

Developing an Internal Quality Culture in European Universities

**Report on the Quality Culture Project
Round II – 2004**

European University Association

**With the support of the Socrates Programme
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Education and Culture

Socrates

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Foreword

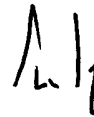
The Quality Culture Project is a EUA initiative aimed at developing and embedding a quality culture in higher education institutions. We are grateful that the Project gained the financial support of the Socrates Programme for the second year. The project supported forty-two institutions in the first round and forty-five institutions in the second round.

Interest in this project has been very high as shown by the significant number of applications - a combined total of over two hundred for the two rounds – and the fact that the report from Round I was one of the “bestsellers” among EUA publication in 2004. It is worth noting that the other “bestseller” was also concerned with quality: “Quality Assurance: A reference system for indicators and evaluation procedures” by François Tavenas (for the Latin European Universities Group).

The interest in these two publications as well as the report that follows demonstrate the high commitment of institutions to develop and embed quality. This report also reveals some of the limiting factors that impinge on institutions’ capacity to meet this objective. These factors include external environmental pressures (e.g., globalisation, the emergence of a higher education market), limited institutional autonomy in some systems and inadequate or decreased funding, all of which can constitute obstacles to developing an effective internal quality. Nevertheless, and despite some of these constraints, higher education institutions aspire to improve their quality and ensure their accountability.

The project showed that good practices can be found in many institutions across Europe and that much effort is being exerted and progress being made by higher education institutions in working towards improving their internal quality processes.

We hope that our member institutions and partners will find this report useful and look forward to any comments and feedback.



Eric Froment
EUA President

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Quality Culture Project aims at contributing to the development and embedding of a systematic and coherent quality culture in higher education institutions in order to meet the general goals of the creation of the European Higher Education Area and its articulation with the European Research Area.

The Quality Culture Project, funded by the Socrates Programme, has its origin in the EUA action plan 2001-2003 and Policy position paper on quality (EUA Council, September 2001). Both documents (i) emphasised that in issues of quality assurance, the point of departure must be the institutions' capacity for developing a robust internal quality culture and (ii) stressed that this capacity was integrally linked to institutional autonomy and public accountability.

An open call for Round II of the Quality Culture Project was circulated in autumn 2003. The call received a great deal of interest, and after a very competitive selection process, forty-five institutions and higher education associations from twenty-four countries were selected to take part (cf. Annex 1). They included a range of institutional types: twenty-four "classical" universities, eleven specialised universities, eight other higher education institutions and most notably two associations of universities and other higher education institutions. They were grouped into six networks and were invited to focus on one of the following themes:

- Research Management and Managing Academic Staff Career
- Student Support Services
- Implementing Bologna Reforms
- Teaching and Learning
- Partnerships
- Programme Evaluations

Each network consisted of a coordinator with a strong quality culture – and the work in the network was based on sharing experiences.

The Quality Culture Project is linked to EUA's Institutional Evaluation Programme, which celebrated its tenth anniversary in 2004 and has evaluated over 130 higher education institutions in thirty-five countries. These evaluations focus on strengthening the capacity of institutions to change through the development of internal quality processes. Thus, it is one aim of the Quality Culture Project to accompany the external approach of the Institutional Evaluation Programme by developing measures to enhance the quality of higher education from within the institutions.

The institutional evaluations and the large experience of EUA in bringing together higher education institutions from forty-five countries in Europe to discuss issues of common interest and agree common positions provided the foundation for the Project Guidelines. The guidelines document developed for the first round of the Quality Culture Project (2002 – 2003) was validated by participants and was used for the Project's second round.

These Project Guidelines offer general principles regarding quality culture and a structure for the three meetings that each network organised. Participants were invited to conduct an analysis of their institution in terms of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (a SWOT analysis) and to develop action plans. Every work phase was discussed (i) in each participating institution to ensure the widest engagement possible of the community and (ii) within the networks to receive advice and to find inspiration from the activities of partner institutions. Thus, the successive small network meetings, building on one another, generated good group dynamics that were maintained through sustained informal exchange within and across networks.

Six network reports, following a template provided by EUA, analysed and synthesised the institutional action plans and the discussions held by each network. The following project report is largely based on the six network reports. It also builds upon the project report produced at the

end of Round I of the Quality Culture Project whose results were taken into account by the networks of Round II.

There has been a clear development in the second round of the Quality Culture Project in comparison to the first round. It is important to note that institutions in the second round are increasingly sensitive to their external environment. The awareness of the following range of issues is particularly striking:

- Europe of knowledge: Growing awareness of the important role of the higher education institutions in the emerging European knowledge society, which has led to consensus on the importance of investment in higher education and research in meeting the EU's Lisbon objectives and increasingly provides the framework in which the Bologna Process and the associated Bologna reforms are being considered.
- Internationalisation/globalisation: The participating institutions are generally clarifying their mission and objectives with a view to increasing their participation in an international and global competitive environment.
- Competitive market: The increased competitive environment associated with the emergence of a higher education market.
- Stakeholders: The rising expectations of society that universities and other higher education institutions should balance harmoniously their three core functions – research, teaching, and service to society – and the associated need to work more closely with external stakeholders.
- Funding: The changing relationship to the State through the reform of governing boards and the constraints in public funding, and the associated need for institutions to diversify their funding sources.
- Legal Framework: The still constraining nature of some legal frameworks that can serve as obstacles to developing quality effectively: staff as civil servants, determination of governing and administrative structures at institutions which might not coincide with current developments and actual organisational needs, and cameralistic accountancy in contrast to global and more flexible budgets.
- Management: Problems might derive from certain forms of New Public Management, especially when state authorities impose short-term performance contracts on institutions.

The networks in Round I emphasised the need to create special quality units, this year's project participants seem more sensitive to the advantages and disadvantages of such units. This may be due to greater experience with internal quality structures, which may lead, if they are not staffed properly, to internal bureaucratisation of quality.

There were a large number of common issues which were discussed in both rounds of the project:

- Accountability/autonomy: Recognition of the demands for greater external accountability and greater institutional autonomy.
- Definition of quality: Resistance in coming up with a single definition of quality that could apply to a diverse group of institutions but an acknowledgement that the search for such a definition is important for each institution.
- Institutional quality culture: An understanding of the need to embed quality culture both institutionally and with external stakeholders and to ensure its wide ownership, which implies that the development of a quality culture is based on a top-down and bottom-up approach and that the rectorate must provide leadership rather than management of these issues.

- Quality enhancing structures: A cautionary note about internal quality structures that could become over-bureaucratic and an associated stress on the importance of quality culture.
- Approach to quality culture: An agreement that a formative rather than a punitive approach to quality is more constructive and would lead to improvement while a punitive approach leads to compliance.
- Relationship between external and internal quality culture: An emphasis on using results of internal evaluations to sustain the motivational level of staff and students in engaging in quality issues.
- Students' role in quality culture: An appreciation for the role of students and their involvement in quality and in the governance of institutions.
- External stakeholders' role in quality culture: An emphasis on the role that external stakeholders can play with regard to the development of higher education institutions, which include in Round II the importance of considering the limits to their sphere of influence.

The following report summarises all the discussions that took place in the six networks regarding the definition of quality and quality culture and how to introduce the latter. Discussions focussed on good practices and identified actors, strategies, policies and planning as well as information and communication. Annex 2 contains selections and summaries from the network reports that could be of particular interest to the higher education community.

II. DEFINING QUALITY AND INTRODUCING A QUALITY CULTURE

All networks were asked to define quality and quality culture at the outset of the Project. While the point of departure of the Quality Culture Project is obviously the concept of quality, the EUA Project Guidelines did not prescribe a definition of quality but rather invited the networks to discuss and agree possible definitions of quality based on the list below. The reason for a lack of definition in the guidelines was to promote the notion that such discussions should take place in every institution and to ensure ownership of any definition that is adopted. The Guidelines offered the following list of definitions:

- Quality as fitness for purpose
- Quality as compliance (zero errors)
- Quality as customer satisfaction
- Quality as excellence
- Quality as value for money
- Quality as transformation (process of changing the customer)
- Quality as enhancement (process of changing the institution)
- Quality as control (punitive/rewarding process of quality assurance)

2.1 *Defining Quality*

As in Round I of the Project, none of the six networks could agree explicitly on a shared definition of quality. This difficulty was linked to the heterogeneity within the networks. Each included institutions of different type, mission, size, age and geographic location. Thus, the networks agreed that definitions of quality are culturally sensitive and that quality is in itself a relative concept.

