

Press release – 16 September 2011

New EUA report examines “quality culture” in European universities

A new report published today (16 September 2011) sheds light on the range of different factors and conditions that help to create a “quality culture” within Europe’s universities.

The report, presented today by the European University Association at an event, co-organised with the Polish Presidency of the EU in Brussels, is the outcome of a European Commission supported project: “*Examining Quality Culture in Higher Education Institutions (EQC)*”.

The term “quality culture” used in the report refers to the creation of a shared set of values and commitments to quality within universities that are supported by structured managerial elements and quality assurance (QA) processes. The report argues that establishing a quality culture is the most effective and meaningful way for universities to ensure that QA mechanisms improve quality and support change within universities.

The report highlights, in particular, a number of conditions and actions that help universities create effective quality cultures.

- Universities should **not rely on a single QA instrument** – but use **a mix of tools** which are reviewed regularly and **linked to the overall strategy and academic values** of the institution.
- Universities need to develop **clear accountability lines** and ensure that the QA system is kept as simple as possible.
- **Leadership** is crucial to give the overview and framework of QA mechanism. It should “**facilitate internal debate and even tolerate dissent**”, to make sure the QA process is not simply imposed. The kind of language used to describe frameworks is also important for its success.
- **Universities need to invest in people**, in particular through staff development. While the report says that staff development schemes are becoming more common, it notes that professional centres to support teaching and learning are a ‘rarity’.
- **Autonomy and self confidence** are crucial factors in institutions’ capacity to define quality and internal QA processes.

Report author Andrée Sursock adds: “This report highlights that the vitality and sustainability of a quality culture depend upon both internal and external factors. It has shown that universities with effective quality cultures are generally located in an open environment which avoids over-regulation and enjoys high levels of public trust. These universities do not limit themselves to the definition of quality processes as set by their national QA agencies”.

The project *Examining Quality Culture in Higher Education Institutions*, carried out by EUA with two partners – the German Rectors Conference (HRK) and QAA-Scotland – examined the quality assurance (QA) processes and tools that have been developed by universities in Europe. The first part of the EQC study (published last year), based on a survey questionnaire, showed that universities had made remarkable progress in developing quality mechanisms. The goal of the second phase, which was based on 59 interviews with ten European universities, examined in greater depth the extent to which these mechanisms and processes have resulted in quality cultures.

The report “Examining Quality Culture Part II: Processes and Tools - Participation, Ownership and Bureaucracy” will be available on the EUA website: www.eua.be

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The European University Association, as the representative organisation of both the European universities and the national rectors' conferences, is the main voice of the higher education community in Europe. EUA's mission is to promote the development of a coherent system of European higher education and research.

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Notes to editors:

- More information about the project *Examining Quality Culture in Higher Education Institutions* (EQC) is available on this webpage: <http://www.eua.be/eua-work-and-policy-area/quality-assurance/projects/eqc/>
- The results of the first part of the study (published in 2010) can be downloaded here: http://www.eua.be/pubs/Examining_Quality_Culture_Part_1.pdf
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