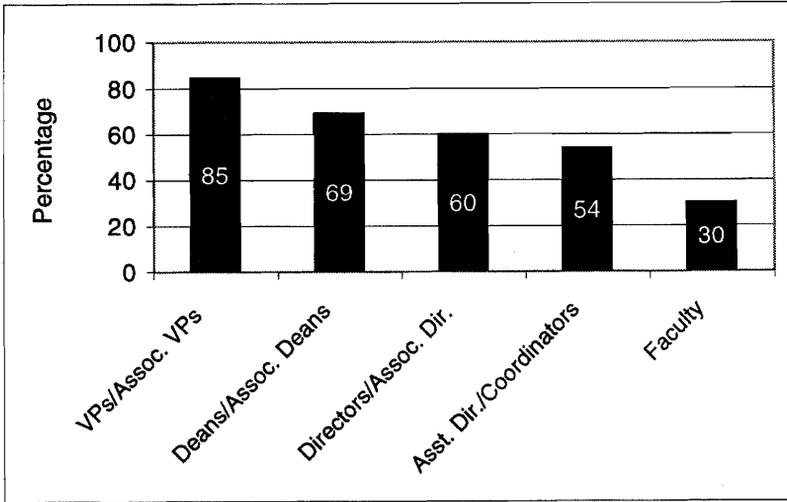
Figure 1. Percentage of Respondents in Each Job Category Who Had Heard of CAS (*N* = 1,481)

CAS Resources and How They Are Used

Participants noted that CAS Standards were used in the following ways: in assessment, evaluation, or accreditation review; as a reference guide or resource; for professional/staff development; and to increase institutional support.

More respondents used CAS materials to guide their programs than for self assessment. Of the three "bluebooks" of standards (1986, 1997, and 1999) the largest percentage of respondents used the 1997 standards "bluebook" as a program guide. In fact, of the three "bluebooks," usage followed a similar pattern: more respondents used them to guide programs than solely read them, but more respondents read them than used them for self assessment purposes (see Table 2). However, self-assessment guides (SAGS) were more likely to be used for self assessment than solely read or used as a guide for programs. Of the functional area self-assessment guides, housing and residence life was the guide most owned by respondents (5.9%), followed by campus programs (4.9%), and then orientation programs (3.7%). Almost 4% of the respondents indicated that they possessed all of the SAGS.

The following quotes highlight specific examples of how the CAS Standards are used. One participant from the Association of Fraternity Advisors indicated, "We have used the standards to do a formal self-evaluation of our graduate program, including curriculum assessment, faculty load, criteria for

performance, etc." A member of the National Association of Campus Activities (NACA) stated, "We are currently using CAS Standards to help evaluate our services and programs for commuter students." A respondent from the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) wrote, "We used them as guides to help us with our institutional self study. We developed charts to show how well we were performing in the areas of services we provide to our students." Another NASPA respondent stated, "This institution is geared toward the working adult and is located in the center of a major financial district. The university used CAS when assessing the need for a student union building."

Table 2

Percentage and Type of Use of the 1986, 1997, and 1999 CAS Standards Bluebooks by All Respondents (N = 1,481)

Bluebook Edition	Read	Used as Program Guide	Used for Self-Assessment
1986	9.1%	11.0%	5.7%
1997	11.5%	13.3%	8.1%
1999	6.8%	8.8%	5.1%

When it comes to using the Standards as a tool to develop goals and mission statements, one respondent who is a member of the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) stated, "When writing program goals, we have become more goal specific; activities are better thought out and conceptualized." One National Clearinghouse for Commuter Programs (NCCP) respondent replied, "I've used the standards for commuter student programs to write up a proposal on what our university should be doing for commuter students.... I've used the standards for leadership programs to expand our offerings."

Regarding professional and staff development a member of NASPA replied the Standards "changed the way we trained our student members of judicial council" and they are utilized "in implementing educational sanctions." A member of National Association of College Auxiliary Services (NACAS) indicated the Standards are used "in work with residence hall staff in class and workshops to help the student staff understand why we need to work to meet

specific goals." One ACPA respondent stated the Standards were "used at a staff retreat to discuss functional areas." Another member of NASPA commented that "the Standards are a very practical tool in teaching the profession and the components of student affairs. So, learning and the Standards work hand in hand."

