

IMPROVING QUALITY, ENHANCING CREATIVITY:

CHANGE PROCESSES IN EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

FINAL REPORT OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE FOR
THE HIGHER EDUCATION CHANGE AGENDA (QAHECA) PROJECT



EUA

European University Association



Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme

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Agenda (QAHECA) Project

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Foreword



Professor Jean-Marc Rapp
EUA President

Contemporary European society is faced with rapid and constant change processes. Progress towards the European Higher Education and Research Areas requires higher education institutions that are able to respond adequately to change as well as to contribute to shaping the development of a knowledge society. In order to accomplish these ambitious goals, it is crucial to promote innovative, well-managed and forward-looking universities and to ensure that quality assurance processes support these characteristics.

In this context, the European University Association (EUA) along with its consortium partners – the Certification and Quality Assurance Institute (ACQUIN), the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and the National University of Ireland in Maynooth – launched a project named “Quality Assurance for the Higher Education Change Agenda (QAHECA)”. QAHECA was developed in order to explore, through a dialogue between higher education institutions (HEIs) and quality assurance agencies (QA agencies), how internal and external quality processes for teaching and learning in higher education are able to support innovative and creative HEIs that can drive forward the modernisation agenda of universities. The central goal was to develop recommendations for effective and efficient quality assurance (QA) that focus on the institution’s capacity to change as a core aspect of higher education governance.

Creativity and innovation have been identified as key factors in knowledge creation and, consequently, social and economic development. Coincidentally, the year 2009 has been identified as the European Year of Creativity and Innovation by the European Commission. Despite the significant overall interest in creativity, relatively little attention has been paid so far in Europe to higher education institutions in this context and how creativity and innovative practices can be enhanced within and by the academic community. EUA for its part has worked for many years to promote both creativity and innovative practices within European universities through projects enhancing quality culture and efficient and adequate governance in the context of institutional diversity. QAHECA builds upon this work as well as upon contributions from project participants. EUA is especially pleased that the publication of this project report takes place during this European Year of Creativity and Innovation and hopes that it will provide a valuable contribution to the ongoing discussions, during this year and beyond.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jm2 R'.

Jean-Marc Rapp
EUA President

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the QAHECA consortium, EUA would like to thank the institutions and agencies¹ that joined us in this exploratory project. Their representatives participated in the discussions on the relations between quality processes and creativity as well as on the importance of creativity to higher education, with an inspiring enthusiasm that can only be admired. In addition, they generously shared their experiences and expertise with other project participants during the project seminars and with the wider community through the case studies included in this publication.

The role of the management team is crucial to the success of this kind of project. In QAHECA, we were lucky to have a team that, from the first to the last meeting, was willing to devote time and effort to the development and success of the project. We therefore would like to address our sincere gratitude to all those who participated in the work of the management team in various phases of the project with such enthusiasm and commitment: David Crosier, EUA (Eurydice since September 2008), Dorit Gerkens, ACQUIN, Eddie Gulc, HEA, and Saranne Magennis, NUIM. Andrée Sursock, Senior Adviser, former EUA Deputy Secretary General, deserves a special acknowledgement for conceiving this project and for her forward-looking attitude and continuous commitment towards the creative dimension of higher education.

On behalf of EUA, we also would like to thank our consortium partners for extending such a warm welcome when hosting the three seminars: in particular, Sue Tosetti from the HEA, Gela Sonnenschein from ACQUIN and Linda King from NUIM who contributed to providing our participants with outstanding conditions to concentrate on the essential discussions. We also express our gratitude to all the facilitators who, during the seminars, contributed to making sure that the project objectives could be reached: members of the steering committee and the management team as well as Paul Luker and Ali Dickens from the HEA during the York seminar, Thomas Reil and other collaborators from ACQUIN during the Bayreuth seminar. Special thanks should also go to the cartoonist Patrick Sanders, whose role during the first seminar in York was much appreciated, and who has kindly let us use his cartoons as illustrations for this publication.

The QAHECA Steering Committee², chaired by Professor Lothar Zechlin, former Rector at the University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany, should be acknowledged for its dynamic commitment, invaluable inputs, enthusiasm and continuous support of the work carried out by the project management team.

In addition, we are grateful to the European Commission for its financial support through its Lifelong Learning programme.

Last but not least, we would like to dedicate this report to the late Professor Klaus Dieter Wolff (ACQUIN), one of the pillars of EUA's Institutional Evaluation Programme and a strong supporter of the need to promote accountability processes that support creativity and institutional change.

Tia Loukkola
Senior Programme Manager
EUA

Thérèse Zhang
Project Officer
EUA

ACQUIN



¹ See list in annex 2.

² See list in annex 1.

Executive summary

In order to build upon EUA's recent work in enhancing the relationship between quality assurance processes, creativity and innovative practices, EUA launched a project in 2007, entitled Quality Assurance for the Higher Education Change Agenda (QAHECA), with a consortium of partners: the Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute (ACQUIN, Germany), Higher Education Academy (HEA, United Kingdom) and the National University of Ireland, Maynooth (NUIM, Ireland).

QAHECA aimed to explore what kind of quality processes for teaching and learning, both internal and external, support creative and innovative higher education institutions and seeks to limit the potentially problematic effects of these processes. In a series of three seminars, the participants (29 higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies) tackled this challenging topic and tested ideas that emerged in the course of the project in their own institutions.

This report includes an overall presentation of the project, followed by chapters discussing the relationship between quality assurance and creativity from various angles and providing some key principles on how HEIs and QA agencies, through their processes, can foster creativity and innovative practices. A few examples of practice from institutions participating in the QAHECA project have been included in annex 3 to highlight some of the initiatives taken by project participants and to exemplify the recommendations of the project.

The starting point for the reflections was that institutional structures, and in this case, specifically quality assurance processes may inhibit or enhance creativity. Institutional creativity, which is at the core of this report, "refers to the conditions promoting creative organisations" (EUA 2007a: 16). The report discusses drivers and enablers of creativity and notes that a creative organisation is both leadership – and grassroots-driven, and is an organisation endowed with vibrant quality culture. The role of the institutional leadership is to create preconditions for such a development, but in the end it is the community – academic and administrative staff as well as students – of an HEI that needs to be both willing and able to take advantage of the opportunities offered to exercise their creativity.

Quality assurance, in this report, is understood in the broad meaning of the term, including all activities related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality of an HEI from strategic planning to staff and curriculum development. Through the project the importance of national and institutional constraints to change processes (in this case developing more flexible QA processes) became obvious and a considerable time was spent on understanding them and their implications. However, even if the national contexts and the exact methods of external and internal QA vary in Europe, external QA processes do have several features in common (self-evaluation, external evaluation and results presented in a publication).

The recommendations below aim to recap, in a concise form, ideas developed through the project and to offer some key principles which every institution and agency should be able to apply in their current practices in order to enhance quality assurance processes that boost creativity.

Recommendations

Recommendations:

- 1) First and foremost, quality assurance must be **context sensitive** and thus individualised. When developing quality assurance processes HEIs and QA agencies need to take into account disciplinary characteristics, various organisational cultures, the historical position of the institution as well as the national context.
- 2) Quality assurance processes – both external and internal – should aim at enhancing the institutions' capacity to change in order to reach the strategic goals of each institution better. Thus, we invite both QA agencies and HEIs to **commit to a developmental approach** in their quality assurance processes.
- 3) **Quality assurance should be inclusive.** A key success factor for an efficient QA that enhances creativity at institutional level implies engaging the whole institutional community and not just considering QA as the special purview of a specific QA unit. This approach regards, for example, strategic planning, educational development and staff development as part of QA processes. We also urge the QA agencies to revisit their standards and processes in order to analyse in which ways they can encourage institutions to adopt this approach.
- 4) Both HEIs and QA agencies should aim at **ensuring the engagement and capacities of key actors in quality assurance processes.** The role of the institutional leaders is to provide support and a framework for quality assurance and creativity. Through staff development, the staff of the institutions can be encouraged to assume an active role in order to ensure the implementation of the inclusive approach to quality assurance mentioned above, while at the agency level, the awareness and understanding of the staff on activities and developments at institutional level needs to be continuously promoted. And last but not at least, both HEIs and QA agencies need to foster greater student engagement through training and support in order for the students to be able to assume their role as key partners in quality assurance.
- 5) A precondition for an effective QA that enhances creativity is a **partnership between institutions and agencies.** This partnership will create space and trust for critical self-reflection which is a prerequisite for creating something new. Trust could be increased for example through confidentiality of institutional self-evaluation reports and developing external QA processes that are based on incentives rather than sanctions. We invite HEIs and QA agencies to work on building this partnership.
- 6) Quality assurance processes need to **allow risk taking and failure** which are essential for creating new knowledge. Internal quality assurance processes should be able to identify failures and define the process through which the institution reacts and rectifies the situation when a failure has taken place rather than prohibit risk taking altogether. For its part, external quality assurance should aim at checking if an HEI is capable of reacting to abnormal circumstances rather than sanctioning occasional failures.
- 7) **Sharing experiences in QA** is essential for the future development of quality assurance. We encourage the creation of platforms for both horizontal and vertical dialogue at various levels: within institution between departments, within a country between institutions, at European level between both HEIs and QA agencies, etc. While encouraging this dialogue, it should not be forgotten that when learning from others' experiences, whether good or bad, one should never aim at merely copying successful practices, but at critically analysing which components of the practice might be applicable to one's own context.

1

Introduction

Since its creation EUA has aimed, through various activities, to support the creation of strong universities for a strong Europe. Its work in the area of quality assurance (QA) and improving institutional effectiveness has created the groundwork for this project.

The four-year Quality Culture project (2002 – 2006) concentrated on developing internal quality culture in universities by examining internal quality assurance processes. The project took place in an interesting phase of the Bologna process that saw the rise of the importance of quality assurance. The Quality Culture project contributed directly to an emphasis given to internal quality assurance of higher education institutions (HEIs) as demonstrated by such policy documents as the Berlin and Bergen Communiqués. (EUA 2006: 33)

After their initial embrace of internal quality, institutions became increasingly aware of the risk of over-bureaucratisation of quality assurance (EUA 2006: 16). As the final report of the project stated: “The major concern that started developing toward the end of the Quality Culture Project centred on the risk that internal quality processes – even when they are developed in the right way – may end up as internal bureaucratic processes.” (EUA 2006: 32)

Hence, EUA decided to take up the challenge of trying to “to enhance our understanding of the concept and to address the question of how creativity can be strengthened in European higher education” (EUA 2007a: 10) as a balancing force to the risk of bureaucratisation. The Creativity project, which followed, aimed at untangling the notion of creativity in higher education and resulted in recommendations for HEIs, governments, QA agencies and other external partners on how to enhance it. Regarding the relationship between quality mechanisms and creativity the final project report stated that “[q]uality processes have the potential to strengthen creativity and innovation if they are geared towards enhancement and focus on the capacity to change as a way to incorporate a future dimension. However, they can also have highly detrimental effects if they stress conformity over risk-taking, are oriented towards the past rather than the future and develop into burdensome bureaucracies.” (EUA 2007a: 8)

Concerns about the relationship between quality assurance processes and creativity and how quality assurance, whether internal or external, can either enhance or stifle innovative practices and creativity within HEIs was picked up as a main question for Quality Assurance for the Higher Education Change Agenda (QAHECA), a project launched in 2007 by EUA and its partners, the Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute (ACQUIN), the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and the National University of Ireland in Maynooth (NUIM).

These issues will be tackled in various ways in this final report. After the overall presentation of the project, the following chapters will discuss the relationship between quality assurance and creativity from various angles and provide some key principles on how HEIs and QA agencies, through their processes, can foster creativity and innovative practices. Some examples of practice from institutions participating in the QAHECA project have been included in annex 3 to highlight some of the initiatives taken by project participants and to exemplify the recommendations of the project³. However, the objective of this publication is not to provide simple, practical instructions on how to design QA processes that enhance creativity – as it would simply be too huge task. Instead, it aims to stimulate reflection within each organisation on what kind of processes could work in its own institutional culture.

