



organ für akkreditierung und qualitätssicherung
der schweizerischen hochschulen

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Internal Quality Assurance at Higher Education Institutions. Requirements and Good Practices

Brief summary of the Seminar interventions



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1 Intervention by Ms Andrée Sursock

Ms Andrée Sursock, Deputy Secretary General of the EUA (European University Association)

Role of universities in quality assurance

Main points of her speech:

As the Bergen and Berlin communiqués stated, the role of higher education institutions is fundamental in increasing quality but it is important to realise that institutional autonomy is a precondition for good internal quality arrangements.

The EUA project on Quality Culture emphasises that it is important to promote a culture of quality – that is, shared values and attitudes – rather than simply managerial processes.

The specific internal and external environment of HE institutions must be taken into account in developing internal quality processes: each institution organises its internal review to fit its own objectives and be coherent with its own academic and organisational values. At the same time, each must balance these against the national external accountability requirements.

There is no single approach to quality. Nevertheless, the project revealed a range of principles that ensure success:

- Explaining that the aims of introducing internal quality are an opportunity to enhance creativity and innovation.
- Building a university community and the staff's identification with the institution and introducing a staff development scheme to ensure that internal quality processes are an opportunity to improve.
- Embedding a quality culture through internal communication and discussions.
- Developing the participation of students in internal evaluations and involving the appropriate external stakeholders.
- Identifying “quality champions”, who report directly to the rectoral team, and ensuring proper academic staffing and staff rotation in the quality unit office.
- Ensuring a follow-up of the internal reviews: e.g., implementation of the appropriate recommendations and feed back loops into strategic management.
- Ensuring that the first steps undertaken are successful: Switzerland has done very well in this regard.

Next steps for EUA will be co-organising, with ENQA, ESIB and EURASHE, a QA Forum focused on internal quality, and launching the “Creativity Project”, which will identify the conditions that make a HE institution creative.

2 Intervention by Mr Rolf Heusser

Mr Rolf Heusser, Director of the OAQ

Institutional assessment: a new trend in external quality assurance

Main points of his speech:

International dimension

- HEIs's autonomy is increasing, which creates also a call for greater transparency and accountability
- QA is a key element for the successful implementation of the Bologna process
- There are established national QA agencies all over Europe. They are working in networks and use commonly agreed guidelines.

New trends in external QA

- There is close link between accreditation and recognition practices
- From input to output orientation in QA
- Internationalisation of accreditation and QA
- Move towards institutional rather than systematic programme assessments
- Main strength of programme assessments: focus on educational quality
- Main weakness of programme assessment: very demanding in resources

Alternative: institutional approach

- Main strengths: focus on „educational quality“; link to national recognition practices; direct international comparison of qualifications possible
- Metaphor of the “pizza production process” as a good example of an institutional approach to QA
- In the past years some European countries moved to institutional assessment, focussing on internal QA systems of HEIs. Examples are Switzerland, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom.
- Internal QA systems of HEIs should be based on the internationally accepted ENQA standards and guidelines 2005, they can also serve as basis for external QA.

- The main challenges are due to limited information about educational provisions and to the impossibility of making direct international comparisons of qualifications, so far.

Case study Switzerland:

- The OAQ has carried out over 100 procedures in the last 2 years, one third of them covering institutional assessments.
- Swiss universities have all gone through quality audits, leading to positive results
- Switzerland is one of the first countries that has implemented the Bergen commitment with the creation of Swiss guidelines for QA at HEIs based on ENQA standards. These guidelines are the result of close cooperation between the OAQ, the Swiss University Conference and the Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities.
- The new University Law might treat the whole tertiary sector equally, with institutional accreditation as a mandatory element, whereas program accreditations might be carried out selectively and on demand.

3 Intervention by Mr Claus Nygaard

Mr Claus Nygaard, Associate Professor and Senior Advisor at CBS Learning Lab (Copenhagen Business School, Denmark)

Quality Assurance at the Copenhagen Business School

Main points of his speech:

Quality enhancement as a bottom up process is a systematic every-day activity.

CBS quality work:

- develops and communicate knowledge on programme development, learning processes and the interaction of these areas with other services such as the library, the administration, etc.
- develops teaching competencies;
- works to involve all levels of staff: teachers, programme and course coordinators, students and CBS management
- develops a learning environment contributing to ensure that students acquire the competencies to meet the challenges of the global knowledge society of the future

Among the most advanced quality activities CBS has developed and is currently implementing the CBS learning strategy, the programme for Assistant Professors in teaching and pedagogical competences, the Teaching and Learning Committee's survey (results available on this link: www.cbsevaluering.dk).

Among its strategic goals the CBS wants to maintain an international profile based on a regional partnership with a business foundation community.

Core concept: CBS as a learning university addressed to learning students. This is a good approach for continuous improvement.

Learning outcomes are carefully set in order for the students to face the competition on the labour market.