In this respect, the Teaching and Learning Network reported a split between those of its members who viewed quality as monitoring and control, and those who stressed institutional responsibility and developmental aspects, that is, quality as improvement.

More importantly, there were also differences in the extent of their institutional autonomy and the weight of external accountability procedures. The first can constrain quality development while the second can push institutions to promote quality in specific ways that are not necessarily the choice that would have been made otherwise.

However, the challenge of defining quality across such a diverse group of institutions is not an obstacle to defining quality at institutional level. Therefore, the networks agreed that quality can be defined by each institution and that such internal discussions are helpful as a starting point in order to develop an internal quality culture.

In addition, although no common formal definition of quality was reached, all networks could identify some central characteristics of quality as will be detailed in the following sections.

2.1.1 *Quality as Outcome, Output or Process*

Several networks noted the importance of distinguishing outcomes and processes when addressing quality issues. The outcome perspective included examining the results of research or service activities and learning outcomes. By contrast, the process perspective focused on those activities in the institution that lead to the desired outcomes but also on governing and

administrative processes which relate to these key activities and provide the appropriate framework and environment. Part of the aim of the Quality Culture Project is to investigate the relationship between institutional processes and outcomes from a quality perspective in order to achieve the goal of quality enhancement.

In contrast to this interpretation, the Research Management Network associated the processes with (external) evaluation and therefore concluded that the process perspective would be too narrow as a concept. Therefore, the Research Management Network stated that quality as a product (or outcome) approach was more suitable for them because it represents the internal perspective of an institution.

Both the Teaching and Learning and the Partnerships networks emphasised quality as an internal, dynamic process with the objective of constant improvement. Thus, the implementation of quality is an ongoing process that is never completed.

2.1.2 New Emphasis on Students and Stakeholder Perspectives

The above discussion which represents an institutional perspective can be enriched if quality is seen from the perspective of the students and external stakeholders, i.e., those who will ultimately benefit from better outcomes, products and services. This view is advocated by the Student Support Services Network, which largely saw student satisfaction as an important aspect of quality.

In Round I, the networks arrived at similar conclusions but, as noted in the introduction, the stress on external stakeholders was stronger in Round II. One explanation for this might be that the demands of external stakeholders like enterprises and the wider society became clearly articulated over the last years, especially in connection with the Bologna Process and the wider Lisbon Agenda. Structural changes in many countries such as the introduction of the three cycles (leading to Bachelor, Master and Doctoral degrees) and an increased emphasis on accountability have clearly supported this development. External stakeholders have a stronger say in the government of institutions via advisory boards or boards of trustees on which they sit. At the same time institutions reflect more carefully upon the role that external stakeholders should play in the development of their strategic priorities (Programme Evaluations, p.8)

2.1.3 Quality indicators – quality measurement

Adopting a specific definition of quality leads the networks to select different ways of measuring it – either in absolute or in relative terms. Furthermore, the perspective on quality as a product or a process had an impact on the approach towards the measurement of quality.

For instance, the Programme Evaluations Network emphasised that one important aspect of quality is the way in which the institution reaches its goals. The Network defined evaluation as the comparison between the goals that were set and the results that were achieved. Therefore, not only do goals need to be clearly specified but also quality measurements must be defined in relative terms, i.e., in the context of the institutional mission and objectives.

If indicators are used, then – as both the Research Management and the Teaching and Learning networks noted – it is important to find both suitable quantitative and qualitative indicators in order to measure the level of quality in the institution.

In addition, the Partnerships Network cautioned that it is important to maintain a reasonable balance between effort, time and output. Therefore, a quality framework must be efficient and effective and not take time away from the main activities of institutions.

When quality was regarded as a process, the satisfaction of students (e.g., with regard to teacher-student interactions) and stakeholders as one indicator for quality was highlighted.

2.2 Definition and Introduction of Quality Culture

The networks were also asked to discuss how to define and introduce quality. As will be seen below, they focused their attention on the latter rather than the former and considered structural and organisational issues that can nurture a quality culture.

2.2.1 Defining quality culture

As explained in the previous section, the concept of quality was discussed in all networks but participants did not reach an agreement on a common definition. By contrast, the concept of quality culture was discussed to a much lesser extent. Only the Student Support Services Network agreed on a formal definition of quality culture. It defined it as “an organisational climate in which groups of staff work together to realise their specific tasks.” Furthermore, a quality culture has two components: an organisational/structural aspect, which refers to tasks, standards and responsibilities of individuals, units and services; and a psychological aspect, which refers to understanding, flexibility, participation, hopes and emotions. Both components are linked in practical terms by communication and career paths. The term “culture” provides the conceptual frame for these different aspects taking into account organisational as well as psychological and motivational features which refer to individuals.

The other network reports did not discuss quality culture as a concept, perhaps because – as the Programme Evaluations Network mentioned – most network members took the definition of quality culture for granted. It is also important to note that the networks had read the Round I project report where this notion was explained in detail.

2.2.2 Introducing a Quality Culture

The network reports give concrete recommendations or examples of good practices on how to introduce quality culture in an institution. The starting point is seen as a clear definition of quality itself and setting the goal of achieving it (e.g., Teaching and Learning, Programme Evaluations).

Like in Round I, the networks agreed that when implementing quality culture, it is important to find a balance between a top-down and a bottom-up approach. Each has different functions and the result should be a bottom-up system with framework guidelines provided by the leadership:

- Leadership is needed to initiate the process, by explaining why internal quality processes have become so essential and defining the framework for these processes.
- These processes are then carried out by the whole institution, including students, academics and administrative staff in order to generate active participation. This will help the members of the institution to identify with quality culture (ownership by empowerment) (Teaching and Learning, Student Support Services).

As the networks emphasised, the bottom-up approach must be given its proper weight and this rests on a distinction between leadership and management (cf. chapter 3.1).

When introducing quality processes and tools, institutions can learn from the experience of others in order to avoid mistakes. However, it is important that any system chosen is modified and adapted to meet the specific needs of each institution (Partnerships).

As in Round I, the networks stressed that in order to evaluate and improve the implementation of quality culture, it is essential to use the results of the monitoring processes. This includes on-going feedback mechanisms and occasional readjustments of institutional goals.

While the attainment (or non-attainment) of goals should have consequences, nevertheless it is important that the outcome of feedback processes are not used in a punitive, sanctioning fashion but as a support to further develop quality (Teaching and Learning, Programme Evaluations). Networks agreed with the results of Round I of the Project and emphasised that a controlling quality culture is incongruent with academic values.

2.2.3 Embedding a Quality Culture

Quality culture is a delicate concept that needs considerable care to grow and to flourish. The networks identified and discussed factors that are beneficial to the development and embedding of quality culture. These factors include the structures and the processes/procedures of quality culture.

On a strategic level, developing a quality culture should be strongly linked to the institutional mission. The institution has to find ways to promote its mission via its structures and procedures. To do so, the organisational structures and procedures should provide incentives to its members for behaviour that conforms to institutional mission and goals (Teaching and Learning, p.8).

2.2.3.1 Structure

Higher education institutions can support a quality culture by providing appropriate structural features within their organisation, which facilitate and maintain the quality commitment of the members of the organisation. In this context, the Programme Evaluations Network stressed the need for durable and stable structures in order to assure quality. At the same time, there might be different institutional solutions for addressing quality issues in a most appropriate way and in a specific institutional environment. This might include small voluntary networks as well as highly sophisticated administrative units. The Network stressed that the creation of new units and groups might not always be the solution but a quality culture could and should be promoted within existing organisational structures (Programme Evaluations, p.7).

Along a similar line, several reports discussed the question of whether an institution should create special units to deal with quality issues or whether existing functional units should be responsible for quality. In general, the results tended more towards the option of embedding quality assurance mechanisms in existing structures rather than creating a separate quality unit.

The advantage of a specialised quality assurance unit – which in fact exists in several institutions – lies in co-ordinating effectively quality-related issues within the institution, measuring and monitoring quality and providing professional expertise (Research Management, p.4; Student Support Services, p.12).

