



III.4.7 Decision-making structures

Good practices in decision-making suggest:

- Strong feeling of identity, commitment and responsibility
- Recognition based on performance criteria
- Awareness to improve quality
- Believe and trust in the strategy
- Transparency
- Regular evaluation of the changes in the institution
- Clear objectives in strategic planning
- Spirit of competition and cooperation at all levels.

Conclusions

Quality assurance is crucial in higher education. It is accepted today that quality has to be at all levels and should be assured internally and externally. Quality standards also exist for QA agencies. Europe has defined clear standards and guidelines for QA.

For internal QA the lessons learned include:

- Clarity in the institutional mission statement;
- Need of quality units within the institutions;
- Monitoring through data collection, analysis and benchmark;
- Transparency in the process;
- Incentive measures;
- Costs of quality procedures.

We need to develop quality processes for better services offered by our institutions against the turbulent and changing environment.

- Is your institution routinely monitoring, reviewing and improving the effectiveness of the support services available to your students?
- Are you comparing your institution with other similar organizations?
- Are you comparing your institution with other institutions beyond Lebanon?

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Quality Assurance in Higher Education - Basic Concepts -

Introduction

Quest for excellence and learner satisfaction represents an historic commitment and foundation of important higher education milestones relating to Quality and Accountability. This document reviews and suggests the main definitions and concepts of quality assurance with a focus on the Bologna and European developments in this regard.

In the medieval age, universities were dedicated to the spirit of learning, nowadays, they need to cover not only learning, but also research and entrepreneurial activities. This expansion of activities reveals the need to develop Quality Management (QM).

Quality Management aims to develop a "Quality Culture" where Quality is seen as everyone's responsibility. The three spheres of Quality Management activities are:

- Quality Planning,
- Quality Control and,
- Quality Assurance.

Quality Planning selects applicable procedures or standards for a particular objective. Quality control ensures that they are followed. The European Commission defines Quality Assurance, in the Education and Training glossary, as "an all-embracing term referring to an ongoing, continuous process of evaluating (assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining and improving) the quality of a higher education system, institution or program."

A common language among various Higher Education systems facilitates the understanding of quality concepts. In this document, we use the European Quality Assurance standards to discover the basics in Quality Assurance, with emphasis on the internal Quality Assurance in higher education institutions.





I. Basics in Quality Assurance

I.1 Fundamental Terminology

Quality

"Quality can be defined in many ways, for instance, quality as an exception, as perfection, as **fitness for purpose (how appropriate is it)**, as value for money, and as transformative.

In the auditing of QA systems, quality refers to the **appropriateness (fitness for purpose)** of quality assurance **methods, processes and systems** in relation to stated objectives or aims. Understood in this way, quality is verified **achievement of objectives.**"



- FINHEEC's definition

Quality Culture

"Quality culture includes measures geared to **improving** quality, and also **individual and collective commitment** to maintaining and improving quality."

- FINHEEC's definition

Quality Assurance

"An all-embracing term referring to an ongoing, continuous **process** of evaluating (assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining and improving) the quality of (teacher/higher) education **systems, institutions or programs.**"

- EURYDICE based on UNESCO's definition

- European Commission, Education and Training glossary

Quality Control

"Planned and systematic review process of an **institution or program** to determine that acceptable standards of education, scholarship, and infrastructure are being maintained and enhanced. Usually includes expectations that mechanisms of **quality control** are in place and effective."

- CHEA glossary

References:

- FINHEEC (Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council - Finland): <http://www.finheec.fi>
- CHEA (Council For Higher Education Accreditation - US): http://www.chea.org/international/inter_glossary01.html

In addition, the institution should develop the necessary structures needed to develop and monitor the quality culture.

III.4.3 Student Support Services

More than learning the students support office should provide services such as:

- Advice and guidance: psychological, health support, career planning, mentoring and tutoring, legal and procedural advice
- Material support services: Financial aid, student health, disability support, accommodation and catering
- Academic support services: International student support, academic technology assistance, libraries, self assessment, study methods, linguistic centre, first-year orientation, educational equity, training of tutors
- Non-academic services: sports, religious groups, socio-cultural centre, transport, security inside the campus

III.4.4 Implementing the Bologna Accord of 2003

For the sake of harmonization, European institutions are encouraged to implement the Bologna process principles. This would certainly improve the quality culture at all levels and provide a European dimension to the institution.

III.4.5 International partnerships

International partnerships and collaboration should be handled by the international office. Several aspects must be considered and in particular the globalisation and the Bologna process.