Several respondents noted using CAS Standards to document support for increased resources, including two respondents from ACPA. One stated using the Standards as a "basis to get funding for a Women's Center on campus" and another who stated, "[our organization] continues to use them to support the need for increased resources and defend against budget cuts."

Influence of CAS on Learning

Respondents were asked if they measured learning outcomes, and if so, was there a connection between CAS Standards and positive learning outcomes. Twenty-four percent stated that they did measure learning outcomes. Of those, 41% percent stated that there was a connection between learning outcomes and CAS Standards. Twenty-eight percent stated there was a connection but it was vague. Only 2% of all of the respondents stated that CAS standards had no connection to learning outcomes. The remainder of the respondents stated that they were unsure if CAS standards influenced learning outcomes. Those at research and doctoral institutions were most likely to indicate that they were measuring learning outcomes compared with those at liberal arts, comprehensive, or community colleges, however the differences were not statistically significant.

Using the Pearson chi-square statistic ($p<.05$) it was found that there were significant differences regarding the job titles of those who measured learning outcomes. The largest percentage of professionals measuring learning outcomes by job title were faculty members (76%), followed by vice presidents and associate vice presidents (53.5%), deans and associate deans (42%), assistant directors and coordinators (41.6%), directors and associate directors (38%).

As was stated above, 41% of those who measure learning outcomes stated that CAS Standards had influenced their programs and services. Using the Pearson chi-square statistic ($p<.05$), new professionals who had heard of CAS were significantly less likely to state that CAS positively influenced programs and services. Vice presidents and associate vice presidents who had heard of CAS were significantly more likely to state that CAS positively influenced programs and services (82%), followed by deans and associate deans (79%), directors and associate directors (68.5%), faculty members (67%), and assistant directors and coordinators (56%). In the comment section a NASPA respondent who utilizes CAS Standards stated "CAS Standards keep programs honest. They

make sure programs provide students with learning opportunities about other cultures, backgrounds, etc." A member of the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) responded, "It has closed the loop in student activities advising to see if student leaders learn or do not." An ACPA respondent indicated, "Internship students use them to evaluate their site and to develop 'ideal' programs. They are expected to understand the CAS Standards' role in student personnel." A member of the National Orientation Directors Association (NODA) stated, "Our mission statement is based on CAS. One of our primary goals is to help new students make a successful transition to the university. This is measured through GPA of first-semester students."

It was found that CAS users at public institutions were statistically significantly more likely to indicate that CAS Standards positively influenced their programs and services than their counterparts at private institutions (Asymp. Sig.= 000). More of those who felt CAS positively influenced their programs or services used the 1997 bluebook as a guide than the other CAS resources in other ways. Participants stated that CAS Standards were most influential in assessing current programs and then expanding current programs (see Table 3).

Table 3

How CAS Standards Influence Student Affairs Programs and Services

Impact of CAS Standards	%* Responding Yes
Assessing Current Program	27%
Expanding Current Programs	22%
Mission Statement and Goals	13%
Justified Current Program	10%
Student and Staff Training and Development	8%
Guide for New Programs	5%
Influence Budget requests	4%

* of respondents who stated that CAS influenced programs and services on their campuses (*n*=605)

Reasons for the lack of connection between learning outcomes and CAS Standards varied. One reason included the lack of CAS Standards in specific areas. For example, a NASPA member stated, "When I worked with commuter students, they provided criteria against which we could assess our practice. Now that I work with adult learners, there are no CAS Standards that connect." Another reason is that other standards were being utilized, such as the Association of College and University Housing (ACUHO) and the National Association of College Employers (NACE) guidelines for career services offices. Still other reasons for the lack of connection between learning outcomes and CAS Standards include that student satisfaction is measured more than learning outcomes, the process of assessment is just beginning, and that assessment is done through a central office on campus. One Southern Association of College Student Affairs (SACSA) respondent stated that assessment of student learning is "very marginal, most emphasis is on satisfaction with service rather than learning outcomes."

Several respondents noted that CAS should itself become an accrediting body rather than being a tool to be used in other agencies' accreditation. One AFA member noted,

> If student affairs agencies are to maintain their "fair share" of campus resources, CAS criteria must be taken to the next level – accreditation. Academic faculty will never respect what student affairs staff do until our staff and services must be accredited in a manner similar to their own academic departments and programs.