There are, however, potential disadvantages in creating a central quality unit. The main danger of such units is that they could hinder rather than foster the development of a quality culture because institutional members will not see quality as their individual responsibility and delegate it to the separate unit (Research Management, p.4; Student Support Services, p.12) thus preventing a wider ownership for quality. Since the hallmark of a vigorous quality culture is a shared ownership by all, quality cannot and should not be confined to a unit.

Therefore, a solution might be to embed quality assurance mechanisms within functional units, which would work closely together with the central leadership in quality assurance matters (Research Management, p.4).

In order to foster quality culture effectively, an information and communications system was identified as an important factor. Information about quality monitoring results is an essential part of the institutional identity and will generate confidence and credibility in the organisation (Teaching and Learning, p.9). When talking about an information and communications system, it is crucial, however, to distinguish between information (which relates to facts) and communication (which relates to ideas and exchange). To foster quality both reliable information and exchange of ideas should be attended to in an integrated fashion within the institution (Teaching and Learning, p.9).

2.2.3.2 Processes and Procedures

Similarly, processes and procedures have to be linked to the institutional mission. Therefore it is important that the institutional leadership formulates and publicises priorities and guidelines and includes them in the institutional overall policy plan as, e.g., the Partnership Network noted with regard to their topic (Partnerships, p.10).

The network reports discussed evaluation as a key procedure to enhance quality. They emphasised that self-evaluation is a fundamental step in order to embed quality culture and that evaluations should assess performance against agreed goals and objectives (Partnerships, p.12).

The Teaching and Learning Network identified three conditions to ensure that evaluation procedures support and enhance quality culture (Teaching and Learning, p.9):

- Integrate evaluations into a broader process of quality management and development. This is very important in order to avoid reducing evaluations to mere bureaucratic procedures aimed at compiling reports and numbers.
- Design evaluations in such a way that discourages mere compliance to evaluation criteria and indicators but rather encourages adherence to the spirit of quality that grounds the indicators. Compliance to indicators will be detrimental to quality in the long run.
- Implement follow-up procedures and consequences linked to the outcomes of the evaluation. If there are no consequences to the evaluations – which usually require an effort by all individuals involved – staff and students will lose interest for these procedures and will not support them.

The Partnerships Network added integration of different perspectives to these conditions, i.e., of different actors such as institutional leadership, academic and administrative staff, and students in the evaluation (Partnerships, p.12).

Furthermore, the creation of feedback systems should be encouraged by the institutions. This is all the more necessary since the existence of feedback loops is not self-evident in higher education institutions (Teaching and Learning, p.15). Feedback loops are especially useful as they add a developmental perspective to evaluations which would otherwise focus on assessment only.

Two networks stressed the need for communicating the results of evaluations across the institution (Teaching and Learning, p.9; Partnerships, p.13). This is important in order to generate confidence and credibility in the procedure and to establish an institutional identity (Teaching and Learning, p.9).

Finally, as one network noted, the institution has the choice of whether it wants to see internal quality as a means of promoting competition or as a prerequisite for continuous institutional development (Programme Evaluations, p.13). This point, however, raises the question of whether this is indeed a strict dichotomy or if comparison and a certain degree of competition might also help in fostering institutional development.

2.2.3.3 Costs of Quality

The Student Support Services Network discussed the costs associated with introducing and maintaining quality culture. To be effective in improving quality, a commitment to quality culture requires a continuous investment in financial and human resources (Student Support Services, p.16). The network noted that while a high level of quality cannot be achieved with minimum money, the costs associated with not investing in quality must also be recognised. In the long run the neglect of appropriate funding for quality measures would lead to shortcomings regarding the fulfilment of the institutional mission as well as a disadvantaged position as compared to competitors. Therefore investment in quality is seen as being indispensable for higher education institutions.

III. GOOD PRACTICES

3.1 Senior Leadership

The institutional leadership has a central function in the implementation and operation of quality culture. All networks discussed the role of the senior leadership. Altogether, four different functions were addressed: setting the overall institutional strategy, promoting and communicating quality culture, developing staff relations and monitoring quality.

3.1.1 Strategy

The senior leadership is in charge of the strategic direction of the institution. Therefore it should set guidelines and clear priorities to guide the activities of staff after these have been discussed widely in the institution (Partnerships, p.11). Leadership must also clarify roles and responsibilities within the institution (Student Support Services, p.10) and initiate close co-operation between authorities on different levels (Research Management, p.5).

3.1.2 Promotion and Communication

After setting the basic strategy, the leadership's task is to promote and communicate this strategy to internal and external stakeholders. It was asserted in nearly all network reports that leadership involves promoting the vision and the idea of a quality culture and raising the awareness of staff members in this regard (Research Management, p.5; Implementing Bologna Reforms, p.22; Teaching and Learning, p.10; Programme Evaluations, p.7).

Furthermore the institutional leadership has to communicate quality goals and related decisions to staff, students and stakeholders (Research Management, p.5; Student Support Services, p.10). However, this is not merely communicating facts, but rather communicating the values of quality-related activities and thus giving meaning to the information (Student Support Services, p.11).

3.1.3 Relationship between Leadership and Staff

A central issue in promoting quality culture is the relationship between leadership and academic and administrative staff. The leadership needs to create conditions that are beneficial to quality culture and in which the staff can perform to the best of their abilities in a way that is congruent with the values of the organisation (Student Support Services, p.10). This involves good communication, motivation and providing possibilities for staff development (Student Support Services, p.10; Teaching and Learning, p.10), but also reducing the administrative workload for academic staff in order to free resources for developing new ideas (Teaching and Learning, p.14).

An open climate conducive for quality culture requires several elements:

- A positive “can do” approach to problem solving rather than a punitive or merely responsive one (Student Support Services, p.11).
- A balanced mix of top-down and bottom-up elements, which is proposed by many network reports (Teaching and Learning, p.10; Partnerships, p.13; Programme Evaluations, p.8).
- Self-empowerment of staff (Teaching and Learning, p.14): This approach relies on staff developing and improving their activities with the input and support of co-ordinating units.

Positive results in promoting quality culture, however, are not only achieved by a mere co-ordinating function of leadership. Some network reports also recommend that institutional leaders are directly involved in central back-up and support services for quality culture, like relevant

commissions or units, in order to generate wide acceptance for quality (Research Management, p.5; Teaching and Learning, p.10; Programme Evaluations, p.8).

Finally a leadership style conducive to quality culture requires the integration of all relevant members of the institution in the decision-making process including staff and students (Research Management, p.5; Student Support Services, p.11; Teaching and Learning, p.10). This will promote ownership and will contribute to mobilise quality champions.

3.1.4 Quality Monitoring

The fourth central role of an institution's senior leadership is the monitoring of quality. In this respect it is important to integrate quality monitoring in the decision-making process of the institution (Implementing Bologna Reforms, p.22). Furthermore the leadership has to be careful that monitoring has a clearly supportive and developmental role and is not considered as controlling by staff members (Research Management, p.5; Teaching and Learning, p.10).

3.2 Strategy, Policy and Planning

Careful strategic planning is required in order to embed effectively a quality culture. This process should begin with an institutional analysis as a basis for further planning (Implementing Bologna Reforms, p.22; Programme Evaluations, p.8). Clarity about the institutional mission is a prerequisite for strategic planning in order to avoid dealing with contradictory aims. In the strategic planning phase, it is crucial for institutions to set clear priorities because it is not possible to achieve all goals at the same time (Teaching and Learning, p.10; Partnerships, p.10). In this respect it is crucial that all strategic and implementation plans include binding schedules for the different stages of the process (Programme Evaluations, p.11).

As mentioned above, quality should play an important role in the strategic planning of a higher education institution and be embedded in the institutional mission, on a central or on a decentralised level (Teaching and Learning, p.10). As one network report noted, however, developing and implementing one common strategy can be a big challenge for higher education institutions that have a long tradition of decentralisation (Teaching and Learning, p.14). Therefore, the development and implementation of a common strategy will only work if there is a common vision among members of the institution or at least a sufficient degree of identification with overarching institutional aims. It is obvious that concrete institutional settings, size, historical legacy and current legal frameworks play an important role in this respect. Small institutions of easily manageable size sometimes find it easier to create a common identity for their members.