III.4.6 Communication flow

There should be an excellent flow of communication within the departments if these observations are followed:

- Developing a culture of communication and sharing information
- Well defined communication responsibilities
- Clear objectives of communication flow
- Precise listing of sources and receivers of information
- Practical and ample usage of information technology



III.4 Tools for Development

The development of the University and of its quality process occurs at different levels.

III.4.1 Research management

Research management is crucial in the development of the quality process. Several steps must be followed in this endeavour:

- Develop research and quality management through brain storming sessions conducted by the research office with the different stakeholders
- Develop management policies and secure transparent appropriate funding
- Develop a shared vision and strategy
- Define and apply recognition and incentive measures
- Emphasize stakeholder accountability
- Develop evaluation procedures and tools for benchmarking the outcomes based on self-evaluation reports
- Develop interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary research on both structural and methodological levels
- Develop awareness of size and quality by measuring for example the rate of students involved in research activities
- Develop international funding expertise
- Develop university-industry partnership and define knowledge transfer mechanisms and rules
- Develop intellectual property rights policies

III.4.2 Teaching and learning

The institution should stress the development of the learning process towards state of the art standards including the Bologna process. A better balance between research and teaching has to be found. It is import to raise the awareness regarding the diversity of funding of the institution and the relation with the external stakeholders. The need to respect the institution policies as well as the national policies and legislation should be stressed on.

Quality Assurance System

The "Quality assurance system" is based on a concept that has become a standard in European quality evaluation. This concept includes both quality management and quality enhancement. It can be used in two ways:

- it may refer to the QA (Quality Assurance) system of an individual HEI (Higher Education Institution)
- or to the national system for assuring Higher Education Quality.

The institutional QA system refers to the entity composed of the quality assurance organisation, respective responsibilities, procedures, processes and resources.

The national QA system refers to the procedures and processes of the HEIs, FINHEEC and the Ministry of Education as a whole and to legislation enacted to assure higher education quality."

- FINHEEC's concept

Quality Improvement

"The expectation that an institution will have in place a plan to monitor and improve the quality of its programs. In most cases, quality assurance and accrediting agencies require that established procedures ensure that this is an ongoing process."

- CHEA Glossary



- While a variety of definitions exists, they are often similar.
- The real definitions reside in the implementation. However, it is important for a system to set common definitions so as to be used by the different involved parties.
- What definitions and terminology are to be adopted for the Lebanese Higher Education QA system?

References:

- ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance): [http://www.enqa.eu/files/CNE handbook.pdf](http://www.enqa.eu/files/CNE%20handbook.pdf)



I.2 Quality Assessment

Evaluation Types

"Evaluation types can be summarised according to use as:

1. Evaluation,
2. Accreditation,
3. Auditing and,
4. Benchmarking.

These different approaches are used to evaluate three different targets :

- Organisations,
- Degree programmes and,
- Subjects.

and these different approaches can also be used for the development of operations to indicating accountability."

- FINHEEC's definition

1. Evaluation

"Evaluation is the systematic appraisal and highlighting of value or the comparison against objectives and targets. It can also be a "measurement" of performance (assessment, as in quality assessment) against a set of criterion."

- FINHEEC sees evaluation as a process geared to highlight development needs and putting forward proposals.

Internal evaluation or self-evaluation

" A process carried out under the responsibility of those working within an institution, collect administrative data and through the questioning of students, lecturers and other staff. It may be considered as a collective institutional reflection and an opportunity for quality enhancement.

External evaluation or External review

The process whereby a specialised external body collects data, information and evidence about an institution or a program, in order to make a statement about its quality. External evaluation is normally carried out by a team of external experts, peers or inspectors."

- EURYDICE based on UNESCO's definition

by participating in different committees.

Finally external stakeholders should also be involved in the quality processes since they ensure the social connection of the institution with its environment.

III.3 Structures

Different units are required as a supporting structure for the quality processes. It is often recommended to have the following units operating within the institution:

- **Quality Unit:** it serves the function of an internal auditor and reports to the University Council. It also serves as an advisory and orientation role to the different units so they can improve the quality of their activities.
- **Office of Institutional Research and Information:** this unit has a supporting role for institutional management and planning through data analysis. The results of this analysis should be disseminated showing the strengths and weaknesses in the different units and activities. This requires a rigorous and regular collection of data from the different units.
- **Research Management Office:** this unit is responsible for the establishment and monitoring of the research environment, priorities and policies. It also supports the establishment of partnerships and alliances. It helps in allocating the needed resources for research.
- **Student support services:** this unit is in charge of academic tutoring, mental health support, and introduction of first-year students. It is also involved in the monitoring process by analyzing and reporting on the quality of lectures, the development of students' competences and on the placement and employment strategies.