CBS Quality indicators:

- Variation in form of teaching and examination
- Teaching is oriented towards practice
- Teaching is research-based

CBS Quality circle as image of a strategy taking into account all stakeholders

1. Be exceptional: ambition to be among the best in Europe
2. Perfection: develop as a learning university
3. Fitness for purpose: stakeholder-related quality enhancement
4. Value for money: payback to stakeholders
5. Transformation: empower students

In order to implement point 2 (perfection) CBS has settled up a Learning Lab whose aim is to improve the quality of teaching and study programmes undertaken at the institution.

Importance of external evaluations and accreditations not only to give guaranties to students and stakeholders, but also to have continuous chances of improvement and pursuing perfection.

What can be learned by CBS:

- Coherent Quality system with an established quality culture
- The development of a “learning lab” for internal QA
- High developed dialogue accompanied by flexibility, adaptability, readiness for change

4 Intervention by Mr Knut Hove

Mr Knut Hove, Rector of the UMB (Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Norway)

Quality assurance at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences

Main points of his speech:

Quality increases in a living environment, where people (teacher and students) do things together.

Presentation of the University and HE-system in Norway:

- 4 universities in Norway (UMB is the smallest)
- Accreditation starts after the Bologna process
- UMB, 30% of the masters programs are in English (International studies very important)

The quality system processes at UMB

- the rector has to be involved to get sufficient power in the quality processes
- participation of all the employees
- internal discussion, help to gain a lot of experience

The motivation for the development of the quality system should not be only subject to law requirements, but quality culture is very important for the development: quality can optimize the resources, help to survive into a strong international competition. Students should be informed and involved (transparency).

In Norway, there is the Norwegian agency for quality assurance in education (NOKUT) and the Universities and Colleges Act. This agency has made 10 commandments (see slides for internal QA) that all institutions in Norway have to fulfil. It is not always easy for the institutions to understand the QA language. Their perception of the QA language is the same as the perception they have for a Cod liver Oil fish (tastes awful, is toxic in large amount... but when you know it you become addicted to it...)

Quality system at UMB

- focuses on students
- includes all academics, learning environment, not only research
- is implemented through UMB's existing international map and management instruments
- is in continual development
- is transparent (web published)

The quality system should have a long term goal : have a look at what the students become after they have finished their studies (study time is used effectively and gives academic benefits)

QA system in practice

- evaluation of programmes (external / internal)
- annual report (taken into the management cycle)
- etc.

Development of ownership

- participation of the rector is really important
- all staff participates in follow-up implementation measures – and is therefore aware of follow-up results
- all evaluations of the courses are published (students can see if an improvement took place or not), students are more involved if changes can be seen

Documentation of QA system

- should be easy to understand
- focuses on the system effectiveness
- should be supported by the use of aids like glossaries, responsibility charts...
- the annual report should be honest and self-critical

Responsibility is distributed in accordance with an organisational map (published)

Student contribution (political, social, academic) is very important

Strategic work and study quality

- the university board should adopt the standards
- the strategic plan should contain objectives for study quality
- study quality should be included in the annual plans

UMB has defined many quality areas (programmes, academic guidance, credit, students, etc) and each area is described in more details with objectives and general responsibility.

Quality assurance system is not a “free lunch”, it takes time and a lot of effort!!

5 Intervention by Mr Pdraig Walsh

Mr Pdraig Walsh, Chief Executive of the IUQB (Irish University Quality Board, Ireland)

Internal quality assurance at universities: the Irish perspective

Main points of his speech:

- Explains Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB).

- Background to Irish HE Systems: binary system
 - 7 universities, regulated by Universities Act (1997) and 14 non-university Institutes of Technology, regulated by Qualifications Act (1999).
- Universities Act 1997: legislation that requires the universities to put quality assurance procedures in place (similar approach in CH); same evaluation procedure for all (department, faculty, service), competent national and international comparisons on the quality.
- Internal QA in Irish Universities methodology / practice: Self-assessment, Peer review, Publication of findings, Implementation of recommendations and follow up.
- „Good self-assessment report implies no surprises and is followed by a good peer review“; self-assessment involves all (Head, staff, students). Peer review by national and international experts. Follow up includes: plan of action, timescale, publish reports visibly, quality improvement plan; justify / reasons why not implemented or changes in plans.
- Review of internal QA in Irish Universities by EUA: review of internal QA procedures in the Irish University sector and effectiveness of internal QA procedures in the individual Irish Universities (reports on website). Strengths: „system strikes the right tone and combination of public interest, accountability and university autonomy“.
- Important differences in QA in a university, Required practice (by law) versus Good practice (at university), e.g. departmental review cycle (10 years – 6 years), Institutional Audit (15 years – 7 years), Publication („Outcome of evaluations“ – Full experts report, full *QuIP*, synthetic evaluation, 1 year follow up).
- EUA Trends IV survey findings:
 - „Institutions with the most systematic approach to quality benefit from the greatest institutional autonomy“.
 - „A well developed internal quality culture is associated with a light external quality control“.