Almost all networks discussed the importance of including staff members, students and external stakeholders in the planning process of the institution. Through their active participation the institution can enhance its strengths in a competitive environment.

With regards the external stakeholders, it is important that the links established with them are in line with the institutional mission and thought through strategically. Such a strategy will be based on the assessment of the social and economic needs at local, regional, national or international level and on a realistic appraisal of each institution's strengths and weaknesses. The challenges for institutions are to reconcile their need for long-term strategies with the sometimes short-term goals of some external stakeholders and to respond to a relatively fast changing social context while developing a strong institutional research and education capacity that requires a longer time frame. As one network pointed out, the institutions must ensure that the planning process is not dominated by external stakeholders (Programme Evaluations, p.8). In the end, the institution itself needs to be responsible for its strategy.

Specific institutional initiatives are needed to facilitate the link with external stakeholders: internal and external communication strategies; specific structures (e.g., external relations office) which help foster exchange between the external stakeholders and the institution; analysis and management of stakeholders' expectations and values. In this context, there is a need to evaluate

stakeholder partnerships and their benefits to institutional missions. Institutional core values should be preserved, yet be responsive to the environment.

The reports point out the difficulties in institutional planning and decision making because these internal processes are influenced and often limited by external and internal factors such as policy frameworks, financial restrictions or conflicting pressures and demands (Programme Evaluations, p.11; Teaching and Learning, p.10). In order to deal more easily with a fast changing environment – especially as funding for higher education is increasingly scarce – one network recommended establishing long-term funding contracts with the state, which would lengthen the planning horizon of the institution and ensure sustainability of activities (Research Management, p.6). In a fast changing environment, however, the institution must carefully consider the advantages and disadvantages of such contracts which might inhibit future development.

3.3 Data, Information and Analysis

The issues of collecting data and providing information is considered as important by the network reports – one that they find challenging as well.

Information based on solid data collection should provide the basis for strategic decisions and planning processes (Teaching and Learning, p.11). Therefore it is essential to have a reliable system and infrastructure to collect, analyse and process data in order to distribute information within the institution. Reliable tools for dealing with data are, however, of little help as long as the purpose and scope of data collection is not carefully defined.

In terms of quality, the first step is to find reliable quantitative and qualitative indicators for measuring quality in the institution (Research Management, p.7; Student Support Services, p.15; Partnerships, p.12). When thinking of specific indicators and information, however, it should be kept in mind that they do not always represent absolute measures. Their interpretation and weight might be different according to the institutional mission or the social context (Student Support Services, p.15; Programme Evaluations, p.9) but also in relation to subjects and knowledge areas. For instance, one network noted that student success rates can be interpreted differently depending on the institution's catchment area. At the same time it is obvious that indicators like third-party funds play a more important role in defining indicators for specific disciplines.

In addition, it is good to keep in mind that information on quality might not be used only within the institution. External stakeholders have a growing interest in assessing institutional performance and comparing it with other institutions. Thus, quality is of growing importance for external benchmarking (Student Support Services, p.16; Teaching and Learning, p.11) as is the (international) comparability of indicators for the comparison of institutions (Student Support Services, p.16; Implementing Bologna Reforms, p.22).

Once data points are collected, it is essential to have an appropriate infrastructure in place in order to analyse the data and to disseminate information as necessary (Research Management, p.7; Teaching and Learning, p.11). Effective communication should rely on multiple communication channels and ensures feedback loops (Teaching and Learning, p.11).

All network reports noted, however, several challenges with regards to information and communication flows. These challenges include:

- Providing too little or too much information (Teaching and Learning, p.11; Programme Evaluations, p.8).
- Neglecting important information.
- Failing to deliver targeted information (i.e., the right information delivered to the right place (Research Management, p.7; Student Support Services, p.9; Teaching and Learning, p.11).

These issues might lead to motivational problems especially because collecting information takes an effort which is wasted if the information is not used properly (Programme Evaluations, p.8).

To overcome these challenges, the network reports made a range of recommendations:

- Data collection should be more focused on those indicators that are clearly related to the goals of the institution in order to reduce the collection of unnecessary data (Programme Evaluations, p.9).
- Designing integrated data management systems, which combine all the databases available in the institution and linking them in a central place to improve the availability and accessibility of information (Student Support Services, p.9; Teaching and Learning, p.11; Partnerships, p.11).

3.4 Staff

As already highlighted in 3.1.3, issues linked to staff are considered as an important factor to improve the quality of an institution:

The need to design staff development schemes was most prominently mentioned by nearly all networks. One report even suggested that these measures are included in the mission statement or at least, on an operational basis, in staff contracts in order to give staff a greater sense of security (Programme Evaluations, p.9).

The reports noted the endemic low participation in staff development schemes, particularly of academic staff. This is mostly due to lack of time or resistance to staff development. Therefore, the benefits of training and professional development have to be clearly communicated and staff development measures have to be tailored to individual as well as institutional needs. In addition, institutions could consider if incentives of a financial or non-financial nature should be offered to promote staff development activities (Teaching and Learning, p.12; Programme Evaluations, p.9).

Staff development schemes must include training and other measures to strengthen accountability and quality awareness and to increase the motivation of staff (Research Management, p.8; Implementing Bologna Reforms, p.23).

Networks noted difficulties with human resource policies and employment procedures and could not come to an agreement on these issues. While one network suggested redefining recruitment criteria in order to provide more incentives to hire academic staff interested in teaching (Teaching and Learning, p.12), another network noted that none of the participating institutions saw a need in changing recruitment procedures, even though it is known that these procedures are highly formalised (Research Management, p.7). This is particularly difficult in countries where academic staff members are civil servants and the state has a strong say in their appointment. It is important to note, however, that institutional autonomy with regard to employment and selection issues is limited in some countries. Institutions should carefully investigate the scope of their autonomy and make use of any opportunity available to develop their own initiatives. Also, in countries with highly formalised employment structures, higher education institutions should develop a human resource strategy and make an effort to become attractive employers.

3.5 Students

Students were considered by all networks as a very important group to engage in quality processes. The reports note that students' involvement in teaching evaluations and representation in governing bodies is usually in place. One network mentioned the need to concentrate on increasing the involvement of non-standard students (Teaching and Learning, p.13). However, as two networks discussed in detail, actual student participation is usually relatively low and institutions experience difficulties in increasing student participation (Student Support Services, p.13; Programme Evaluations, p.9). There is a need to identify reasons for this and develop solutions which will enable students to participate. However, the recent trends towards seeing students as (paying) customers or consumers might worsen the problem, as students may derive the impression that quality can be bought rather than acquired by work

(Programme Evaluations, p.10). A possible solution might be to give students real influence, starting in areas where their solutions can be usefully implemented.

3.6 Other Members of the Institution

In general, members of the institution should be involved in the quality process by encouraging intra-institutional debates. This can be initiated by establishing focus groups on specific issues that include all relevant staff, students and administrators (Teaching and Learning, p.13). Evaluation is an exercise in which this broad involvement can be beneficial to the institution in including different viewpoints (Partnerships, p.12).

IV. CONCLUSION

As can be seen from this report, much has been learned from the project. Building on Round I, the Round II participants validated the finding that quality is difficult to define across so many different institutional types and countries but can and should be defined at institutional level.

They also stressed that in order to successfully embed quality internally, it is best to combine a top-down and bottom-up approach in order to empower the whole academic community and engage it in the process. This implies clarity of roles in respect to the leadership at institutional, faculty and departmental levels as well as identifying the role and contribution of students and academic and administrative staff. External stakeholders are also included in these considerations because they bring an added perspective that can be beneficial to institutional development.

The networks agreed that the notion of quality culture was important as a signal that internal quality processes should involve all these key actors. They stressed the need for attitudinal and behavioural changes and expressed caution that internal quality should not turn into bureaucratic processes which would undermine the goal of improving quality rather than simply controlling it.

All networks noted that it is important to follow up on results of internal quality monitoring in order to keep up the level of commitment to these processes. It is best, however, to stir away from a punitive approach to quality and to focus instead on developing incentives and staff development schemes in order to support the development of a functional quality culture.