³ The reports prepared by the project participants, as well as the PDF version of this report, are available through EUA web-site (www.eua.be).

2

Project description

In order to continue EUA's work in recent years in enhancing the relationship between quality assurance processes, creativity and innovative practices, EUA launched, in 2007, a project together with its consortium partners ACQUIN (Germany), the HEA (United Kingdom) and the National University of Ireland, Maynooth (Ireland): Quality Assurance for the Higher Education Change Agenda (QAHECA).

QAHECA aimed to explore what kind of quality processes for teaching and learning, both internal and external, support creative and innovative higher education institutions and seek to limit the potentially problematic effects of these processes. The project has built upon the experience of institutions and QA agencies in order to address the balance between the requirement to have quality assurance processes as tools for institutional governance and external accountability and the need to ensure creativity and innovative practices in higher education. Project participants focused on the institutional capacity for change and explored how an enhancement orientation and forward-looking perspective can be incorporated into processes that are, by their very nature, to a great extent retrospective (e.g., largely based on data about past performance).

Taking the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) as background, the project sought to devise a methodology which was geared towards enhancement and would strengthen creativity and innovation in higher education.

2.1. PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

At the beginning of the project the consortium partners invited higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies from across Europe to apply to participate in the project through an open call. A combined total of 29 institutions and agencies were selected to participate in the project with one delegate per organisation being in charge of liaising with the management team, representing his or her home institution at the project seminars, responding to the reporting assignment and being responsible for the overall implementation of the testing phase within his or her institution. A complete list of participating institutions and agencies is presented in annex 2.

Selection was primarily based on demonstrated experience with and expertise in the project topic and plans for communicating and implementing the results. In addition, the delegates' experience in developing, managing and operating quality assurance and enhancement processes, as well as geographical distribution, institutional and disciplinary diversity, were considered.



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Project description

2.2. PROJECT SCHEDULE AND WORKING METHOD

The overall project period was two years. After the selection of project participants, a questionnaire was sent to all participating institutions in order to identify their quality assurance processes and the place that enhancement of creativity holds in these processes. This theme was further elaborated during the project through various exercises and discussions as described below.

During the project period the representatives of institutions and agencies participated in a series of three seminars organised by the consortium partners. The first two seminars (respectively held in York in March 2008 and in Bayreuth in May 2008) were dedicated to developing a draft quality methodology through a variety of activities.

In York the participants were introduced to the QA landscape across Europe and shared examples of creativity from their own experiences seeking to identify what the examples suggested about the nature of creativity. As it became clear during the first discussions that participants' thinking was constrained by their current institutional and national contexts, a discussion group session tackled a question designed to free them of such constraints and to put the focus firmly on students: "What should QA look like in 2020 for higher education to meet the expectations of students for a high quality learning experience?" At the conclusion of the seminar the cartoonist Patrick Sanders, who had followed the seminar and the discussions closely, presented his cartoons capturing the essence of the seminar and leading to the final discussions⁴.

In Bayreuth the focus was on producing a methodology for the testing phase which was to follow this seminar. This work was based on material prepared by the consortium partners prior to the seminar. The outcomes of the working groups' work were recommendations in the form of questions an institution should ask itself in the context of its own QA procedures. Among the questions were, for example: How do you engage students in creative reflection on their learning experience, and how is dialogue and feedback ensured? How do you take account of creative ideas in curriculum development from a range of sources, such as students, staff in all roles (teaching and non teaching) and external stakeholders? During the seminar the participants explored the relevance of the recommendations to their institutional context.

Following the work of the two seminars, the steering committee agreed upon the final list of questions to be tested. The questions were not designed to constitute a survey questionnaire to be answered by the participating institutions – rather they were meant as the basis and stimulus of a self-reflection exercise. In order to keep the work required from each participant manageable and to allow proper self-reflection, each participant received a package of five questions and was expected to select two questions within this package. Question 1 was to lead to a presentation, self-assessment and possibly further enhancement of an existing, successful practice. Question 2 was to lead participants to implement a new practice. The aims were to reflect on this issue with regard to current practices in place, to then develop a new practice, test/ implement it and report on the first experiences and (if possible) on the results achieved.

The experiences of the testing phase and practices were shared among the participants through reports that were posted on a common platform for all other participants to read.

The third seminar, which took place in Maynooth, Ireland, in February 2009, was dedicated to analysing participants' experiences with the draft methodology and with the practices implemented, as well as formulating recommendations for the project publication. As the discussions progressed it became evident that although the questions used during the testing phase did raise important issues regarding the project theme, such as the importance of an institutional strategy and student involvement as well as the curriculum development process, they did not quite work as a methodology or as a basis for a set of recommendations. Thus, a new set of recommendations with a slightly different approach was developed⁵.

The reports produced by the participants and various discussions during the seminars have all contributed to the contents of the following chapters of the report. This report has been prepared by the consortium partners after the last seminar under the supervision of the project steering committee.

⁴ The cartoons of Mr Sanders also illustrate this publication.

⁵ The questions utilised during the testing phase, however, can be consulted in annex 4. Should an organisation be interested in using them as a self-reflection tool, it should aim to ask how it is succeeding in doing what is being asked and how/if it could improve its activities related to the question in hand in order to further enhance creativity.

3

Quality assurance and creativity

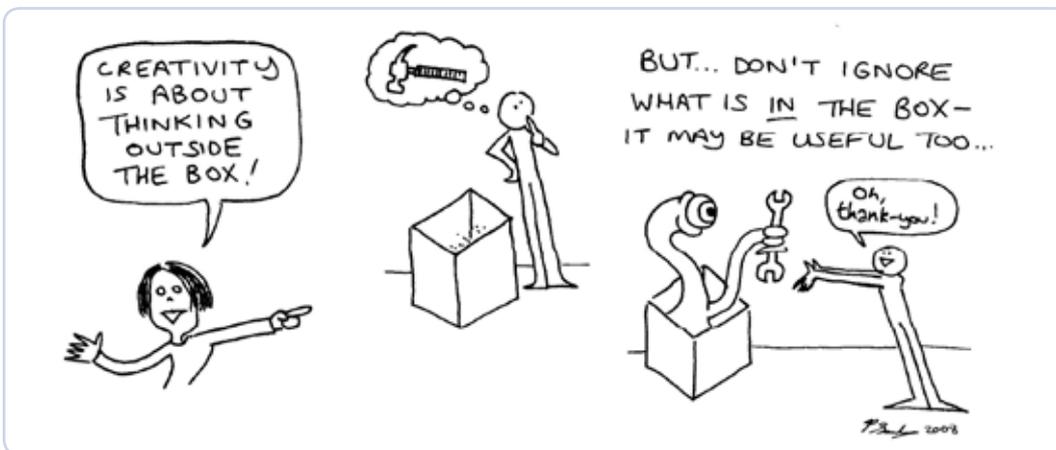
Creativity is contextual; what is creative in one environment and situation might not be in another. Therefore, unsurprisingly, creativity has as many definitions as there are people discussing it. The Encyclopedia Britannica, for instance, defines it as “the ability to make or otherwise bring into existence something new, whether a new solution to a problem, new method or device, or a new artistic object or form.”

This definition is in line with the list of characteristics of creativity identified in EUA’s Creativity project: originality, appropriateness, future orientation and problem-solving ability (EUA 2007a: 17). Related definitions have been given to creativity and innovative practices in the numerous books and articles aimed at capturing the essence of these concepts and explaining how to foster and achieve them in the knowledge society that highlights the importance of and is dependent upon creativity and innovation.

3.1. INSTITUTIONAL CREATIVITY ON THE ONE HAND...

One common way to deal with the various kinds of creativity is to define it as an individual characteristic, a collective or institutional feature. (EUA 2007a: 16). Individual creativity of staff members or students as well as collective creativity, that is, one born through their interactions, is usually considered to come naturally to the academe.

In this report we will focus on institutional creativity, “which refers to the conditions promoting creative organisations” (EUA 2007a: 16). Such creativity does not only depend on the characteristics of the individuals involved, but does demand work, commitment and is a conscious choice made by the institutional community. However, considering the nature of HEIs – the main activities being research and teaching which aim to create and disseminate new knowledge – one would expect it to be an obvious, albeit, conscious choice.



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The most important condition for institutional creativity – one that was underlined repeatedly during the project – is the attitude of the institutional management and leadership. Without the commitment of the leadership, isolated or individual initiatives to create or enhance institutional creativity do not succeed.⁶ The attitude of the leadership in encouraging creativity is always important, but it does become especially vital when an innovation has resulted in a pilot that is then established as an institution-wide practice, as is the case in most of our case examples annexed to this report. The moment of proceeding from innovation and piloting a new practice to routine is crucial: how to maintain the quality and innovative nature of a practice when it is no longer only conducted by committed and enthusiastic pioneers who are typical key factors of a successful pilot phase? At this point motivational support as well as proper resources allocated by the leadership is essential to the success and sustainability of the process.

⁶ It is worth noting, however, that even without institutional creativity, individual creativity can flourish. This is where we come to the eternal question regarding for instance the current rankings. In many rankings, institutions are merited for Nobel Prize winners working in these institutions, but often it is unclear if these scientific discoveries have been made thanks to or in spite of the conditions within the institution.

3

Quality assurance and creativity

Leadership alone, however, does not guarantee institutional creativity. It can create preconditions for such a development, but in the end it is the community – academic and administrative staff as well as students – of an HEI that needs to be both willing and able to take advantage of the opportunities offered to exercise their creativity. Like quality culture, creativity needs a bottom-up as much as a top-down approach in order to be (and stay) vibrant. As the network on creative teaching and learning of the EUA Creativity project described it:

“... universities with a renowned “creative” profile with a focus on interdisciplinary project work and group work are more likely to attract students and staff open to creative solutions, whereas our discussions in the network showed that more traditional universities face a greater challenge when motivating students and staff to explore alternative and innovative ways of teaching and learning. Thus, institutions already having built a “creative” profile will have an easier task, because students and staff will be expecting and demanding this and play an active part in the realization of this potential. There is a self-reinforcing mechanism built in here.” (Jensen and Christensen 2006: 9)

In the light of these two dimensions to fostering creativity – leadership- and grassroots-driven – it is interesting to analyse Table 1 presented below. The table identifies the key components of creativity and distinguishes drivers and enablers of creativity as they were developed during the project. One could argue that it is the role of the leadership to provide the enablers of creativity – that is, a culture of trust and critical self-reflection, space and time, etc. – and members of the community to find the drivers in themselves – curiosity, desire to improve, etc. However, in the case of HEIs, local ‘ownership’ is often considered even more crucial to creativity and thus the project participants concluded that, for instance, collaboration and collegiality are important in the process of developing appropriate frameworks and institutional drivers to underpin individual work. The ideas in Table 1 helped to develop the recommendations presented later in the publication and underpin principles behind the recommendations⁷.

Nature of creativity	Drivers of creativity	Enablers of creativity
Context-dependent	Need to change	(Earned) trust
Paradigm breaking	Curiosity	Space
(Managed) risk taking	Problem solving	Critical self-reflection
Shared vision	Desire to improve	Openness – culture of sharing
Target oriented	Enhancement of pursuit of excellence	Collaboration
Respect of diversity	Incentives	Appropriate QA Framework

Table 1: Key components, drivers and enablers of creativity as developed during the project.

⁷ See chapter 4.

3.2. ...AND QUALITY ASSURANCE ON THE OTHER HAND...

Through a combination of participants from HEIs and QA agencies, the project aimed to explore both the internal quality assurance mechanisms of HEIs and the external processes carried out by the QA agencies. The diversity of QA procedures (and even how QA is defined) were very apparent issues from the start and set the framework for the project.