- Are your students clearly informed about the assessment strategy used ?
- Are your students well informed about the criteria that will be applied to the assessment of their performance?



III.2 Actors

unstable and uncertain activities”.

A responsive, competent and enlightened **senior leadership team** is an essential requirement as an enthusiastic **supporter** of developing a **quality culture** within the institution.

A **specific senior administrator** (vice rector, dean, etc.) should be in charge of co-ordinating the quality process. His/her **responsibilities will include:**

- Organisation of an internal quality network
- Enhancing Communication flow between units
- Developing a 3-step learning process: learn, apply, disseminate
- Recognizing the specific skills in the institution
- Fostering innovative ideas in order to solve problems
- Measuring improvements in the quality actions
- Assuring quality
- Analyzing the reports provided yearly by each unit about its activities
- Auditing the activities in cooperation with a senior manager
- Benchmarking the outcomes

In addition, **several offices at the institution will have to support the quality process** particularly the international office and the accounting/finance office.

Staff are responsible for the development of **quality culture as much as the senior administrator**. Staff often see quality measures as a threat. **Institutions are recommended to define incentive and reward schemes** to stimulate the adoption of the quality procedures by the staff.

Similarly **students** are also central players in the development of the **quality culture**. They need to become involved in different actions:

- Through the evaluation of programmes and learning processes
- Volunteering in student service areas and in decision making



2. Accreditation

“The word ‘accreditation’ (Latin ad + credere) means to prove something creditable and publicly acknowledge its worth in relation to external criteria. Accreditation usually refers either to an official approval of **HEIs** and their **programs** or to the **awarding of different quality labels** to HEIs and their programs.”

- FINHEEC’s Definition

“**Accreditation is:** the process of external quality review used in higher education to scrutinize colleges, universities, and higher education programs for **quality assurance** and **quality improvement**. Success results in an accredited **institution** and/or **program**. In some countries, it conveys institutional authority to offer specific programs.”

- CHEA glossary

3. Auditing

“Auditing is independent external evaluation to ascertain whether a QA system conforms to its stated objectives, is effective and fits its purpose. Auditing does not address the objectives or the results of operations as such but evaluates the processes that the HEI uses to manage and improve the quality of its education and other activities.”

- FINHEEC’s definition

“A process of review of an institution or program to determine if its curriculum, staff, and infrastructure meet its stated aims and objectives. An audit focuses on accountability of institutions and programs. (In the U.K., an audit is an institutional review process)”

- CHEA glossary

4. Benchmarking

Benchmarking is the process of helping compare inputs, processes and outputs either between HEIs or within an institution.



I.3 Measurement

Review

Peer Review: "External review and evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of an institution's academic programs, staffing, and structure, carried out by a team of external evaluators who are specialists in the fields reviewed and knowledgeable about higher education in general. Reviews may be based on standards set by the accrediting organizations or on quality standards set more broadly."

- CHEA glossary

Standards

"The level of requirements and conditions that must be met by institutions or programs to be accredited or certified by a quality assurance or accrediting agency. These conditions involve expectations about quality, attainment, effectiveness, financial viability, outcomes, and sustainability."

- CHEA glossary

Validation

"Independent review of a self-assessment process by an outside quality assurance structure. Validation usually applies at the program level."

- CHEA glossary

Certification

"Certification is the verification and validation of an achieved standard or status. It often includes a certificate of the standard or status achieved. The certificate can be awarded by a first party (the management of an organisation), a second party (the customer) or a third party (an accredited external certifier).

- FINHEEC's definition

- demonstrating competences,
- acquiring funds,
- setting priorities and objectives,
- coordinating the efforts of the different units,
- and monitoring performance.

To serve the defined mission and using the communication flow established strategic planning can be better conducted. This planning should also incorporate the needs of the different stakeholders both internal and external.

- The internal stakeholders include:
 - management body,
 - academic staff,
 - students,
 - support staff.
- The external stakeholders include:
 - government agencies,
 - private sector,
 - media,
 - alumni.

An external interface unit could be installed to collect the external needs and distribute it optimally throughout the internal units. A good balance however should be found between centralization and decentralization at this level.