Similarly, there was agreement across the networks that some processes and structures are necessary to embed quality. These include:

- Clarity in the institutional mission statement and inclusion of quality culture as an important objective.
- Establishing quality units with an understanding of the risk that such units entail in delegating quality to a few staff members rather than sharing it broadly across the institution.
- Collecting and analysing institutional data in order to effectively monitor the institution.
- Integrating databases available into one information system.
- Ensuring internal and external information in respect to quality procedures, their results and the ensuing follow up.
- Containing costs of quality procedures and being aware of the cost/benefits associated with an over-bureaucratisation of internal quality cultures.

Annex 2 raises specific issues in relation to the network themes and complements the generic discussion that forms the body of this report.

ANNEX 1: PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS

Theme 1: Research Management and Managing Academic Staff Career

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Theme 2: Student Support Services

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Theme 3: Implementing Bologna Reforms

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University of Ghent Assoc. (4 HEIs), Belgium
University of Paderborn, Germany
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Medical University of Gdańsk, Poland
National School of Political Studies and Business Administration, Romania
Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia
University of Bristol, UK

* Non-Socrates funded participation

Theme 5: Partnerships

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Theme 6: Programme Evaluations

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Pädagogische Akademie der Diözese Linz, Austria

University of Srpsko Sarajevo, Bosnia * (did not participate)

University of Léon, Spain

College of Nyíregyháza, Hungary

Hogeschool van Arnhem en Nijmegen, Netherlands

Poznan University of Economics, Poland

Ovidius University of Constantza, Romania

* Non-Socrates funded participation

ANNEX 2: THEMATIC GOOD PRACTICES

While the main body of the report addressed generic issues related to quality, this annex provides summaries based on the network reports. The purpose of these summaries is to highlight specific issues and good practices related to the network themes. Readers are encouraged to consult the project report from Round I that includes annexes on the following themes:

- Research Management
- Teaching and Learning
- Student Support Services
- Implementing Bologna Reforms
- Collaborative Arrangements
- Communication Flows and Decision Making

Four of the themes were repeated in Round II: network partners used these reports as a basis for their work to bring the topic forward.

1 Research Management and Managing Academic Staff Career

With service to society, universities have two major missions: teaching and research. The discussions within the Network revealed that the majority of institutions have difficulties in achieving balance between the three, and that the equilibrium between teaching and research is particularly challenging. As opposed to the Teaching and Learning Network which noted the predominance of research over teaching, the Research Network observed that teaching prevailed over research.

The following objectives were identified in order to redress this balance:

- Introducing a system of incentives for researchers, particularly young researchers.
- Developing human resources policy for academic staff and ensuring their development through the obligation to earn the highest scientific degree within a specific period of time.
- Establishing a well-functioning evaluation system, accompanied by clear and transparent reward incentives that can increase academic staff's motivation for research. Hence, an important step for developing quality culture in this area includes the creation of a coherent evaluation system, with a number of quality indicators.
- Ensuring access to research outcomes through improved communication across different university faculties and entities.
- Promoting multidisciplinary in research through increasing the number of joint (multidisciplinary) research projects and including multidisciplinary as a criterion for receiving research funds.

The Research Network identified several obstacles to achieve these objectives. These included:

- In terms of funding:
 - Lack of sustainable and sufficient research funds: All partner institutions pointed to the problem of insufficient funding - whether these were large universities with well developed research activities or younger and smaller ones.
 - Limited support of PhD candidates and no university research budget for new high-potential staff, which leads prospective research candidates to choose a business career instead of research.
 - A weak motivational system that lacks financial incentives.
- In terms of structure:
 - Lack of co-operation between different university entities and researchers, resulting in difficult access to research outcomes of departments and other types of units.
 - Communication problems between researchers across different generations or not very well developed information channels supporting research teams and projects.
 - Insufficient multi- and inter-disciplinary research conducted within the institution (also due to the fact that the national funding regulation often makes it impossible to apply for these kinds of projects).
 - Lack of or weak links with industry that lead to insufficient industry-oriented applied research.
- In terms of quality processes:
 - Lack of quality assurance for research management and well established procedures of research assessment that measure outputs.
 - Time-consuming and often time-inefficient quality monitoring mechanisms.

To remedy some of these problems, the Network suggested the following possible solutions:

- Diversifying funding sources through:
 - Increased participation in international research projects (including applying for EU funds in co-operation with foreign partners). This can be facilitated through several initiatives: developing or strengthening information and support for researchers wishing to apply for external funding sources, i.e., through a series of information events with European institutional representatives and with researchers who have been successful in applying for EU grants; strengthening language education for researchers.
 - Identifying external partners to provide financial support for PhD students.
- Promoting the institution through:
 - A research newsletter that disseminates summaries of research results within and outside the academic community.
 - Promoting a positive image of the institution by clarifying its profile and setting its priorities.
- Promoting innovative research by:
 - Raising interest for a career in research among young students, i.e., by offering lectures in an easily understandable way to teenagers and young students.
 - Improving university career paths in order to encourage young researchers to stay in academia and creating a positive and motivating atmosphere for them.
 - Introducing an institutional funding policy that gives priority to multidisciplinary research projects.
 - Stimulating competition between academics from different universities in order to increase their research activity.
 - Promoting interdisciplinary research. Although such a goal seems relatively easy to reach, in some cases national funding regulations make it impossible to apply for grants for interfaculty research projects because funding allocation and accounting are made at the level of a single faculty.

2 Student Support Services

Academic Support

The cycle of academic support starts with the process of enquiry through to application, matriculation, induction, on-programme and graduation. The management of academic support is as essential as the support itself, in order to ensure a consistent and holistic student experience.

All institutions expressed a desire to attract more students and a number identified that these students would be increasingly drawn to research, postgraduate and lifelong learning programmes and increasingly originate from other countries or backgrounds traditionally not associated with higher education study. Consequently, as student numbers grow and the intake mix becomes more diverse, it is critical that the institution manages the student experience.

How this would be achieved differed and perhaps revealed differing institutional pressures, i.e., the focus of institutions to attract:

- more students;
- students that better fit the institutional profile;
- more students to programmes in which they were likely to succeed.

In all cases, the provision of accurate pre-entry information was seen as critical not only in attracting students but also in managing their expectations.

Once admitted, improving student success was seen as essential and the key driver identified by institutions was improving students' employability and preparation for professional careers, although specific measures of employability were not noted.

Social Integration

Social integration comes about through strategies that enhance student commitment to the institution and help them to form strong social networks. An institution that conducted a Student Satisfaction Survey mentioned that the importance of social integration was evident in the results, which highlighted the value that students placed on relationships with both fellow students and staff. Other suggestions included:

- Enhancing the web-based information; however, this is achieved at the cost of human contact, and therefore ways to improve this must be sought.
- Developing more room for common non-curricula activities.
- Developing mentoring schemes for new students by more senior students as a way of orientation.
- Providing appropriate conditions to improve social integration of students with different needs (e.g., students that are parents) or students with different disabilities.

Academic and Regulatory Structures

A clear thread through all of the institutional plans was the need for clarity in the roles and functions of all services and departments. Activities implemented by network institutions included:

- To establish focus groups and questionnaires to seek views from its students. These vividly captured the bewilderment of a student who may recognise that there are differences in functioning between different support units, but cannot understand the differences and nuances between each unit's individual function.

- To transform the structures and processes by prioritising students' needs over institutional custom and practice.

Data Quality Management

All institutions had data management systems. One used web-based systems as its primary student support input. This was viewed as a strength, although it was recognised that the consequent reduction in human student contact with students was viewed negatively by some students.

The challenge for all institutions was two-fold:

- Systems were generally not integrated into a single database which meant that students and staff had to source and search a number of diverse areas to seek information and that the information on some occasions was contradictory or unclear.
- There was diversity in what data should be collected and for what purpose. These ranged through providing information for the diploma supplement through tracking engagement with learning and gathering demographic and other data to know students better and therefore more effectively respond to their needs.

3 Implementing Bologna Reforms

Building on Round I of the Quality Culture Project which included this theme, the Network agreed on the overarching importance of the Bologna reforms for European higher education institutions. The Bologna Process places new and challenging demands on institutions and at the same time provides significant opportunities for reforming institutions and study programmes.

Political Framework

When discussing the implementation of Bologna reforms, it is necessary to distinguish between the political level and the institutional level: the latter must implement European policy developments and deal with their implications in the institution.