During the project, it was a deliberate decision to use quality assurance in the broad meaning of the term, including in practice all elements of a strong quality culture of a HEI. Internal QA in the context of this report should not be understood merely as specific quality monitoring (such as process descriptions, data collection and analysis) or evaluation processes often carried out by a specific quality unit, but including all activities related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality of an HEI from strategic planning to staff and curriculum development. For example, the curriculum development process is an essential element for assuring the quality of HE learning and teaching and its importance has been highlighted by the curriculum restructuring carried out in European HEIs in recent years, as part of the Bologna Process. Monitoring and evaluation processes alone, with no link to the curriculum development process, do not guarantee the quality of higher education. Through the choice of understanding quality assurance as quality culture, the project also intended to highlight the importance of a bottom-up approach to the development of genuine quality processes which enhance creativity as much as improve quality.

Key success factors for a well-functioning internal quality assurance system identified by EUA's Quality Culture project were strategic planning, appropriate organisational structures for quality assurance, commitment of the institution's senior leadership, engagement of the staff and students, involvement of external stakeholders and well organised data collection and analysis (EUA 2006). This list per se demonstrates that QA activities should not be considered as a separate activity carried out by specific person(s), but that a concern for quality should permeate and be embedded in all activities of the institution and be the responsibility of each and everyone.

In recent years, the European higher education landscape has witnessed a rise of student involvement in developing education and its quality. Student participation in quality assurance has been one of the key priorities in the European QA discussion (see for example EUA 2007b and EUA 2009) and it has progressed in recent years (ESU 2009: 49). The role of the students is particularly central when discussing creativity and innovation in teaching and learning, which in the end largely depends on the interaction of the teacher and students. As HEIs develop their QA processes and adopt new approaches to teaching, it is good to revisit observations made by the network on teaching and learning of EUA's Creativity project:

"In some settings the teacher will have the traditional role as provider of knowledge organised systematically by the teacher. In other settings the teacher's role will be that of facilitator, instructor or mediator. In these settings the learner will have the role as researcher and organiser of their own and other's working process.

When entering higher education students are not necessarily sufficiently prepared for these roles and the high degree of participation and responsibility required – depending of their previous educational experiences. Thus, it is crucial that the university provides the right settings which step by step encourage and engage the students and provide the possibility of practising these roles which are essential for developing the feeling of co-ownership." (Jensen and Christensen 2006: 10)

3

Quality assurance and creativity

Similarly, the importance of supporting and encouraging students to assume an active role in the quality assurance of higher education should not be forgotten. In Scotland, for example, the creation of a national development agency⁸ to assist, support and train student representatives and their associations for this role has resulted in increased levels of interest, participation and effectiveness.

In the QAHECA project, participants were challenged to take a look at their QA processes, question them and try to find ways of transforming them in order to enhance creativity. This turned out to be quite a challenging task, as could probably be expected. In order to transform existing structures, one is required to have a deep knowledge of the underlying system as well as an open mind and a capability to distance oneself from one's own system. As Crozier *et al.* noted in their study: "Those with a role to play in a system have a partial knowledge of the system of higher education, and it is the complexity of that system which prevents a complete vision and a true understanding of it." (Crozier, Curvale and Hénard 2005: 16) This observation was confirmed by experience during this project.

Indeed, a major challenge during the project was for the participants to overcome their national and institutional constraints when trying to find ways to develop more flexible QA processes. Relatively often it was argued that national legislation or institutional statutes stand in the way of change. Thus, we agree with Crozier, Curvale and Hénard's observation that:

"... [A]gencies are not used to questioning their own activities. They do not tend to challenge the frameworks that form the basis of their *raison d'être* and to question the political decisions that impact their work. They resolutely see themselves as operators of a set of procedures and defend themselves against encroaching on the territory of those that they see as political decision makers or the academic world." (Crozier, Curvale and Hénard 2007: 27)

The same dynamic also seems to apply to HEIs in certain respects.

However, the importance of national constraints should not be underestimated, and one should keep in mind that QA systems are always part of the larger HE system in each country, both of them being the results of a specific history, and ought to be interpreted as such. National politics usually determine these systems and politics are influenced by numerous factors (Crozier, Curvale and Hénard 2005: 17). Tampering with one component of the system without taking into account the other components (funding mechanisms, legislation framework, etc.) would not be fruitful nor lead to sustainable results. This is one reason why this project does not lead to concrete, detailed instructions on how to design QA processes, but provides principles to be adjusted to each HEI's and QA agency's circumstances. Quite commonly agencies use more than one type of QA mechanism; "tolerance for diversity of approach to quality assurance and especially for the assignment of more than one responsibility to one agency may be influenced by the national context and perception of external quality assurance" (Costes *et al.* 2008: 24-25).

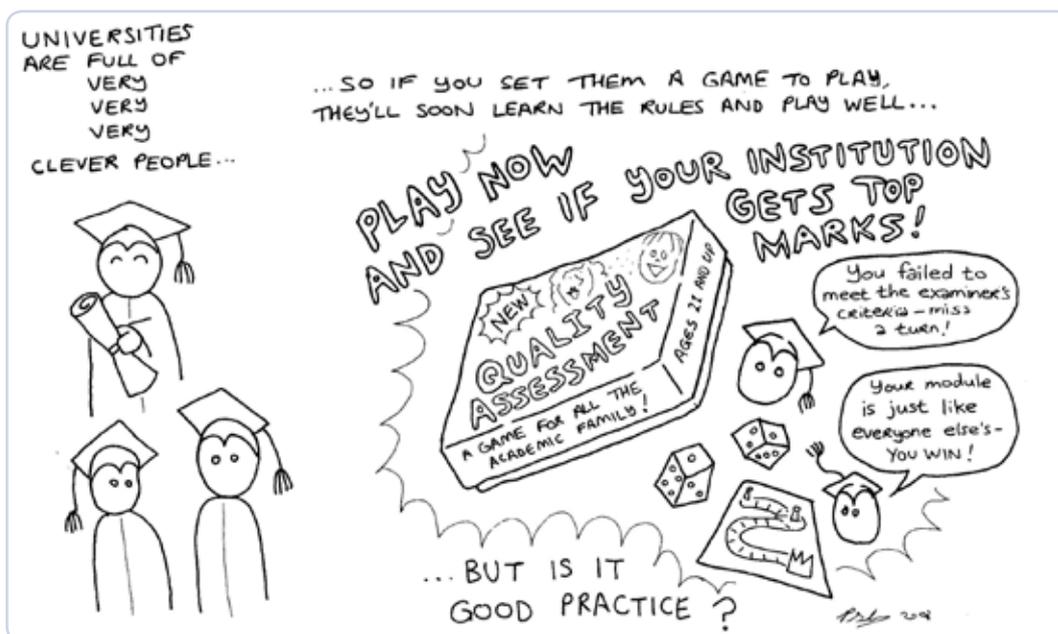
After having stated that national constraints and contexts are essential for understanding the diversity of QA processes, it is necessary to remember that in Europe external quality assurance processes use the same method (self-evaluation, external evaluation and finally a publication) with some variations (Crozier, Curvale and Hénard 2005: 15, Costes *et al.* 2008: 45). The similarities of the processes do not end there. In a recent ENQA survey addressed to QA agencies, about two thirds of agencies declared that they carry out programme-level evaluations or accreditation and 40 per cent use institutional level procedures.

According to the same survey, QA agencies seem to be relatively free in defining the specification of processes and criteria for their external QA processes, as 62% stated that they make these decisions

⁸ Sparqs, <http://www.sparqs.ac.uk/>

alone and 87% that they use their own criteria and standards for the processes (Costes *et al.* 2008: 66-67). And indeed, “three-quarters of the agencies responded that they have changed their quality assurance approach recently or that they are about to do so in the near future” (Costes *et al.* 2008: 24). From the perspective of this project, one can only hope that the approaches adopted in the near future will be of the kind that enhance creativity and innovative practice.

One outcome of having representatives of HEIs and QA agencies working together in the project were the numerous discussions on the potential tension between internal and external QA processes and on the interaction between them. Participants could easily agree that these two aspects of QA should definitely work together toward a common goal – in most cases the aims of the processes are not conflicting – but admitted that there are some challenges, especially when an institutional quality culture is new and the institution lacks autonomy. The risk of developing internal QA just to appease the agency and to come up with polished reports with very little or no impact on enhancement of activities increases in these circumstances, with negative impacts on creativity and innovative practice. And this is in fact quite understandable when one considers that, according to the recent ENQA survey, in 90% of cases external quality assurance procedures have formal consequences for the approval and/or funding of the institution or programme (Costes *et al.* 2008: 25).



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3.3. ...HOW TO GET THEM TO WORK TOGETHER?

Although creativity is always linked to individuals, it also results from interaction between individuals. Therefore, institutional structures may inhibit or enhance creativity (EUA 2007a: 13). Towards the end of the project the question was raised as to whether it is possible to have too much creativity, especially because in some countries a measure of academic freedom has resulted in demands for complete freedom. In answer to this question, project participants strongly agreed that certain structures for an organisation are crucial. Without structures there would be chaos, and as Paul Claudel put it in the 1930s, two dangers threaten the world: disorder and order. In other words, creativity should be channelled through institutional structures. The challenge here lies in developing “institutional structures that aim at balancing stability and flexibility” (EUA 2007a: 9) as EUA’s Creativity project has called for.

3

Quality assurance and creativity



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In many cases, when the idea of quality assurance systems is first introduced to the academic community, it is precisely the fear of losing a creative edge and innovative drive within the professoriate that is of concern. And also, in some cases the quality assurance processes have, indeed, become so normative and bureaucratic that this fear is quite justified.

However, when quality is understood as transformational and fit-for-purpose and the objective of quality assurance is defined as a means for improvement and is future oriented – as is the case quite commonly in the current European higher education discourse – instead of merely measuring existing quality, quality assurance should link creativity and quality rather than see them as being mutually exclusive. As the first round of Quality Culture project already highlighted, both internal and external QA processes are only efficient on condition that they are “forward looking and oriented towards building and developing institutions rather than simply inspecting them” (EUA 2005: 14). Keeping this in mind while examining the key components, drivers and enablers of creativity presented in Table 1, we might conclude that both creativity and a quality culture flourish under the same circumstances.

Therefore, it would be logical to expect that quality assurance processes should aim at enhancing creativity and innovation, and not just be limited to fulfilling the requirements of a threshold or minimum standard of quality. But as QA processes and especially external QA processes are usually connected to demands for accountability, it is difficult not to fall into the trap of “playing it safe” and creating structures that limit (to too large an extent) risk taking or result in a polished evaluation report with no self-criticism. Thus, institutions and agencies have to balance various factors, which are presented below in Table 2, in order to implement QA successfully. If this balance is found, the quality assurance system is of added value also with regard to creativity of teaching and learning. (Jensen and Christensen 2006: 14)

Contributing to the development of new and improved procedures	><	Not neglecting existing best practices
Offering a system that is transparent and comparable	><	Allowing flexibility and variation in order to promote innovation and development
Achieving clarity with regard to what is being measured and what is the overall goal	><	Not promoting a “threshold-culture”, where it is enough just to satisfy “minimum demands”

Table 2: Successful quality assurance should be able to balance several factors (Jensen and Christensen 2006: 14)

4

Recommendations

The aim of the project – as defined initially – was to prepare recommendations for a formative quality methodology that would aim at enhancing (rather than stifling) creativity and innovative practices through quality assurance processes. When discussing the nature of these recommendations, it was decided at an early stage that the recommendations should not consist of prescriptive instructions about concrete practices that should be implemented by higher education institutions or quality assurance agencies. Such instructions were not considered desirable as there was a common understanding that both creativity and genuine quality culture must always be contextual and that the diversity of European higher education, and consequently quality assurance processes, must be respected. Nor should the recommendations lead to burdensome and bureaucratic QA processes.