Finally, it is worth noting that higher educational institutions need both management and leadership in order to succeed at quality education and learning processes. As stated by Declerck and Ansoff "management is adequate for stable and known activities, leadership is really needed for

- Is there a commitment at all levels of your institution to ensure that its programs have clear and explicit intended outcomes that will improve and enhance Excellence?
- - Is your staff ready and able to provide teaching and learner support that will help your students achieve your intended outcomes?



III.1 Processes

Taking into consideration that the Higher Education Institution (HEI) is diverse in its capacities, resources and aims, HEI face two challenges in developing its QA:

- Organising the standards and operations uniformly across the institution taking into account its profile.
- Define a set of criteria and measurements allowing it to identify successes and failures.

A **SWOT analysis** could be used as a starting point, in order for the institution to define the appropriate mission statement accordingly.

SWOT is an acronym for:

- Strengths,
- Weaknesses,
- Opportunities
- and Threats



It is also an **excellent practice to involve the whole institution** in the early stages of the introduction of the **quality culture**, creating different communication flows, identifying some **champions** and stimulating the exchange of good ideas. All this should be accompanied **transparently with appropriate documentation** and a set of instruments to measure and benchmark the outcomes of the activities within the institution.

Once the first steps are accomplished, an **information system** should be established within the institution implementing feedback loops and communication flow. This allows the management to better face **the continuously changing environment** of institutions nowadays. **This includes:**

- absorbing pressures,



II. European Quality Assurance Standards

In the Berlin Communiqué of 19 September 2003, the Ministers of the Bologna Process signatory states invited the ENQA through its members, in cooperation with the EUA (European University Association), EURASHE (European Association of Institutions in Higher Education), and ESIB (European Students' Information Bureau), to develop an **"agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on Quality Assurance"**



Developed by ENQA, EUA, EURASHE and ESIB/ESU these standards/guidelines were adopted by the Bologna Ministers at the Bergen Conference (Norway) in 2005.



II.1 European standards for internal quality assurance within higher education institutions:

1. Policy and procedures for quality assurance
2. Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards
3. Assessment of students
4. Quality assurance of teaching staff
5. Learning resources and student support
6. Information systems
7. Public information

II.2 European standards for the external quality assurance of higher education institutions:

1. Use of internal quality assurance procedures
2. Development of external quality assurance processes
3. Criteria for decisions
4. Processes fit for purpose (appropriateness of process)
5. Reporting
6. Follow-up procedures
7. Periodic reviews
8. System-wide analyses

References:

- ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.): <http://www.enqa.eu/>
- EUA (European University Association): <http://www.eua.be/>



II.3 European standards for external QA agencies:

1. Use of external quality assurance procedures for higher education
2. Official status
3. Activities
4. Resources
5. Mission statement
6. Independence
7. External QA criteria and processes used by the agencies
8. Accountability procedures



Remarks:

- ENQA's General Assembly confirmed on 4 November 2004 the change of the former European Network into the European Association for QA in HE.
- ENQA established a workgroup IQA to set the internal quality assurance procedures and criteria for the quality assurance agencies.
- **WESIB/ESIB/ESU:** The three acronyms are for the same institution. Founded in 1982 as WESIB (Western European Students' Information Bureau), it became ESIB dropping the "Western" in search of a more inclusive European Platform and, became finally ESU in May 2007.
- The processes, criteria and procedures used by agencies should be pre-defined and publicly available. They include:
 1. a self-assessment or an equivalent procedure ;
 2. an external assessment by a group of experts;
 3. publication of a report (formal outcomes);
 4. a follow-up procedure to review actions .



- QA is about respect and evaluation by a Higher Education System (HES) against adopted standards
- What QA standards to define and adopt in the Lebanese HES?

References:

- EURASHE (European Association of Institutions in Higher Education): <http://www.eurashe.eu/>
- ESU (European Students' Union): <http://www.esib.org/>



III. European internal Quality Assurance within Higher Education Institutions

Because the internal evaluation of quality assurance is the cornerstone in higher education ...

Because the first European standard for the external quality assurance of higher education is the using of internal quality assurance procedures ...

Because we believe, like the European Ministers in Berlin 2003, that "the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself and this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework."

Several entities worked on the issue of internal QA in Europe and among them, were the "European University Association" (EUA) and ENQA.



Since 2002, the EUA started a series of projects in QA and the first project was dedicated to the development of "Quality Culture" in many European universities. This project resulted in an excellent application of internal quality assurance.



ENQA has also developed, as presented earlier, a set of standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance. Besides the European level, several efforts have been made to develop and define application in internal quality assurance have been spent within the European countries.

References:

- http://www.eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/QC1_full.1111487662479.pdf