Policy developments at European level provide a broad framework for the implementation of reforms in each country participating in the Bologna Process and in each institution. Elements of the European policy framework, which figure now in the European Qualifications Framework, are the three cycle structure, ECTS credits and descriptors linked to learning outcomes. How these elements are adopted differ to some extent from country to country (e.g., concerning the degree structure: some countries are implementing a 3 + 2 structure while others are putting in place a 4 + 1 structure).

Participants noted information gaps and observed that these constitute striking issues in the current implementation phase of the Bologna reforms. The Bologna Process is often misperceived as an official EU policy and institutional staff is not aware of the way policy agreements are reached at European level. This information gap is matched at the institutional level by a similar gap between those implementing and those planning the adaptation of the reform (i.e., between academic and administrative staff on one hand and institutional leadership on the other). While the Network focused its discussion on the implementation of the Bologna reforms in individual institutions, the lack of information with regard to policy developments was seen as an issue that has to be addressed in the future in order to ensure success of the implementation.

The Berlin Communiqué stressed that the major responsibility for quality lies with the higher education institutions. Given, however, that external quality assurance agencies exist in most higher education systems, the question raised by the Network was: in what ways do these agencies influence the development of a quality culture within the institution? Institutions must acknowledge the existence of such agencies and familiarise themselves with the demands that these place upon them.

The way in which a quality culture could become reality when implementing the Bologna reforms was discussed by network members in relation to some of the action lines that have been identified in the Bologna, Prague and Berlin Communiqués, that resulted from each bi-annual ministerial meetings.

Content and Quality of Programmes

The Bologna reforms provide an ideal opportunity to reconsider not only the structure of higher education but also the content and the quality of the programmes. The shift in paradigm, i.e., from a knowledge based and teacher oriented approach to a competence oriented and learner oriented approach can serve as points of departure when looking at reforming programmes. The most important question is no longer “what does a student know?” but instead “what can a student do with the acquired competences (i.e., knowledge, insight, skills, and attitudes)?” A real transparency with regard to degrees can be reached by comparing learning outcomes and not by comparing content that can remain different from one institution to another.

In the entire reform process, the participation of the teaching staff is of extreme importance: describing competences and translating them into programmes can only be done by staff members themselves. Another crucial point in this paradigm shift is the important question of assessing competences in a proper way. This is certainly the case as far as generic competences are concerned. This topic has to be kept in mind permanently in the construction of new curricula, i.e., with regard to new teaching formats but also the way in which general competences such as critical thinking, the ability to work independently or in a team, etc., are assessed.

ECTS as a Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

ECTS as a credit system is a central part in the construction of curricula in higher education, especially within a competence oriented approach. The number of hours a typical student needs to successfully finish a course or module and, as a consequence, how many credits she/he has earned can be calculated easily. In respect to lifelong learning, this is an important step in the shift from a mere credit transfer system to a system of credit accumulation. The Network supported the notion that students themselves are responsible for their programme and for their progress, and can accumulate credits in formal, non-formal and informal settings. These different learning experiences should be acknowledged by institutions when students seek to obtain a degree.

Mobility

The internationalisation of teaching and learning goes hand in hand with the implementation of the Bologna reforms. Internationalisation can take various forms: mobility, developing a European dimension in restructuring courses and shaping curricula, preparing students and staff for European teaching and learning experiences and careers through language teaching. Foreign languages are also important in strengthening the ability of institutions to attract international academic staff and students.

Frequency and forms of student mobility have changed over the past years. When introducing the first cycle, some institutions note a decline in mobility during the first years of study. This might sometimes be linked to the problem of overloaded curricula and uncertainties concerning recognition of phases of study. While formal recognition remains important, institutions should not cease to co-operate on the basis of trust. International interest of students has to be nurtured: information concerning opportunities to study in other European countries should be made available.

At the same time it is important to note that students from different regions and social backgrounds might not have the same opportunity to participate in this free movement of learners. This is related to language issues, lack of information and also to a potential lack of sufficient funding. Institutions should support students in their attempt to participate in this process and inform them about funding sources.

Some of the issues raised with regards to student mobility, such as the need for information and proper funding, also apply to staff mobility. Staff mobility can take various forms: individual initiatives, departmental or institutional co-operation, exchange schemes, etc. Outgoing academics might be seen as creating problems at their own institution because they are not available and therefore cannot fulfil their various duties. In the long run, however, institutions are likely to profit from such processes as much as the individuals concerned. At the same time, it is in the interest of each institution to attract academics from other countries and learn from their experience. This does not only apply to exchanges related to research: students benefit from being taught by academic teachers from different countries and backgrounds.

Mobility was mainly discussed by the Network with regard to geographical mobility. The Bologna Process, however, also poses questions with regard to mobility within the higher education system. There should not be any “dead ends” in the system, i.e., it is important to integrate the cycles in a framework of lifelong learning and to allow for flexible learning paths.

Employability

The issue of employability has gained importance. As the exchange in the Network made clear, in certain countries the world of learning and the world of work are well connected while in others much remains to be done.

Employers are important stakeholders in the Bologna Process. The value of new and unknown degrees has to be communicated to them. If this is not done properly, the graduates have to cope with the risks related to lack of comprehension regarding the new degrees within a context of a changing labour market.

The Changing Role of the Student

As mentioned above, a result of the new learner centred approach is that the student is placed at the heart of the teaching and learning process. In addition, institutions increasingly acknowledge the important role that students can play in institutional decision making and quality assurance. However, much remains to be done in this respect. The Network suggested the further distribution of good practices of student involvement in quality assurance.

Bologna and the Widening of Access to Higher Education

The widening access to higher education leads to new requirements concerning selection of students, educational methods and ways of transmitting knowledge. Widening access does not automatically mean less quality nor does selection equal quality.

It is still the case that the process of teaching and learning, pedagogical methods and didactic approaches do not receive sufficient attention at some institutions. Traditionally, higher education concentrated to a large extent on academic content. Widening access and pressure on employability require new methods to develop high quality education and training. The reorientation of higher education towards competencies may support positive change regarding the quality of the educational process.

The Long-Term Impact of the Bologna Process on Institutions

In addition to aspects of the Bologna Process that are the current concerns for institutions, the more far-reaching impact of the Bologna Process on higher education institutions were discussed by the Network. Do the Bologna reforms stand for a complete change in the philosophy of higher education? Do they lead to the replacement of the Humboldtian university by a post-modern, globalised higher education?

Some academics see a link between the Bologna reforms and the introduction of new public management, e.g., with regard to the changing role of professors (more service and management requirements), new governing structures and the impact of the market on higher education. State funding is decreasing and some institutions are increasingly under pressure to offer education and training in accordance with the demands of the market. This might have positive as well as negative effects in terms of the quality of their provision. A socially wider participation in higher education and an emphasis on graduates' employability are generally seen as positive. However, short-sighted decisions as a result of market dependency could harm institutions.

Therefore, despite the acknowledgement that this reform offers opportunities, there are also more ambiguous expectations with regard to the effects that the Bologna Process could have on higher education. If they are not addressed properly, these feelings might slow down the implementation of the reform and the development of a quality culture.

4 Teaching and Learning

In addition to the good principles and best practices offered by this network and referenced in the main report, the following section focuses on additional good practices which can be especially relevant for improving quality of teaching and learning.

Role of Leadership

In most institutions, quality is entrusted to specialised units varying in number, hierarchical level or purpose (co-ordination, counselling, evaluations, etc.). In connection with the Network's understanding of the quality culture concept, these units are most useful if they serve in a supportive and advisory capacity rather than as controlling bodies. By appointing senior university staff as unit leaders or process owners, the institutions try to foster the various quality initiatives and ensure a high degree of acceptance and co-operation.

Exemplary actions in this regard include:

- The appointment of associate deans for teaching and learning in each faculty.
- Establishing high level teaching and learning committees.
- Creating posts of vice-deans responsible for e-learning implementations in each faculty, etc.

Strategy, Policy and Planning

Strategic issues play a key role in fostering quality. The Network identified a definite need for strong central policies which provide basic structures and guidance. In this context it is essential to embed quality issues (especially in relation to teaching and learning) in the academic mission and formulate coherent strategies. The embedding of these strategies can then be handled in a more decentralised way.