As current practices – especially external but also to some extent internal – are tied to national legislation and contexts, it is not always that easy to change them radically by the actions of QA agencies or HEIs. In addition, when defining quality processes that all participants agreed upon, the general conclusion was that these processes and their principles, have already been included in the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA 2005), and it was not intended to repeat or rewrite the ESG within the framework of this project. Thus the following recommendations aim to offer some key principles which every institution and agency should be able to apply to their current practices with minor adjustments if necessary.

In addition to these recommendations, the project wishes to remind all parties concerned that we should not aim at measuring creativity through QA processes. One can certainly appreciate the results of creative thinking or innovative practices (at institutional or individual level), but not assess creativity itself. It is up to the institutional leaders to stimulate this appreciative approach.

However, an interesting question remains: can and should we aim to measure preconditions of creativity? At the moment, practically all aspects of HEIs' activities are being measured and institutions are compared on the basis of these measures – for example, tolerance, environmental friendliness, and services for students with disabilities – but so far the extent to which institutions foster creativity has not been compared (Tepper 2004). As Tepper put it, would it not be possible to identify some criteria through which institutions could study how successful they are in ensuring the preconditions for creativity? For example, regarding tolerance towards failure – which is one of our key recommendations – Tepper proposes among others the following question: “Do faculty members feel supported in their own departments when they take unconventional approaches in their research and teaching?” (Tepper 2004). This constitutes an open field for further reflection, for what would be interesting to relate to the issues explored during QAHECA and going beyond the very scope of this project.

The outcome of the QAHECA project is presented below in the form of seven key recommendations for HEIs and QA agencies to take into account when further developing their QA processes. The recommendations aim to recap, in a concise form, ideas developed through the project and presented in the earlier chapters of this publication. A few examples of practices have been selected that take into account these recommendations and demonstrate practically some of the key principles. We are confident that these recommendations will stimulate a fruitful discussion within higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies and with their partners.

Recommendations:

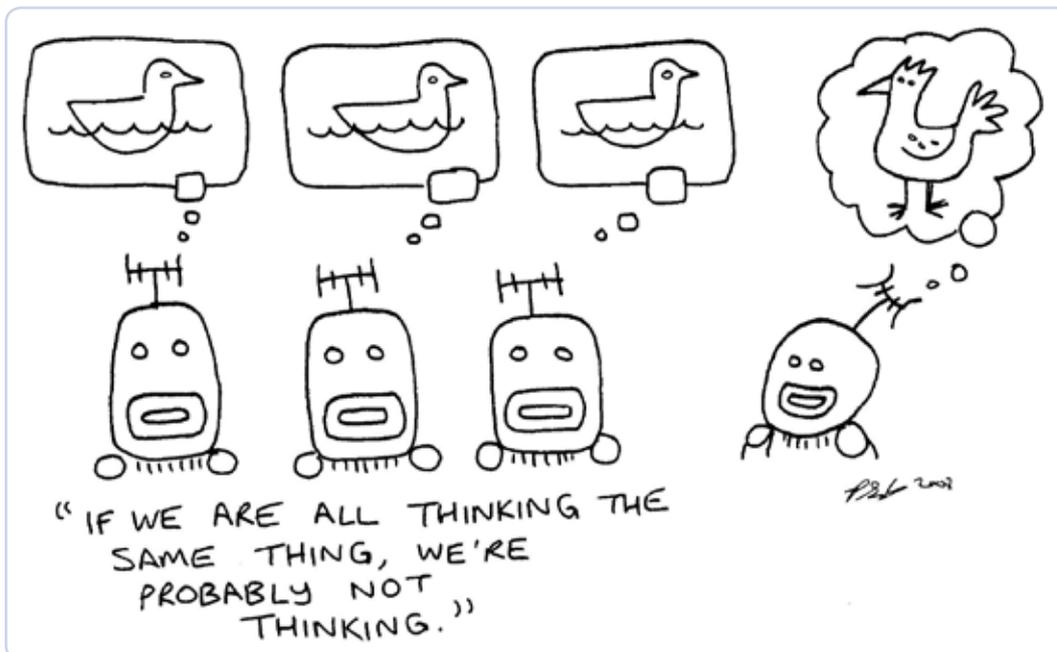
- 1) First and foremost, quality assurance must be **context sensitive** and thus individualised. When developing quality assurance processes HEIs and QA agencies need to take into account disciplinary characteristics, various organisational cultures, the historical position of the institution as well as the national context.
- 2) Quality assurance processes – both external and internal – should aim at enhancing the institutions' capacity to change in order to reach the strategic goals of each institution better. Thus, we invite both QA agencies and HEIs to **commit to a developmental approach** in their quality assurance processes.
- 3) **Quality assurance should be inclusive.** A key success factor for an efficient QA that enhances creativity at institutional level implies engaging the whole institutional community and not just considering QA as the special purview of a specific QA unit. This approach regards, for example, strategic planning, educational development and staff development as part of QA processes. We also urge the QA agencies to revisit their standards and processes in order to analyse in which ways they can encourage institutions to adopt this approach.
- 4) Both HEIs and QA agencies should aim at **ensuring the engagement and capacities of key actors in quality assurance processes.** The role of the institutional leaders is to provide support and a framework for quality assurance and creativity. Through staff development, the staff of the institutions can be encouraged to assume an active role in order to ensure the implementation of the inclusive approach to quality assurance mentioned above, while at the agency level, the awareness and understanding of the staff on activities and developments at institutional level needs to be continuously promoted. And last but not at least, both HEIs and QA agencies need to foster greater student engagement through training and support in order for the students to be able to assume their role as key partners in quality assurance.
- 5) A precondition for an effective QA that enhances creativity is a **partnership between institutions and agencies.** This partnership will create space and trust for critical self-reflection which is a prerequisite for creating something new. Trust could be increased for example through confidentiality of institutional self-evaluation reports and developing external QA processes that are based on incentives rather than sanctions. We invite HEIs and QA agencies to work on building this partnership.
- 6) Quality assurance processes need to **allow risk taking and failure** which are essential for creating new knowledge. Internal quality assurance processes should be able to identify failures and define the process through which the institution reacts and rectifies the situation when a failure has taken place rather than prohibit risk taking altogether. For its part, external quality assurance should aim at checking if an HEI is capable of reacting to abnormal circumstances rather than sanctioning occasional failures.
- 7) **Sharing experiences in QA** is essential for the future development of quality assurance. We encourage the creation of platforms for both horizontal and vertical dialogue at various levels: within institution between departments, within a country between institutions, at European level between both HEIs and QA agencies, etc. While encouraging this dialogue, it should not be forgotten that when learning from others' experiences, whether good or bad, one should never aim at merely copying successful practices, but at critically analysing which components of the practice might be applicable to one's own context.

5

Conclusions

The strength of the QAHECA project lies in the diversity of the perspectives participants brought from across Europe, but also in having the agencies and HEIs discussing together how both external and internal QA processes could contribute to the enhancement of creativity, especially as the participating institutions were at different stages of development of their quality processes. On the one hand, it was clear that those with a long experience in implementing QA processes were also more willing to recognise the risks that these processes may carry in inhibiting or suppressing creativity; on the other hand, those participants who are still engaged in creating their processes may have more flexibility to modify their processes in order to avoid these pitfalls.

Although the project partners were aware of the complexity of such a topic from the start, the project turned out to be even more challenging than expected. The notion of enhancing creativity and innovative practices in teaching and learning through quality processes is clearly not mainstream ideology and discussion of the starting principles and goals of QA processes involved more time than expected. National and institutional constraints also influenced the discussions and overall thinking of the participants. This, along with the fact that the time reserved for the testing phase was far too short to implement significant new practices and to gauge their impact, had a considerable influence on the participants' reports and the outcomes of the project. One should observe, however, that the topics discussed during the project raised considerable interest and awareness among participating institutions, and it should be expected that some intangible results of this project, in terms of a change in mindsets, might be observed in the years following the end of the project itself.



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5

Conclusions

In most countries and HEIs quality cultures are still in the process of being developed or identified and a great deal of work still remains to be done before it can truly be said that a genuine quality culture internalised by the academic community, including students and administrative staff exists. Looking at the future of quality assurance in higher education it is nearly impossible to see what lies ahead. However, it can be predicted that students in HE are likely to be more diverse and demanding and thus providing a more personalised learning experience that meets their expectations will become increasingly challenging. As a result, defining fitness of purpose – which is the starting point for most QA processes – may become even more of a challenge than today. HEIs will probably need to develop more sophisticated ways of measuring the impact and effectiveness of their strategies for enhancing the quality of their student learning experience. Development of an institutional quality culture that meets student and employer expectations will require greater investment in high quality development of staff for their roles in teaching and supporting learning.

At the same time, we can only hope that the approach to QA by agencies will continue (or in some cases evolve) to respect and reflect the principle of institutional autonomy. Diversity of institutional missions and cultures will require more trust and flexibility from QA agencies. In this context, as HEIs develop a more mature and better-embedded quality culture, QA agencies will hopefully be able to focus on the effectiveness of institutional systems and adapt more developmental approaches.

One thing clearly demonstrated by the project is that all QA activities – no matter what kind of processes are implemented – ultimately aim at having strong autonomous HEIs with mature quality cultures which enhance creativity and innovation, thus enabling HEIs to contribute better to the creation and development of a knowledge society. Ideally, internal and external QA processes should be in balance and there should be an interaction between them, but they do risk being contradictory processes. The danger of trying to appease the agencies at the expense of institutional-based creativity, does exist and HEIs and QA agencies should work together to diminish its likelihood. The aim of this report is to stimulate discussion and inspire ideas about how to reach this stage.

6

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Annexes

ANNEX 1: CONSORTIUM PARTNERS AND THE STEERING COMMITTEE

Partners

European University Association, EUA (Brussels, Belgium) is the main representative organisation of universities (over 800 members) individual members and national rectors' conferences (34 members) in 46 European countries. The Association's mandate in the Bologna process, contribution to EU research policy-making and relations with intergovernmental organisations, European institutions and international associations, ensures its capacity to debate issues which are crucial for universities in relation to higher education, research and innovation: www.eua.be.

The Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute, ACQUIN (Bayreuth, Germany) is an evaluation and accreditation agency which offers its services to higher education institutions both in Germany and internationally. ACQUIN is listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) since April 2009. ACQUIN's membership consists of 150 higher education institutions, professional associations and business companies: www.acquin.org.