Faculty Members

Unlike previous studies exploring CAS Standards, this study gained insight into the use of CAS Standards in academic affairs. Faculty respondents were members of 12 CAS professional associations. The two professional associations with the largest percentage of faculty members were the National Association of Developmental Educators (22% of the faculty in the sample were members) and the American College Personnel Association (17.7% of the faculty in the sample were members). These two associations most likely represent two distinctive groups of faculty members in terms of whom they are teaching and what is being taught.

Of the 77 faculty respondents, 37.7% had heard of CAS. There seemed to be no particular use pattern of CAS materials. Faculty respondents utilized a variety of functional area standards and assessment guides as much as the master's graduate student affairs program standards.

General Comments

Respondents also offered positive comments about CAS in general. These comments included that the standards are very appropriate and thoroughly written and that CAS is "critical."

There were several criticisms of CAS. One theme noted that the standards were not user friendly, especially for smaller institutions or those offices with one professional staff member. Another common theme was that respondents had become aware of CAS through their graduate programs, but their current institution "rarely refers" to CAS Standards. For instance, a College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA) member stated,

> We are currently not using the CAS Standards. We are, I feel, at the crossroads in my program. I want to implement standards as do some of the faculty; other faculty don't want standards. Why not? They fear change – and how they will need to change what they do.

Other respondents stated that they did not have the updated versions or that they did not know how to obtain updated CAS materials. An ACPA respondent stated that "the difficulty is helping others who are unfamiliar with the CAS Standards to recognize its value and application."

Implications

The results of this study indicate that since its inception in the late 1970s, CAS has become familiar to professionals in student affairs programs and services and even to some degree in academic affairs. In fact, only 2% of those who had heard of CAS stated that CAS did not influence their programs and services. In this regard then, CAS has made a difference in the practice of student affairs.

In this current study almost 15% of vice presidents/associate vice presidents and 30% of deans/associate deans had not heard of CAS. In Mann et al.'s study (1991) of student affairs leaders 16% were not aware of CAS Standards. However, Mann et al. found that less than one-third of the participants felt that CAS positively influenced programs whereas in this study 82% of vice presidents/associate vice presidents and 79% of deans felt that CAS positively influenced programs. It would appear that a similar percentage of student affairs leadership is still unfamiliar with CAS Standards but there has been an increase in those who believe that CAS positively influences programs and services.

This study indicates that CAS Standards are still utilized less at private institutions than other types of institutions. CAS should strive to increase the awareness of its standards and their potential role in enhancing the quality of programs in liberal arts institutions and community colleges. Certainly, further

research is necessary to determine more effective ways to market and distribute CAS Standards not only to student affairs leadership but a broader spectrum of professionals as well. Due to the low number of respondents who indicated that they are measuring learning outcomes, the student affairs profession generally as well as CAS in particular should better advocate for the necessity of measuring learning and making decisions based on data.

The results of this study would indicate that new professionals are learning about CAS in graduate programs but then may not be involved in assessment as new professionals. It is important for new professionals to be involved not only in the implementation of assessment projects but also in their planning to set a strong foundation of being comfortable with and competent in conducting assessment.

CAS has created a system of revising standards and guidelines. Standards are revised approximately every five years on a rotational basis. Since a new Standards bluebook is published every five years, new and revised Standards can be obtained in a timely manner. Publishing updated and revised standards is a worthy enterprise, however it would appear that CAS may want to consider a longer time lapse between "bluebook" publications or increase its marketing since the use of the 1999 "bluebook" falls below that of the 1997 "bluebook." It is possible that institutions and professionals who purchase CAS materials may be hesitant to do so every two years. It may also be possible that student affairs professionals do not realize how frequently editions are updated and to what extent.

Users of CAS Standards may want to contact their professional association's representative to CAS for additional information on CAS resources and initiatives or to offer feedback and participate in revising already existing CAS Standards or to create new standards. Because CAS has recently devised more specific learning outcome statements in its general standards, future research should study to what degree new CAS initiatives influence learning outcomes of programs and services in higher education.

Finally, CAS may want to explore the notion of accreditation. As indicated here, the CAS philosophy of self assessment has been influential. Some professionals believe that some form of accreditation or certification would serve as a more influential means of ensuring quality. Before embarking upon this however, the authors recommend that CAS consider carefully whether accreditation has improved and ensured the quality of higher education over the long term in a way that self assessment has not.

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