Due to environmental circumstances, however, many strategies have to be mapped out reactively instead of proactively. Such external factors include:

- The implications of the Bologna Process
- The expansion of the EU and the internationalisation of "academic markets"
- The labour-market conditions for graduates
- Law regulations and state funding
- Demographic changes and student/teacher mobility (e.g., migration)
- Changes in the needs and expectations of society (e.g., the increased interest in lifelong learning)
- Technical developments related to teaching and learning (e.g., e-learning, distance learning, etc.).

On a strategic level, it will be essential to find ways of restoring an appropriate equilibrium between **teaching and research** by acknowledging and rewarding teaching activities and considering them as important in tenure decisions and academic career development. It is all the more difficult if the reputation of a university rests mainly on its research rather than its teaching activities, as can be seen in most rankings. Most universities have less experience with the evaluation of teaching than research - a field with well established indicators.

In order to cope with such problems, the Network came up with a variety of strategies, including:

- Career-oriented strategies: academic staff members are usually expected to be equally competent in teaching and research. Possible strategies include: promoting the differentiation of career stages (e.g., concentrating earlier on research and later on teaching) or of career paths (e.g., focus on either research or teaching). Accordingly, promotion procedures should provide reward options for both paths, possibly even linking them to different teaching profiles.
- Co-operative strategies, e.g., team teaching: inexperienced and more experienced teachers could learn from one another, depending on the framing of their partnership.
- Synergy-oriented strategies: research-based teaching may take many forms; nevertheless, the academic staff should be encouraged to link their research efforts with their teaching assignments more strongly.

Staff

The Network agreed that the development of a quality culture is highly dependent upon staff motivation, good qualifications and communication. It is not, however, always the staff's dedication that seems to be a major obstacle; in many cases the quality aspirations are hampered by external circumstances and well-entrenched attitudes, e.g.:

- Insufficient resources for support services and staff development.
- "No time to be supported": the heavy workload of most academic staff makes more elaborate support strategies unappealing.
- Low importance and value given to teaching activities in tenure decisions.
- Negative perception of evaluation as a control mechanism rather than a tool for identifying strengths and weaknesses.
- Reluctance to change didactic approaches, especially among the more experienced teachers, etc.

The action plans clearly opt for the extension of internal training and support programmes, especially in the area of teaching (and learning). However, many support programmes are often seen as "nothing but extra work" – if professional development efforts are not recognised within reward and promotion structures, they will most certainly be subordinated to other areas of activities.

All participants have developed staff development programmes but with diverse characteristics and different focal points. Good practices include:

- Team teaching initiatives that benefit both parties.
- Reorganisation of reward systems, appreciation and strengthening of teaching activities and rewarding excellent performances in this area.
- Establishing Centres for Teaching and Learning to support teachers and students alike.
- Introducing support programmes for teachers, including training in the fields of pedagogy, teaching/learning psychology, time management, group dynamics, etc.

Improving teaching quality is closely connected to the importance of rewarding the staff's commitment. If research efforts are the only ones that count in the long run and if teaching activities are completely irrelevant for a career, it will be impossible to achieve far-reaching improvements in matters of teaching quality. Hence, a stronger emphasis on teaching should start during the recruitment process by redefining engagement criteria.

Students and Stakeholders

Most partner institutions focus on examining students' expectations and needs in order to enhance and support study processes. In some cases, higher education institutions aim for a greater diversity in this specific group, trying to integrate mature students, disabled students or students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

Most institutional action plans emphasise an increasing awareness and involvement of all relevant stakeholders in the development process. As a sign of the importance of this topic, the action plans mention a number of stakeholder-oriented actions and objectives, e.g.:

- Ensuring the broad involvement of students in evaluation and quality development processes.
- Including academic departments/units in decision-making processes, thus facilitating the implementation phase.
- Improving publicity and dissemination of information, thus paving the way for comprehensive internal and public debates.
- Intensifying participation with regional scientific institutions, thus facilitating the acquisition of resources.
- Creating public outreach units to strengthen the links between higher education institutions and their local communities.

Process, Product and Service

There is a great variety of good practice and promising plans that can be found in the institutional reports, among them:

- Linking evaluation to pedagogic counselling.
- Encouraging innovations in teaching.
- Developing assessment strategies in addition to the traditional written examinations.
- Reviewing curricula to make sure they are fit for their purpose and resource efficient.
- Focussing on the learning side as well as on teaching aspects (quality management has to take both sides into account).

Organisational Decision Making and Feedback Loops

Many participating institutions seemed to be in a situation of change. In this context the consideration of external circumstances is indispensable. Efforts to establish such reflection processes routinely are often already in progress.

A synthesis of the action plans and SWOT analyses shows that feedback loops are not self-evident and have to be encouraged: many evaluation procedures stress the assessment aspects instead of feedback loops and communication flows. It is therefore necessary to establish feedback systems on as many levels as possible, e.g.:

- Using fast and appropriate feedback procedures during (rather than at the end of) courses, to gain an early insight into what is working and what is not; although it is a well-known practice to investigate student satisfaction with the help of standardised questionnaires, it may be even more helpful to make a special effort in developing a culture of reflection and feedback, giving the students a chance to participate in institutional improvements.

- Developing educational forums where teachers can share their experiences: many participants expressed the need to enhance the dissemination of good practices and innovative approaches within their institutions.
- Enhancing communication flow between management and academic staff, students and teachers, departments.

Introducing and strengthening such systems naturally requires a long-term perspective since changes in organisational cultures cannot be achieved overnight.

5 Partnerships

The following is an excerpt from the Network report that identified good practices with regard to partnerships. Identifying types of partnerships, indicators of quality within partnerships and internal structures to ensure this quality will help institutions integrate partnerships in their own quality culture and quality management systems.

Identifying Different Types of Partnerships

There are different levels of partnerships, depending on the scope of their activities, lifetime, integration of resources and resulting type of contract between partners. It is important to realise that not all partnerships operate on the same level or have the same objectives, since this influences the approach towards the partnership from a quality management viewpoint.

Level of partnership	Scope of activities	Lifetime	Integration of resources	Contract between partners
Individual partnership	Internal partnership between researchers, students, and teaching staff on a daily operational basis External partnerships with individuals from other higher education institutions Important for profiling the institution and for contributing to its reputation	Different time scale	No	No
Projects	Structured partnerships on a temporary basis with specific objectives and an agreed set of activities to reach the goals within an agreed timetable	Short term, with agreed timetable	Yes, external funding possible	Yes
Networks	Structured partnerships on a permanent basis with a broad range of objectives and activities within a broader area of research, education or knowledge pooling	Long term	No, but contribution from each partner	Yes, but rather loose
Alliances	Structured partnerships on a long term basis, focusing on (a range of) specific objectives and activities can contribute highly to the profile and the reputation of the partners	Long term	Yes	Yes
Merger	Full integration of objectives, activities and resources of the partners on a permanent basis	Long term	Yes	Yes

To illustrate the diversity of existing partnerships at the institutions represented in the Network, the following matrix could be helpful:

	LEVELS					
	Partnerships for	Individual	Project	Network	Alliance	Merger
OBJECTIVES & ORIGINS	Research					
	Learning					
	Teaching					
	Knowledge pool					

The matrix is kept simple in its design, taking into account the level of co-operation on one hand and origin and objectives of the partnerships on the other. The network members pointed out that other information could be included, such as cost and output for each partnership. This would develop the matrix into a tool to identify types of partnerships and assess the quality of the partnerships with regard to the input/output ratio. A more complex form of this matrix could be used to create more elaborate computer models, which might be useful for future strategic planning of partnerships within an institution.

Quality Assurance of Partnerships: Indicators of Quality

Formal criteria of a partnership: to establish a qualitative and successful partnership, it is important that some formal criteria are clearly determined and agreed upon from the beginning. These formal aspects include:

- types of participants in the partnership
- a timescale for the partnership
- concrete objectives for the partnership within the determined timescale
- a detailed work plan, dividing the tasks to realise the objectives
- a financial plan dividing the available budget among the partners

Once these formal criteria have been agreed on by all the partners, a contract should be drawn up and support from central services (e.g. legal services) should be provided.

Embedding partnerships in the institution’s policy

It is important for institutions to consider that partnerships should lead to an added value for the institution: enhancing national or international appeal, attracting international students, improving the quality of curricula or research, pooling knowledge with partners, etc. Partnerships are not (nor do they have to be) isolated projects that only affect the staff members involved. Future-oriented partnerships serve the policy of the institution.