The Higher Education Academy, HEA (York, United Kingdom) is supported by the four UK funding councils and by university subscriptions. Its mission is to help higher education institutions, discipline groups and all staff to provide the best possible learning experience for their students: www.heacademy.ac.uk

The National University of Ireland, Maynooth (Ireland) has over 6500 students and offers a range of disciplines including the humanities, music, education and social sciences, science, computing and electronic engineering. NUI Maynooth is currently coordinating a project exploring the fostering/teaching innovation and creativity in higher education: www.nuim.ie

Steering committee:

Lothar Zechlin, Chair, Former Rector, University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany

Glynis Cousin, Director of Institute for Learning Enhancement, University of Wolverhampton, formerly Senior Adviser, HEA, United Kingdom

Bruno Curvale, Delegate for International Affairs, Agence d'Évaluation de la Recherche et de l'Enseignement supérieur (AERES), France, and President, European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

Dorit Gerkens, Programme Coordinator, ACQUIN, Germany*

Eddie Gulc, Senior Adviser, HEA, United Kingdom*

Tia Loukkola, Senior Programme Manager, EUA*

Saranne Magennis, Director of the Quality Promotion Office, NUI Maynooth, Ireland

Anne Mikkola (later replaced by Liam Burns), Representative, European Student Union (ESU)

Martin Prchal, Chief Executive, European Association of Conservatoires (AEC)

Graeme Roberts, Senior Associate, HEA, United Kingdom

Andrée Surssock, Deputy Secretary General, EUA

Thérèse Zhang, Project Officer, EUA *

Gerd Zimmerman, Rector, University of Bauhaus in Weimar, and President, ACQUIN, Germany

* Project management team

ANNEX 2: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

The following higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies participated in the project:

- Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance (AQA), Austria
- University of Graz, Austria
- Artesis – Royal Conservatoire of Antwerp, Belgium
- University of West Bohemia, Czech Republic
- Merz Academy, Germany
- Accreditation Agency for Study Programs in Engineering, Informatics, Natural Sciences and Mathematics (ASIIN e.V.), Germany
- Hellenic Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (HQAA), Greece
- University of Akureyri, Iceland
- School of Art, Design and Printing, Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), Ireland
- University of Catania, Italy
- Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Design, Music and Dance, Netherlands
- Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO), Netherlands/Belgium
- Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT), Norway
- Bergen National Academy of the Arts (KHIB), Norway
- Instituto Superior Técnico (IST), Portugal
- University of Art and Design in Cluj-Napoca, Romania
- Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS), Romania
- The University of Economics in Bratislava, Slovakia
- Technical University of Košice (TUKE), Slovakia
- Alexander Dubcek University in Trencin, Slovakia
- AQU Catalunya, Spain
- University of Oviedo, Spain
- Royal Institute of Technology (KTH), Sweden
- Royal College of Music in Stockholm (KMH), Sweden
- Luleå University of Technology, Sweden
- Conservatoire of Swiss Italy in Lugano, Switzerland
- Cukurova University, Turkey
- Gazi University, Turkey
- The University of Manchester, United Kingdom

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ANNEX 3: EXAMPLES OF PRACTICE

Instituto Superior Técnico, Portugal: Involving students in institutional life

Pedro Lourtie⁹

According to the IST by-laws, students play a pivotal role in the management of the School. They have a seat on the Assembly of Representatives (IST's main management body with 36 students) and on the Executive Board (IST's management executive body consisting of the Students' Association President and three other students). The introduction of the new legal framework of HE Institutions (RJIES - Law 62/2007 of 10 September) reformulated the participation of students in the management of HE institutions, which was introduced in March 2009 in IST's by-laws.

Students are also represented in the Pedagogic Council, the number of students' representatives being equal to those of the teaching staff. The representatives of the students, the student delegates, are elected by their peers and play an important role in planning the teaching-learning activities, including workload and assessment, and in identifying problems or difficulties that arise during the semesters.

The organisation of the Pedagogic Council includes pedagogic committees attached to the different programmes, where most of the day-to-day issues are dealt with. Those issues that require a general treatment or that cannot be resolved at local level are discussed and the orientations decided by a Coordinating Committee, composed of six representatives of the students, six of the programmes' coordinators and the Executive Committee. This Executive Committee is the operating body that runs the pedagogic activities on a daily basis and is composed of two students and two members of the teaching staff, in addition to the Vice-President for Pedagogic Affairs.

Two of the broadest ranging and most recent activities of the Pedagogic Council, with the full cooperation of student representatives, have been the quality assurance system being developed for the teaching and learning and the development of the Tutoring Programme, described below.

One of the most important tasks students' representatives have is to ensure the communication between the teaching staff and their own colleagues, which frequently implies mediating opposing views from each part. Being aware of that, the Pedagogic Council, in close collaboration with the Tutoring Programme, has started to offer workshops on leadership, conflict resolution, teamwork and public speaking.

Simultaneously, there have been some major changes on the students' representatives' electoral process to ensure greater legitimacy, which enables them to participate directly in the internal evaluation process (QUC) as students that, besides their own individual opinions, have a vision of the whole.

Tutoring Programme

The Tutoring Programme is committed to its mission of encouraging and supporting students' integration into academic life, creating the necessary conditions to facilitate an early contact between students and professors and by globally promoting the quality of the teaching-learning process, in the respect of quality principles, ethics, and interpersonal responsibility.

At IST, a Tutor is a Professor who provides counselling in a personalised way to a group of students from the 1st and 2nd years of undergraduate programmes, allowing students to develop their intellectual, emotional and interpersonal qualities. The goals of the Tutoring Programme are to:

⁹ Vice-President in charge of Pedagogical Affairs, Instituto Superior Técnico.

- support students' transition from secondary to higher education
- provide students with support alongside their education at IST
- promote students' academic qualities
- identify early any situation of academic underachievement
- contribute to the improvement of teaching quality at IST
- support the activities related to the different courses of IST.

The way the Tutoring Programme achieves this is by:

- organising course-specific welcome meetings for all the first year students
- publishing a student notepad with suggestions concerning study skills, time management and planning, at the same time including inspiring quotes of successful former IST students
- running workshops for first year students, on "Time and Stress Management" and on "Teamwork". The workshops run for an hour and a half during the first weeks of the students at IST
- running workshops for students, identified by their tutors as having poor or excellent academic performance. The workshops run for four weeks and are entitled "To avoid dropping out" and "Good to Great", respectively
- running workshops for teachers/tutors, either promoting their knowledge on the Programme Structure and Methodologies, or promoting their Coaching Skills (Coaching Clinic ®)
- publishing the Tutoring Programme Homepage (<https://fenix.ist.utl.pt/tutorado>) and regularly posting useful information for Tutors and students alike, including the Tutor's Booklet and a virtual pamphlet collection for students
- organising, via the Computer and Network Service, a special worksheet where tutors find detailed information about their tutee's academic performance
- organising regular meetings with course coordinators, tutors and students, and sometimes, when needed, with groups of students and their tutor.

Challenges encountered

The Tutoring Programme has been running in several courses since 2003/04 and was placed under the management of the Pedagogic Council in 2005/06. The Tutoring Programme has faced some difficult challenges:

1. Tutorials are not part of the higher education tradition of southern European countries, and certainly do not belong to the Portuguese academic culture. Therefore students and teachers alike have found it difficult to understand what is required from them and to participate. It is especially difficult to involve students who are experiencing difficulties because they feel it is shameful to ask for help.
2. Most members of the Higher Education teaching staff in Portugal do not have specific training in pedagogical or teaching competencies, therefore making it more difficult for them to participate in training activities of the Tutoring Programme, even though participation in these activities plays a key role in its success.
3. Challenges 1 and 2 have serious implications for the programme's success because they affect all participants – students and teachers – interacting in a way that easily lessens their mutual motivation to participate (if students do not ask for teachers' support, teachers lose motivation; if teachers are less motivated, students sense that and seek support elsewhere).

These challenges were faced with a great investment on marketing activities (e.g. homepage, direct contact with students in the classroom, written material, posters) and in involving teachers in the Tutoring Programme's training activities. The programme is evaluated each academic year and the weak points identified are corrected in the following year, always making sure the experience and feedback of teachers and students is incorporated.

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The way the challenges were faced at IST is a good example for universities, especially in southern Europe, which intend to implement Tutoring Programmes. Other suggestions include:

1. Start the programme on a small scale, with one or two programmes where motivation and interest (or need) are higher, and build success from there
2. Define all participants' roles and goals in a clear, precise and objective way
3. Offer proper training to the tutors and support them through individual coaching activities and through meetings among them to share experiences, difficulties and ways they have found to cope
4. Structure contents and build support materials for both tutors and students
5. Simplify all procedures for all the participants (especially avoid a great load of paper work) and state clearly what is expected from each of them (e.g. time wise)
6. Evaluate the programme on a regular basis and make sure evaluations are used to improve the programme.

Gazi University, Turkey: Departmental self-evaluation and quality improvement process

Güçlü Yavuzcan¹⁰

General strategic approach

Gazi University has adopted the fundamental strategic approach suggested by YÖDEK (Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement Board of Higher Education Council) that considers institutional evaluation in quality improvement processes (Fig. 1). This approach concentrates on the evaluation of the institution as a whole together with environmental factors and on developing strategies which underpin the infrastructure. The main characteristic of this approach is its flexibility. It can be applied not only on an institutional basis but also within academic/administrative units and departments/sub-units.

Institutional evaluation results are analysed according to the core values of the university and subsequently, the strategies/aims for improving the quality of academic and administrative service are assessed. To realise each strategy/aim, measurable and easily understandable targets of the academic/administrative units are to be assessed. Generally, the director of the related unit is responsible for the execution of these processes. After these processes, the academic/administrative unit targets need to be converted into the individual targets (the activities and studies that the individuals of the units should conduct) and the achievements in the implementation are regularly observed and analysed.

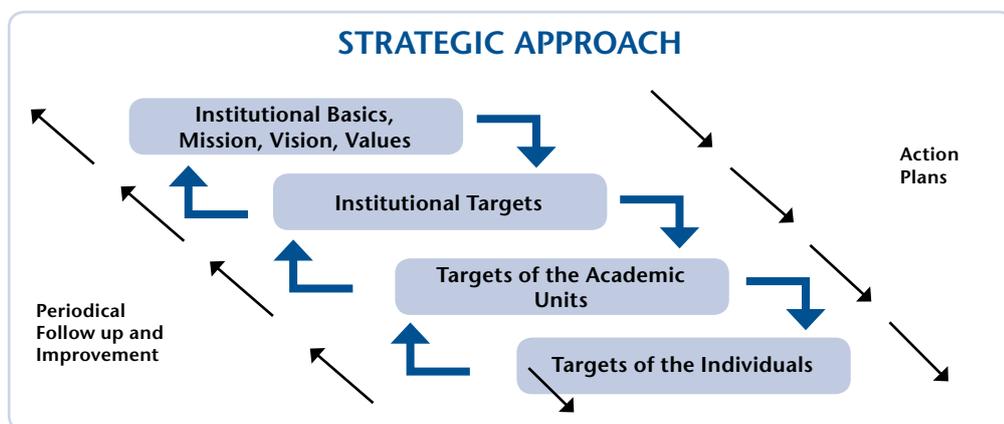


Fig. 1: Strategic approach

Departmental self-evaluation and quality assurance policy

Hitherto, all the quality assurance practices at the university have led to institutional evaluation and strategic planning. Although self-evaluation practices have been also carried out at departmental and academic level, these were mainly considered as mere paper work and have not led to concrete developmental plans to be monitored and updated.

By following YÖDEK's suggested model, creative solutions for effective self-evaluation and strategic planning strategies have been sought to ensure sustainable quality assurance at departmental level. The main aims of the pilot presented in this paper were as follows:

- a) decentralising the self evaluation process and making it applicable by a more specific process at departmental level

¹⁰ Member of the central academic evaluation and quality improvement board, Gazi University.

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- b) reinterpretation of the self evaluation system through concrete measurement methods/ indicators and then rank these according to levels
- c) preparation and implementation of the action plans with specific targets and performance indicators
- d) conversion of the institutional targets to individual targets.

The pilot was conducted by the Department of Industrial Technology Education. The department has a total of 20 Academics (2 professors, 2 associate professors, 7 assistant professors, 4 lecturers and 5 research assistants) and 442 students (415 B.Sc., 19 M.Sc. and 8 Ph.D. students).

The aims of the process were defined in the following way. In the light of the institutional characteristics and peculiarities,

- a) to conduct departmental evaluation (self evaluation and environmental evaluation) studies;
- b) to determine performance results;
- c) to set out and analyse the SWOT results.

The departmental evaluation process consists of:

- a) the self evaluation of all education/training activities, research and development studies, administrative and support services and management activities and relationships;
- b) the environmental evaluation regarding the issues surrounding and affecting the department but outside its control.

The head of department appointed an academic evaluation and quality improvement commission (ADEK) which was given the responsibility of conducting the activities related to the evaluation independently. This commission consisted of 7 academics.

Taking into account the context of the exercise, the department board determined the stages of the road map for the Departmental Quality Assurance Process (integrated with the some previously completed actions) as follows:

1. preparing a SWOT analysis and establishing appropriate feedback tools
2. conducting the actual evaluation
3. defining a strategic plan including a target for each aim and performance indicators as well as providing appropriate tools for continuous follow-up and improvement (questioning, measurement, analysis, improvement)
4. self-Evaluation Subjects at Departmental Level
5. YÖDEK requires the annual institutional evaluation of universities based on the specific guidelines developed. Accordingly, the self evaluation is done within 10 main categories (Fig. 2).

There are several evaluation subjects under each main category that are assessed by a 5 degree scale (expected, lower than expected, much lower than expected, higher than expected, much higher than expected). To make proper identification/interpretation, some measurements methods/indicators were defined for each subject (this needs to be improved for further processes over the next few years). These indicators/measurement methods allow for appropriate assessment in each subject.

However, the numeric value of the threshold "expected" cannot be centrally determined for any of these subjects and/or indicators thus interpretation has to be left to the evaluation teams. Considering the previous strategies and targets mentioned in the strategic plan (where available) and institutional characteristics and peculiarities and formal policies of the department board, the evaluation teams decide the level of the current situation of the related subject.

6. environmental Evaluation Studies

The environmental evaluation studies have been carried out by the YÖDEK Department taking into consideration amongst others the following criteria:

- national and international developments in the higher education area
- new developments regarding graduates
- social developments and relationships with society
- developments in educational technologies

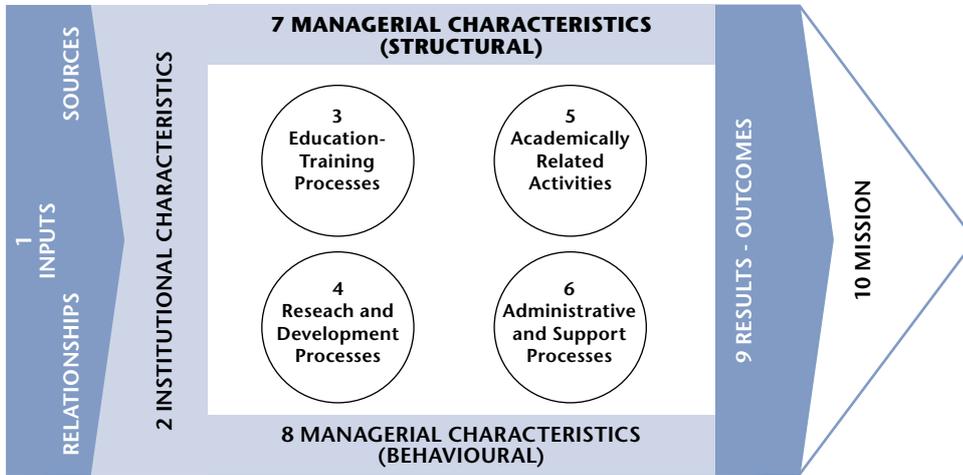


Fig. 2: Self-Evaluation Categories

Online Tools Developed for Assisting Self-Evaluation and Knowledge Sharing

While the self-evaluation process was being designed, the department also developed on-line tools to collect information relevant to the evaluation process. These tools are:

- academic information system
- alumni database and information system
- self Evaluation data base
- online student forum.

Implementation

At the time of writing this paper ADEK has completed the integrated SWOT and subject self-evaluation analysis. It has revised the self-evaluation considering the draft results of the satisfaction surveys. All the results and evaluations were then discussed in several academic board meetings and finalised together with the environmental evaluations.

Consequently, ADEK has determined 10 strategies linked to a total of 24 targets, 35 sub-targets and 71 performance indicators / measurement methods. Next year, these indicators will be measured and analysed and if any negative deviation from the intended level is observed, improvement plans and/or the revision of the targets will be put in place.

The integrated analysis of the departmental analysis has also led to a change in the strategic management structure. Accordingly, the tasks of the deputy heads were re-arranged based on four main self-evaluation categories (while linking the related self evaluation subjects in the 1st, 2nd and 9th main categories to each of them).

Undergraduate and graduate education coordinators were also assigned (with defined duties and authority approved by the academic board) and the autonomy of ADEK has been extended to increase its role in the internal control processes.

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Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Design, Music and Dance, Netherlands: Developing and implementing a joint master programme

Frans de Ruiter and Rineke Smilde¹¹

As an example of how curriculum development is based on creative ideas, and more precisely on creativity itself, this being the 'core business' of an arts academy, the Royal Conservatoire (part of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Design, Music and Dance) The Hague presents its recently launched *Joint Music Master's programme for New Audiences and Innovative Practice*. Five higher music education institutions from four European countries are participating in this new and innovative curriculum: the Guildhall School of Music & Drama in London, the Prince Claus Conservatoire in Groningen (the Netherlands), the Iceland Academy of the Arts, Department of Music, the Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences, School of Music in Finland, and the Royal Conservatoire in The Hague.

General outlines

The music profession is rapidly changing. Careers in music are more flexible and international in scope than ever before. Increasingly, musicians are collaborating with practitioners in other arts and societal cross-sector settings. Today's musicians must be capable of working in a variety of contexts. The Joint Music Master for New Audiences and Innovative Practice is designed to meet these demands. Students learn to develop and lead creative projects in diverse artistic, community and cross-sectoral settings, thereby creating new audiences and developing their leadership skills in diverse artistic and social contexts. Students entering this Master must be in possession of a Bachelor's degree in Music. The compulsory modules Action Research, Leading & Guiding, Performance & Communication and Project Management & Entrepreneurship are at the heart of the programme as well as Mentoring. In addition, students can choose from a variety of options fitting their personal pathway. The Master combines study at one's home institution with exchange study at a partner institution abroad.

Course information

This two-year Master curriculum has a study load of 120 ECTS and is divided into four semesters. Students acquire competencies in the compulsory modules. Specialisation is possible in three different areas: 'Ensembles', 'Collaborative Practice' and 'Cross-Sector Settings'.

The Master's programme will begin with a weeklong intensive summer school week at one of the five partner institutions, where the students will be able to work with some of the programme tutors and mentors. The personal and professional development of the student is at the centre of this programme and is, to a large extent, tailor-made, with each student having his/her own personal development plan, set up with his/her mentor. This includes the choice of the partner institution where the student will study during the second semester of his/her Master's programme, fitting the student's personal pathway, the optional modules to be undertaken, as well as details relating to the 'professional integration project' that each student will carry out during the second year in cooperation with an external partner.

¹¹ Chairman Board of Management, Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Design, Music and Dance in The Hague, and Director of the Academy of Creative & Performing Arts at Leiden University.

¹² PhD, Professor of Lifelong Learning in Music and the Arts.

Mentoring and Personal Pathway Guidance

Mentoring is a fundamental given in the Joint Music Master for New Audiences and Innovative Practice and students will receive mentoring throughout the whole two-year programme. Important aims of this module are for students to develop skills in critical reflection and self-reflection, co-mentoring and the ability to be reflexive in different contexts and roles. In addition, students develop the ability to plan, act and reflect in a productive cycle. As such, Mentoring is closely related to Action Research.

Quality Assurance

A joint internal quality assurance system has been developed between the institutions that will be used parallel to the internal systems of the institutions.

Quality assurance is not seen so much as a bureaucratic system to absorb criticism but as an integral part of the learning process for all involved: students, tutors, mentors and programme managers. The whole process of re-examination of the outcomes of various steps and phases in the curriculum starts right from the admission procedure that is remarkably different from the usual practice.

This admission procedure consists of two steps. Applicants will send in a combined letter of motivation/study plan/CV and a DVD to document their artistic skills. A maximum of 15 students will be short-listed in this first round in order to appear for a second round that consists of two parts. In a workshop, candidates offer a 10-minute performance on their instrument or a presentation of their compositions, and they take part in a creative workshop and collaborative task, where generic, collaborative and improvisational skills are tested. In an interview a candidate gives a 10-minute presentation of the study plan and then has a 30 minute interview. A maximum of 7 candidates can pass this second selection. In particular, this second selection round is quite exceptional in higher music education.

After students have finished the entrance examination, their feedback is asked on several occasions. Upon admission (or rejection) the students reflect upon their satisfaction on the admission procedure. After having entered the programme, student satisfaction is monitored repeatedly, on the level of individual modules as well as on the level of the programme as a whole. For most forms of student feedback, (electronic) questionnaires have been developed. Feedback from the teachers will also be taken into account, not only by using a questionnaire but also by using a set of questions that can be used by the programme coordinator in meetings with teachers. Questionnaires have also been developed for 'early leavers' as well as for alumni in their third and fifth year after graduating from the Joint Master programme.

Throughout the Joint Master another form of Quality Assurance takes place in the ongoing process of mentoring. Per semester students have 12 hours of mentoring with both their mentor and their peer-students. It goes without saying that this mentoring process gives the management of the Joint Master insight into the obstacles and possible problems of the course on an almost day to day basis. The outcomes of this ongoing process of Quality Assurance will be used to refine the compulsory modules and be incorporated into the mentoring programme, as part of the students' learning process.

The Quality Assurance not only takes place by introspection, but as well by letting external stakeholders take a closer look at the programme and its outcomes. External stakeholders will have an important role in assessments. Others will be invited as evaluators to attend presentations by students, in particular the presentation of the Professional Integration Projects.

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Finally, the satisfaction of society in general will be taken into account, through the collection and documentation of response in the media.

All in all, the quality assurance takes place on two levels: each institution maintains its own quality assurance system and the joint quality assurance serves as an extra 'layer' for the collaborative programme. In the (context-based) assessments, teachers from the partner institutions serve, together with the professional experts with whom the students collaborate in their professional integration project, as examiners.

Pilot 2008-2009

This Joint Music Master NAIP will start in September 2009. However the programme was tested in a Pilot that was launched in September 2008. After an admission procedure in which eleven candidates applied for seven vacancies, six students were selected to enroll in the Pilot at the Royal Conservatoire. This institute offers three of the compulsory modules (Performance & Communication, Leading & Guiding, Project Management & Entrepreneurship) and two optional modules. Apart from that, students are allowed to add subjects from a variety of electives and lessons that are being given in the institute, including individual lessons with tutors at Master's level. However the exchange part of the JM NAIP will not be realised in this pilot year.

State of affairs Joint Music Master in The Hague (per 1 January 2009)

Six students have enrolled in the Pilot for the Joint Music Master after a selection procedure that consisted of an interview based on a written application and a study plan. Some students (those who did not graduate from the Royal Conservatoire) also submitted DVDs to document their performance skills.

The course started piloting the Performance & Communication module in September with a series of weekly lessons of three hours and with a week of intensive workshops lead by Tim Steiner, guest tutor from the Guildhall School of Music & Drama to kick-off the Leading & Guiding module.

At the beginning of November, 5 students started a placement at the Utrecht Centre for the Arts, leading workshops with two groups of pre-drama school students. These workshops resulted in the presentation of two mini-operas, created by these students in December. The students are currently preparing an educational project (in collaboration with a Dutch opera company) with young people in a culturally highly diverse borough of The Hague and projects organised by the education department of the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam.

In the meantime, JM students have begun to register their placements/projects for the P & C module. In the second semester, the optional module on African music and the compulsory module on Project Management and Entrepreneurship will be piloted.

University of Akureyri, Iceland: Adapting to the needs of lifelong learning through enhancing information literacy

Sigrun Magnúsdóttir¹³

The University of Akureyri (UNAK), Iceland was established in 1986 and has 1400 students in three faculties, Faculty of Health Sciences, Faculty of Business and Science and Faculty of Humanities and Social Science. At UNAK it is also noteworthy that one third of the student population is made up of distance learners. The number of study programmes is 22: 16 undergraduate study programmes and 6 on masters' level.

At UNAK the objective of teaching and training in information literacy (IL) is to ensure that students become information literate during their studies and thus more skilled for lifelong learning. A number of definitions of the term information literacy exist but the one we use is from the American Library Association (Presidential Committee on Information Literacy, Final report, Chicago: American Library Association, 1989¹⁴) which states that "to be information literate, a person must be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information."