Higher education institutions will maximise the benefits offered by the different types of partnerships only if they formulate guidelines and priorities and include these in the institution’s overall policy plan. They should identify preferred partners – both on a regional, national and international level – and formulate a policy with regard to the types of partnership which should be in line with the institution’s mission: which types of partnership will be encouraged, how will these types of partnerships be promoted within the institution and will efforts be concentrated on certain disciplines or certain aspects, e.g., research or internationalisation?

In addition, the priorities and guidelines should clearly indicate which partnerships receive central support and what level of support they receive. The central support should take the form of:

- Central administration of partnerships (or central support for the administration of partnerships)
- Financial support
- Communication of guidelines, policy and priorities within and outside the institution
- Training of staff involved in partnerships.

While an institution will not be able (and will not choose to) support all its partnerships at central level, it is important that the academic authorities are aware of existing partnerships and new initiatives. An up-to-date central inventory can be used as a tool to develop individual initiatives into stable and more enduring partnerships.

Ensuring quality of partnerships: evaluation

Many partnerships seem to be the result of chance rather than a well thought through policy of the institution. Although these partnerships may be valuable and lead to useful results for the institution, this is not always the case. Partnerships should be assessed by regular (self) evaluations and institutions should not be afraid to end partnerships that are inactive or that have not produced any useful results for the institution.

Too often, existing partnerships are left to run their course, without any regular evaluation. Some of the following points of action may prevent this in the future: making an inventory of existing partnerships, defining targets, measuring the cost/benefit ratio of the partnerships and examining outputs (if it is beneficial for the entire or a large part of the institution, or only for one staff member or a limited group of teachers or researchers), and introducing fixed points of evaluation.

When evaluating a partnership, it is important to avoid one-sidedness. Some conclusions of both partners could be the same in both analyses, but other conclusions could be different and sometimes the view of the institution and its partners with regard to the success of certain aspects of the co-operation could even be diametrically opposed. This will lead to interesting discussions in the future and adjustments in terms of co-operation and the targets of the partnership. When an evaluation takes place within an institution, it is necessary that all stakeholders have the opportunity to share their views. Therefore, an evaluation that confronts multiple perspectives – central management teachers and students – is advisable.

There are several indicators for successful partnerships. Apart from its formal criteria and its mission, a partnership can be measured by its output: scientific publications, joint seminars, joint degrees, number of mobile staff and students, etc. Good results that are difficult to define in terms of quantity (e.g., end-user satisfaction) should also be included in the evaluation.

A final factor that should be taken into account when evaluating a partnership is the dissemination of the results. These should be communicated to all stakeholders within the partnership and, if applicable, outside the partnership.

Quality Assurance within Partnerships: Organisational Structure

Organisation of partnerships within the institution

An institution can adopt either a top-down or a bottom-up approach with regard to partnerships. Both extremes should be avoided as neither will promote good practices. A balance between a top-down and bottom-up approach will give better results. To promote successful partnerships, an institution has to provide adequate central support and guidelines but it should also rely on initiatives and co-operation from individual staff members and departments.

The approach towards partnerships will also determine whether the administration of the partnerships will be organised on a central level (by central services) or on a decentralised level (faculties or departments).

Organisational structure within the partnerships

The organisational structure within a partnership will vary strongly according to the type of partnership that is adopted. The closer the co-operation the more important it is to have an appropriate and strong organisational structure.

The key to good partnership organisation is to ensure continuation and sustainability. If a partnership is only dependent on the efforts of one staff member, the continuation of the partnership might be threatened. Therefore central support for important partnerships is vital.

Other elements requiring attention are the representation of the organisational structure, the possibility to take decisions that are carried out by all partners, and the transparency of decisions and implementation structures.

Introducing Systems of Quality Management within an Institution

Much time can be saved and much disappointment and mistakes avoided by basing the system of quality management on existing models of good practice. However, no system can be adopted without adapting it to the specificities of the institution with its own tradition and aspirations. Therefore only models that can easily be modified or that do not have to be fully implemented in order to be functional should be used.

6 Programme Evaluations

The Programme Evaluations Network focussed their report mainly on cross-cutting issues related to embedding quality culture in a higher education institution and their contributions have been included in the main body of the report. Given the tight project schedule, there was little time left for specific recommendations on evaluating study programmes. Therefore EUA includes in this section material on evaluation developed in its Institutional Evaluation Programme.

Preconditions

In order to be able to carry out an evaluation of study programmes, the following preconditions must be met:

- The institution should organise a discussion and come to a wide consensus on its objectives and specific profile.
- The institution should define the quality level it seeks to meet and identify indicators to measure it.
- The institution should identify the evaluation cycle (e.g., every 6 years) and its procedures.
- The institution should determine the kind of experts who will carry out the evaluation and how their advice will be used. For instance, the expert team could consist of academics in the same discipline from other institutions and one or two academics from the same institution but from different disciplines.
- The institution should establish an advisory group which will identify key data (institutional, historic and comparative). These data are analysed on a regular basis and the results are communicated to the governing bodies.

In order to succeed in introducing a non-bureaucratic and useful evaluation culture which is supported by all members of the institution, the following principles should be applied:

- Develop a sense of ownership of the evaluation process within the institution.
- Ensure the participation of students, academics and administrative staff.
- Put in place a formal and informal communication strategy to address resistance to the evaluation process.
- Underline the importance of a thorough self-evaluation which involves all actors of a study programme (students, academics and administrative staff) and ensure that the evaluation will have a follow up at the programme and institutional level.
- Implement staff development schemes for academics and administrative staff and develop incentives for good performance in order to raise the acceptance of these internal quality measures.

Checklist for Study Programme Evaluations

What are the objectives of a programme?

- Which learning outcomes have been identified (in terms of subject specific and generic competences)?
- How do these learning outcomes fit with the institutional mission and the profile of the institution?

How does the institution intend to reach these goals?

- Decision making: How is the course content designed? How are they approved within the programme? How and how often are they updated?
- Curriculum: How are the learning outcomes designed in terms of coherence and progression? Are they clear to the students? How is the content of the programme linked to research?
- Pedagogy: What is the balance between lectures and other types of courses and their adequacy to the learning outcomes?
- Examinations: What is the balance between different types of examinations and their adequacy to the learning outcomes?
- External relations: What are the relations with other study programmes within the institution and with similar study programmes on a regional, national, European and international level?
- Students: Number and ratio compared to teachers and researchers; progress and graduation rate, employability and career development, evaluation of teaching, participation in decision making, tutorials.
- Academic staff: Profiles and their adequacy to the study programme (academic level, age structure); evaluation of the capacity of staff to act as a unit in order to enhance, evaluate and update the programme; support and development of teacher's competencies; processes to ensure a good recruitment and good staff management.
- Library, equipment and buildings: Are they adequate to meet the goals of the programme?

How does the programme monitor its quality?

- What are the indicators for monitoring the quality of all points cited in the checklist above?

What are the procedures to promote change?

- Are the roles and responsibilities for internal quality monitoring clearly identified?
- How are the following points taken into account in the planning of activities: teaching evaluations, yearly staff appraisals, key indicators concerning students?
- How are external and internal evaluations used to improve programmes at the departmental and institutional levels?
- How are stakeholders consulted and how is their point of view integrated in the planning process?

Process

Evaluation cycle

As a first step, it is useful to launch an evaluation of all programmes in order to develop a knowledge basis. Once the first cycle is completed the institution has to decide if it is necessary to repeat this cycle in the identical form or if it wants to confine it to certain programmes. The option of not repeating the cycle is viable as long as there are structures in place that allow the self-evaluation of the study programme such as through the following:

- Student evaluations whose results are convincing and well used.
- A pedagogic team which updates the teaching methods and content according to change in discipline.

- Information that is systematically communicated to the institutional leadership and the governing bodies.

Self-evaluation of the study programme

The evaluation is based on the self-evaluation report that is written under the responsibility of a small group of student representatives, teachers, researchers and academic and administrative staff.

A good report is synthetic and analytic and describes the strengths and weaknesses of the study programme following the above-mentioned checklist. This report is finalised during a discussion within the programme in order to assure the participation of the majority of persons involved.