Further it states that an information literate individual knows how to learn and acquire knowledge but it is also important that he is able to utilize this knowledge in the future. Information literacy skills support and contribute to lifelong learning.

The aim of teaching and training IL is to introduce students to information sources in both digital and printed forms and teach them how to utilise them both during their university studies and in their careers. Emphasis is placed on teaching the students information searching skills, how to evaluate the quality of the information sources they retrieve and how to use them in a systematic and professional manner.

Apart from classes in IL in connection with specific courses, practical exercises are offered in specific databases and programs for students who want to acquire deeper knowledge or review their skills before commencing their work on the final dissertations.

Who is involved?

All students at the university receive teaching and training in IL at the start of their studies as a part of academic skills courses. As their studies progress, they also receive teaching and training in IL as a part of courses which are selected in consultation between librarians and individual teachers from the faculties. Teachers interested in such cooperation are advised to contact the library staff but it is also important that the librarians themselves are proactive, take the initiative and contact teachers and thus start the cooperation.

The aim is to have at least one course during each academic year for every student connected to IL teaching and training. We are getting closer to obtaining that goal but are not quite there yet. For students who have selected their subjects of specialisation during the second or third year the teaching focuses on specialised databases and information searching within their specialised fields of studies. Teaching in the third/fourth year aims at the preparation of students' final dissertations.

¹³ Director of Quality Management, University of Akureyri.

¹⁴ <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/publications/whitepapers/presidential.cfm#importance>

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It is interesting to note that the teachers often sit in on the IL teaching and training classes with their students to learn alongside them as the information search techniques needed for effective searching in scholarly databases is new to many of them, especially the older ones. Also the search techniques change constantly and new features are added to the databases so the teachers need to update their skills on regular basis.

Challenges encountered

The implementation of the IL teaching and training at UNAK has, overall, been successful even though we would like to see it integrated into second year courses in more programmes and as a part of all of the masters' degree programmes.

1. It has been a challenge to get IL teaching and training to be an integral part of all first year courses. It has taken time but now the IL teaching and training is a part of all the academic skills courses that are compulsory for all first year students.

The librarians initially had to use their personal contacts among the teachers but as other teachers have heard how important and successful the IL teaching and training has been and what positive impact it has on the students' assignments more and more have asked the librarians to be a part of their courses.

It has been clear from the start that IL teaching and training is the role of the UNAK and a part of its services to the academic community so the faculties have not had to pay extra for it. Therefore the question remains to be answered if the implementation of IL teaching and training would have been as successful if the faculties had had to pay the library from their funds for the IL teaching and training.

2. It is important that IL teaching and training is a part of the course assignments and even that the librarians grade parts of the assignments either with grades or passed/not passed. The reason is that students are more attentive and learn better if they get grades for their work and if they can use their newly acquired skills and search results right away to make the assignments they are currently working on better.

It has not been possible for the librarians to give grades in as many courses as they would have liked during the last two years because of staff shortages at the library as the grading is too time consuming. It is however very important to be able to do more of that in the near future. The teachers realise now how important this is and have, in some cases, started grading the students' IL skills themselves when the librarians have not been able to.

3. Through our advocacy IL is one of the skills criteria in all three cycles of the National Qualification Framework (NQF) developed by the Icelandic Ministry of Culture, Education and Science. It was very important to include it there as it will help make IL teaching and training an integral part of compulsory courses preferably one for each of the three to five years the students study for their bachelors' or masters' degrees.

It is important to keep the IL criteria in an upcoming revision of the NQF and try to make the wording even stronger in the revised edition. All the academic libraries in Iceland have co-operated for years on important issues like this and through their collaborative efforts and in light of how important IL is for lifelong learning this will hopefully be successful.

The University of Manchester, UK: Students as Partners' programme with particular reference to PASS

Louise Walmsley¹⁵

Students at the University of Manchester have the opportunity to reflect on their learning and wider student experience through unit and programme level questionnaires, via curriculum tools such as learning logs or the use of enquiry-based learning, and via regular meetings with academic advisers. However, the University of Manchester also runs a programme called 'Students as Partners' which supports and facilitates student-led activity, encouraging students to take a holistic approach to their learning and development, concentrating on the total student experience and recognising co-curricular learning opportunities as well as those available through the curriculum. The programme's aims are to:

- involve students as partners in helping others in the transition into higher education
- develop and support the independent learner
- engage students in curriculum feedback and development.

The programme manages two complementary schemes for peer support: peer mentoring and PASS (Peer Assisted Study Scheme). Peer mentoring is an informal social support network for students to assist with orientation and socialisation during the first few weeks of Year 1. Peer mentoring can continue throughout the year to foster a greater sense of community within a discipline and School. PASS is where higher year students help lower year students, in groups, to reflect on their learning and to help develop study and learning strategies. Sessions are voluntary and regularly timetabled thus informally enabling students to review material from historically difficult units in a non-threatening, group situation. The character of sessions is one of collaborative active learning centred on discussion, reflection and interaction.

Both schemes have been running since 1995 and, whilst distinct, can often overlap. All schemes are discipline owned and student led; by taking responsibility for its own scheme (while still accessing central and Faculty staff for support, guidance, training, evaluation and dissemination) a discipline can ensure the scheme meets the needs of the students, with those needs being most effectively identified by the students who are involved.

The purpose of PASS is to:

- support the first year student experience through collaborative reflection and exploratory discussion;
- enhance the learning experience and personal development of PASS Leaders;
- improve academic performance and achievement and increase retention;
- provide an additional mechanism for communication and feedback between teaching staff and students.

The approach is summarised as follows:

- learning enhancement through student to student support scheme;
- trained student PASS Leaders facilitate study sessions for groups of lower year students;

¹⁵ Head of the Teaching and Learning Support Office, University of Manchester.

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- PASS is voluntary and intended to offer a safe, friendly place to help students:
 - adjust to University life
 - improve their study habits
 - enhance their understanding of the subject matter of their course through collaborative learning
 - enhance their awareness of programme direction and expectations;
- content is based on course materials and PASS leaders are engaged in sharing their experiences and facilitating discussion rather than re-teaching the subject.

We believe that PASS adds value to the learning experience and improves the academic performance of both first years and PASS leaders; regular attendees of PASS have achieved a higher mean academic mark, a twofold reduction in fail rate and a threefold increase in 1st class marks (Fostier and Carey, 2007¹⁶). It is also important to note that research has suggested that students from a diverse range of academic abilities attend PASS, providing an approach to student support that positively provides opportunity for improving grades rather than addressing learning deficits.

Who is involved?

PASS was first introduced into the University in 1995 in Chemistry to address retention and academic performance. The programme has expanded considerably, currently operating in 14 disciplines (Mechanical Engineering, Mathematics, Computer Science, Aerospace Engineering, Chemistry, Life Sciences, Civil Engineering, Chemical Engineering, Material Science, Economics, Music, Middle Eastern Studies, Econometrics and Psychology) with over 400 PASS student leaders supporting over 2000 first year students. It is a key part of the University's strategy to deliver high quality provision in strategically important and vulnerable subjects. It is also a key component of the University's emerging strategy for personalising learning. The University is committed to expanding the use of PASS into new disciplines and programmes, to piloting vertical expansion to extend the benefits to higher year students, and to exploring how PASS can be developed in online environments.

In May 2008 we hosted and facilitated a national PASS workshop and attracted 32 external participants, demonstrating interest in the model across the UK. Additionally, the University has recently become the UK National Centre for PASS and will be providing support and training to other higher education institutions seeking to implement similar schemes.

PASS is embedded in the established Students as Partners programme which is coordinated institutionally by the Teaching and Learning Support Office. The programme has become an integral and well established programme of activity, enhancing the student experience and supporting institutional strategic goals. Activity is managed and supported by two permanent members of staff who provide training, specialist knowledge and advice. In addition sabbatical interns are recruited annually in collaboration with the four faculties to support operational activity at a discipline/programme level.

Challenges encountered

The benefits of introducing PASS are significant but equally require substantial investment of commitment and enthusiasm from both academic and administrative staff (at varying levels) and students to implement and embed a programme within both the discipline and institution.

The most challenging practicalities of introducing PASS are timetabling and room booking. For the programme to be successful the sessions should be scheduled in a lecture gap but finding a slot in

¹⁶ Fostier, M. and Carey, W. (2007) *Exploration, experience and evaluation: Peer Assisted Study Scheme, sharing the experience of the University of Manchester. Science, Learning and Teaching Conference*, Keele University, UK, 143 - 150 Higher Education Subject Centre for Bioscience, Materials and Physical Sciences.

the timetable where both the higher year leaders and first year students are available is never easy and requires working closely with administrative staff within the discipline.

The recruitment of PASS leaders can be approached in many different ways and careful consideration should be given to this process. At the University of Manchester we use student volunteers and therefore market the opportunity to all eligible students and deliver 'PASS expectation' workshops to interested students, ahead of them attending the required comprehensive training programme.

Staff who will deliver the student training need to have been identified and trained. Again there are different approaches that can be taken to this but in most institutions that operate PASS there is central support and coordination.

Practitioners seeking to implement PASS would be wise not to reinvent the wheel but instead to utilise the wealth of knowledge, expertise and lessons learned. Practice, resources and research are collated and disseminated through the International Center for Supplemental Instruction (based at University of Missouri, Kansas City) and the National Centres who provide training and consultancy to individual institutions and disciplines. Anybody seeking to implement a programme should be trained as an SI Supervisor which is a requirement to train student leaders.

In recognising the value of PASS there is often a temptation to attempt to implement quickly, the greatest advice is to ensure that a thorough consultation period with students and staff has taken place. Allowing a full semester to discuss with students and staff how to identify the complex components of a module or course and to recognise how PASS can be most effectively utilised would be an adequate time period. It is also essential to ensure that all of the course teaching team are aware of the model and that they approve of the introduction so that they will stress the importance of first year attendance, this should be supported through the delivery of staff development workshops ahead of implementation.

We also believe that the support of key staff, including those in senior roles at institutional level, and the linking to institutional teaching and learning strategies is vital.

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NVAO: Introducing, developing and implementing a new phase in the accreditation system in the Netherlands and Flanders

Leendert J. Klaassen¹⁷

Context

HEIs operate in a social environment which is becoming increasingly complex. They need to perform broad, multiple tasks, requiring them to meet increasingly higher quantitative and qualitative demands. In addition, international competition is picking up, boosted by international rankings to which some parties are attaching great significance. As a result, the stakeholders involved (such as students and the professional sector) as well as the national government and politicians, are regarding the institutions with an increasingly critical eye. Thus, HEIs are confronted with an area of tension between institutional autonomy, accountability as requested by the social environment and the presence (or absence) of public trust. While the institutions are first and foremost in pointing out their autonomy, strongly emphasising the required confidence in the quality of what they are offering their students – in some cases based on a centuries-old history – the stakeholders tend to take the position that their first priority should lie with accountability, in part due to the large sums of public resources made available to higher education. In some circles, therefore, “due suspicion” tends to prevail, rather than “earned trust”.

Continuing development of government policy in the Netherlands and Flanders

An important consideration in light of the above trends is one of the principles the Dutch government formulated upon the establishment of the government coalition in 2007: “We will give education institutions more scope to implement their own views in the education they provide, by placing trust in the professionals, by reducing rules and regulations and by easing up on supervision.” Thus, “earned trust” became one of the key concepts in the further development of the supervision system and consequently, in the accreditation system. More attention to the role of the professionals, the teachers; reducing the burden of bureaucratic rules and regulations; reducing the paper work in the system. In the accreditation practice this was especially significant in view of the fact that by 2010 all programmes in the Netherlands will have been accredited in the first round of the system. In Flanders, this goal will be achieved in 2013. By then, all (still) existing programmes can be assumed to meet the generic quality requirements. Now that this generic quality has been safeguarded, we need to create room for institutions and professionals to focus on a substantial quality improvement. Another reason for choosing to continue the development of the accreditation system was the conviction that the added value of a second, unaltered accreditation round would be at odds with the (financial and administrative) burdens it would carry. Although Flanders lags a few years behind and will not complete the first round of the accreditation system until 2013, the Flemish government has also embarked upon the development of a policy for the next phase of the accreditation system, in part instigated by the conviction that a further divergence of essential elements in the two accreditation systems would be undesirable. Nonetheless, in Flanders too the first round will initially be completed entirely in accordance with the existing system. The approach decided on for the new phase of the accreditation system can briefly be described as follows: accreditation should become a process that both safeguards generic quality and promotes increased quality. Made-to-measure quality assurance: powerful intervention where needed, providing room when trust has been earned. In this manner, a new balance will be created between accountability, quality improvement and trust.

¹⁷ Member of the Board, NVAO.

Outline of the new system

NVAO developed the next phase of the accreditation system in concert with the government and the stakeholders, based on the following points of departure:

1. The core of the system is and will remain the external, independent assessment of the quality of the education provided (at the programme level) by means of peer reviews.
2. Reduction of administrative burdens.
3. No overlap with other forms of supervision.
4. Continued quality improvement by: paying increased attention to the content of the education provided and expanding the role of teachers; visualising the differences in quality (beyond generic quality); increasing the emphasis on “learning outcomes”.

The methodology opted for focuses on two routes:

1. A combination of assessing quality assurance at the institutional level (on a voluntary basis) and accrediting programmes on the basis of a limited programme assessment.
2. Assessing the programme level only by means of an extensive “old style” programme assessment.

The key question in the initial accreditation framework that has been developed specifically for the voluntary institutional audits will be: is the institution “in control” of the programmes it offers? This key question will be translated into six standards to be assessed by the auditing panels, which can be summarised as follows:

1. Does the institution have a well-founded policy view on the quality of its programmes?
2. What policy does the institution implement and what resources does it draw on for this purpose?
3. How does it keep track of its progress?
4. What results does it achieve?
5. What are the measures for improvement?
6. Who is responsible for realising the measures for improvement?

The assessment itself will consist of a “critical self-reflection”, to be drawn up by the institution, and studied by the auditing panel which will complete its overall picture of the institution’s quality assurance by means of a site visit and various audits. The above standards, assessed together, will provide a complete picture enabling the panel to assess the quality assurance at the institutional level. A (positive or negative) judgement on the various standards will eventually result in a well-reasoned final conclusion with regard to the institutional audit on a three-point scale: trust, conditional trust, no trust. This final conclusion is decisive for the question of whether accreditation of the programmes is to be based on either a limited or an extensive programme assessment (see diagram above).

The status of “earned trust” is open to institutions that have received a positive judgement (trust) on their quality assurance system and its functioning. They are deemed to be “in control” of the quality of their programmes. In such situations, a limited programme assessment will be sufficient. This limited programme assessment involves a discussion, on the basis of a self-evaluation report drawn up by the institution itself, with external, independent professionals, the peers, on the content of the programme, the results achieved and the programme’s ambitions. The limitation consists in the omission of all the aspects that can be deemed as sufficiently covered in the institutional audit. In effect, three questions remain that have been translated into standards to be assessed by the peers:

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1. What does the programme aim at (intended learning outcomes)?
2. How does the programme intend to realise its objectives?
3. What results does the programme produce (achieved learning outcomes)?

The scores/judgements of the assessment panels can be defined as follows:

- Generic quality: the quality that can be reasonably expected of a higher education bachelor's or master's programme in an international perspective.
- Insufficient: the programme does not meet the generic quality requirements.
- Sufficient: the programme meets the generic quality requirements.
- Good: the programme exceeds the generic quality level.
- Excellent: the programme exceeds the generic quality level by far and serves as a role model for other relevant programmes.

Implementation

A vital link between the development and the introduction of the next phase of the accreditation system involves conducting a considerable number of pilot projects. These pilot projects pertain in particular to the two new instruments that will be introduced: the institutional audit and the limited programme assessment. The object of the pilot projects is to ascertain whether these new instruments and the procedures and standards they encompass will yield a proper picture of the quality of the education provided. The focus is both on the processes involved in quality assurance at the institutional level (is the board of the institution "in control" of the quality of the programmes offered?) and on the effect of the limited programme assessment for safeguarding the quality of the educational content at the institutional level. Another important question to be answered in the pilot projects relates to the mitigation (or rather toughening?) of the bureaucratic burden attached to the new procedure.

The pilot projects are carried out by six widely divergent institutions in the Netherlands: research universities and universities of applied sciences, single-sector and broad-based, large and small, publicly funded and privately funded. In addition, there are three institutions in Flanders involved in the pilots, also diverse in composition. In the second half of 2008, all of these institutions drew up a so-called "critical self-reflection", which will form the basis for the institutional audit. In November and December 2008, audit teams, specifically set up for these pilot projects and chaired by experienced, authoritative administrators from the higher education sector, visited the institutions and presented a judgement on the institutions involved on the basis of the standards described above. The judgements ranged from "trust" (five times) to "conditional trust" (four times). Most of the audit teams were composed of five members, a secretary and a NVAO process coordinator. In addition, NVAO requested the Inspectorate of Education to provide an observer in order to warrant independent evaluation of the audits. In the first few months of 2009, the institutional audits will be followed by the pilot projects for the limited programme assessments. The latter pilot projects had not yet been completed at the time this report was compiled; this means that no data is available on the outcomes.

Evaluation

When this report was drafted, the conclusions of the evaluation of the institutional audits conducted were only available to a limited extent. The Inspectorate of Education will publish its findings in the first week of February 2009. However, the audit teams and the institutions assessed did provide NVAO with their initial impressions. Across the board, these responses range from favourable to

enthusiastic. Drafting a critical self-reflection is regarded as an informative process; the audits are deemed valuable and a good way of arriving at a well-founded judgement on an institution's quality assurance system. This justifies high expectations for the remainder of the pilot process. Obviously, this does not preclude us from learning lessons from the experiences gained. Several conclusions emerge from NVAO's own observations that will probably lead to an adjustment of the procedures.

Some of the standards used have similar elements and seem to partially overlap one another. Combining these standards is considered.

Panels are subjective in their interpretation and application of the three-point scale "trust – conditional trust – no trust". Consequently, they tend to steer clear of the "no trust" judgement. In similar situations, the two other judgements are used in different ways. This is undesirable for judgements that are aimed at legal consequences and must be able to stand the test of equality and consistency before the law, in the interest of and with a view to equal treatment of the institutions. We must seek more objectified and stringent formulations for the judgements, without losing sight of the essence of the "earned trust" principle.

With regard to the composition of the audit teams, special attention must be focused on the schooling and training of chair and members. Adopting an overly "managerial" stance tends to result in obscure or insufficiently sharp judgements. The team is hesitant to express that the requested trust is lacking. The members of the audit teams must be aware that a meaningful audit depends on an honest, autonomous and clearly formulated judgement.

Conclusion

The Netherlands and Flanders have taken the first steps towards the next phase in the accreditation system, which is less bureaucratic and offers the professionals more scope to discuss the "real content" of education and "real quality" with their peers. In addition, the new system focuses more on bolstering a permanent quality culture within the institutions. In this quality culture, by definition, there is a need and room for the self-reflection desired. In the next phase of the system the institutions will be required to draw up a critical self-reflection for the institutional audits and prepare self-evaluation reports for the programme assessments, which will give them ample opportunity to test these against the judgement of independent peers. If, moreover, this appears to reduce the bureaucratic burden and may lead to increased creativity among all parties concerned, then we are justified in looking forward to the next phase of the accreditation system of the Netherlands and Flanders with "earned trust".

Annexes

ANNEX 4: LIST OF QUESTIONS USED IN THE TESTING PHASE

These questions were developed by the project steering committee on the basis of project participants' work during the two first QAHECA seminars. The idea was that participants would not answer the questions as such, but would pick two questions and present one practice per question in their report. One practice was to be an existing successful practice and another, a new practice that the participant tested during the project. However, as the project progressed and the questions were tested, it was decided not to exclusively base the recommendations of the project on these questions.

These questions may be of assistance to an institution or an agency reflecting on how its QA processes enhance or stifle creativity and innovation within the organisation. If these questions are used for this purpose, the organisation should, instead of merely aim to provide a direct answer, always keeping in mind the standard phases of self-evaluation:

1. How would we answer these questions? What kind of processes do we have in place in relation to the area addressed by the question? How well do these practices enhance creativity and support the quality assurance?
2. How could we improve these existing practices to better enhance the creativity?
3. Preparing an action plan for improvements with schedule, priorities, distribution of responsibilities as well as defined monitoring methods.
4. Following up the action plan in order to ensure that it is implemented properly.

The questions developed during the project:

Institutional Strategy

1. How does your approach to staff development promote and reward creativity in teaching, learning and assessment?
2. How is your institution adapting to the current and future needs for lifelong learning?

Research-based higher education

3. How do you ensure that learning and teaching at your institution are informed and underpinned by research?

Student involvement

4. How are students encouraged to be actively engaged in all aspects of institutional life, whether formal or informal?
5. How do you engage students in creative reflection on their learning experience, and how is dialogue and feedback ensured?

Internal and external evaluation/assessment

6. How do you work together with agencies (OR: with HEIs) to improve quality and creativity?
7. A trusting culture that welcomes self reflection is essential to the QA processes. How does your institution promote such an approach?
8. How do your QA processes identify and acknowledge creative initiatives?
9. What are the incentives for institutions to develop creative and innovative teaching, learning and assessment?
10. How can the internal QA and the external accreditation processes be shaped and enhanced by good, creative practice?

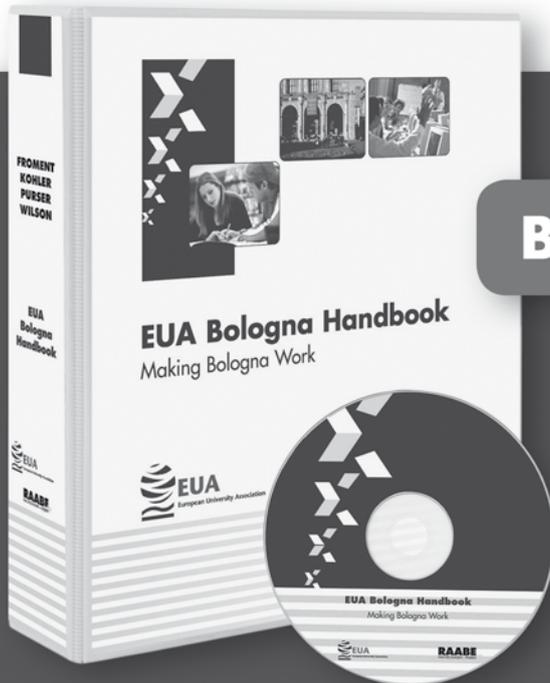
Curriculum development

11. How do you take account of creative ideas in curriculum development from a range of sources, such as students, staff in all roles (teaching and non teaching) and external stakeholders?
12. In what ways does the approach to assessment in your curricula promote creativity and personal development?
13. How do you recognise and accredit the learning outcomes that result from the students' informal learning experiences – including through mobility periods and work placements?
14. How are staff encouraged to explore the possibilities of new technologies to develop flexible and creative curriculum? How do you assure the quality of creative ways of using learning technology?
15. How do your quality processes support inter-disciplinary teaching and learning?

Dissemination of QA practices

16. How do you create opportunities for knowledge exchange on QA issues within the institution?
17. How do you ensure that you listen and give feedback to stakeholders?
18. How can the valuable findings from QA reports/visits be synthesised and shared across the sector? What dissemination strategies ensure that such findings have maximum positive impact?
19. How do your QA processes benefit from partnerships and networking with other institutions and stakeholders?

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