



## 12th European Quality Assurance Forum

### Responsible QA – committing to impact

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### Paper proposal form

**Deadline 24 July 2017**

*Please note that all fields are obligatory. For a detailed description of the submission requirements and Frequently Asked Questions please consult the Call for Contributions.*

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#### Short bio (150 words max):

He is a senior partner of the Knowledge Innovation Centre, specialised in Quality Assurance processes and knowledge transfer of research. Within Quality Assurance he has given training on techniques for peer-review to quality assurance agencies around Europe, and contributed to the UNIQUe and ECBCheck guidelines on quality assurance of e-learning. He also acts as secretary to ISO 21001/WG1 which is authoring a global standard for Educational Organization Management Systems.

*If you are submitting a paper or workshop proposal, please do not register for the event online until the results of the selection process have been announced. Each selected paper and workshop at EQAF 2017 will benefit from one reduced fee, which will be applied through a special registration process.*

*During the Forum, the full text of all papers presented at the Forum as well as the associated Powerpoint presentations will be published on the Forum website. If you do not wish your paper to be published, please indicate so here. This has no consequences on the selection of the papers. Please however note that all Powerpoint presentations will be published, regardless of whether the full paper is published.*

#### Proposal

**Title:** Standardizing Management Systems for Educational Organizations: Implications for European Higher Education

**Abstract (150 words max):** The paper presents an overview of the upcoming ISO 21001 standard, which will be published in early 2018 as a Management System Standard for Educational Organizations. It shows how ISO 21001 overcomes some of the chief criticisms and limitations of applying ISO 9001 to the field of education, and discusses the principles on which the standard is based. Additionally, it briefly presents the structure of the standard, and discusses how it may be used in conjunction with the



European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education to within an international framework of standards applicable to education.

**The paper is based on:** policy

**Has this paper previously been published/presented elsewhere? No.**

**Text of paper (3000 words max):**

### Introduction

ISO 21001 provides a common management tool for organizations providing educational products and services capable of meeting the needs of learners as well as other of other beneficiaries and stakeholders in education. It is a stand-alone management system standard, based on ISO 9001 (without being a sector application), and aligned with other ISO management system standards through the application of the High Level Structure. ISO 21001 focuses on the specific interaction between an educational organization, the learner, and other relevant interested parties.

It specifies requirements for a management system for educational organizations when such an organization:

- a) needs to demonstrate its ability to support the acquisition and development of competence through teaching, learning or research, and
- b) aims to enhance satisfaction of learners, other beneficiaries, and staff through the effective application of its EOMS, including processes for improvement of the system and assurance of conformity to learners' and other beneficiaries' requirements.

All requirements of ISO 21001 are generic and intended to be applicable to any organization which uses a curriculum to support the development of competence through teaching, learning or research, regardless of type or size or methods of delivery. This means that all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can apply ISO 21001.

### Purpose of ISO 21001

A management system is the way in which an organization manages its interrelated parts in order to achieve its objectives. These objectives can relate to a number of different topics, including product or service quality, operational efficiency, environmental performance, health and safety in the workplace and many more. In particular, ISO 9001 sets out requirements for Quality Management Systems, and has been implemented by a substantial number of Higher Education Institutions globally.

The education sector has its specificity that makes it different from manufacturing and other services sector activities. Due to this, ISO published the "ISO 9001:2008 Handbook for Educational Organizations-What to Do: Advice from IWA 2 Working Group". The purpose of the initial international workshop agreement and its update was to provide guidelines for educational institutions (including HEIs) to use when implementing the ISO 9001:2000 requirements. These guidelines were written by a group that included education experts along with experts representing national organizations for standardization (El Abbadi, L., Bouayad, A., & Lamrini, M. ,2013).

However, the application of ISO 9001 in Higher Education has been generically limited to the institutions services and not their core functions, namely teaching and learning (Rosa, Sarrico & Amaral, 2016). Furthermore, a key element of ISO 9001 is a customer focus, which concept has many negative connotations and is widely misunderstood by the education community. It is argued that the idea of the student as a customer can lead to a damaging



commodification of learning knowledge and the service that the university provides. Commodification and the rise of academic capitalism encourages a utilitarian instrumentalism that distances the student from the deep learning and personal growth that most people believe is the most valuable part of the university experience for students, and is also the best way for universities to meet their broader social responsibilities (Cuthbert, 2010).

The IWA 2 guidelines were withdrawn in 2013 and in 2014 set up a project committee in 2014 to draft a new standard specifically dedicated to educational organizations. The project committee was given a wide mandate to consider any and all factors which have a bearing on the operation of educational organizations. Since 2014, within the framework of WG1 of the project committee, 140 experts from 34 countries have prepared 9 iterative drafts of a standard over 10 meetings. ISO 21001 is now registered as a Final Draft International Standard, meaning that, subject to a final vote by all members of the project committee, it will be published as an International Standard in early 2018.

### Principles and Innovations of ISO 21001

ISO 21001 set out to maintain the main advantages of ISO 9001, while significantly enhancing the scope of the standard to meet the specificities of the educational sector. Each standard is based on a set of principles, which elucidate the overall management approach promulgated by the standard, and which are deeply embedded into all requirements of the standard.

ISO 9000:2015/9001:2015	ISO 21001
customer focus	focus on learners and other beneficiaries
leadership	visionary leadership
engagement of people	engagement of people
process approach	process approach
improvement	improvement
evidence-based decision making	evidence-based decisions
relationship management	relationship management
	social responsibility
	accessibility and equity
	ethical conduct in education
	data security and protection

Fig. 1 Comparison of Principles in ISO 9001 and ISO 21001

#### A focus on the needs of learners and other beneficiaries

From a conceptual perspective, the most significant difference between the two standards is the replacement of the principle of 'customer focus' with the principle of 'focus on learners and other beneficiaries'. In fact, ISO 21001 does not mention the word customer at all. This change marries two key concepts in the management of educational organizations.

Firstly, it acknowledges while learners may 'consume' the products and services of an educational organization, focusing solely on their needs, and ensuring satisfied, 'happy' learners alone will not meet the wider goals of education. Thus, ISO 21001 mandates that an educational organization must aim to meet the requirements not only of every learner, but also of other beneficiaries of education – in Higher Education this means the labour market and

government. Thus, a successful HEI will manage to triangulate the requirements of all three parties to ensure the satisfaction of all three with its services and products.

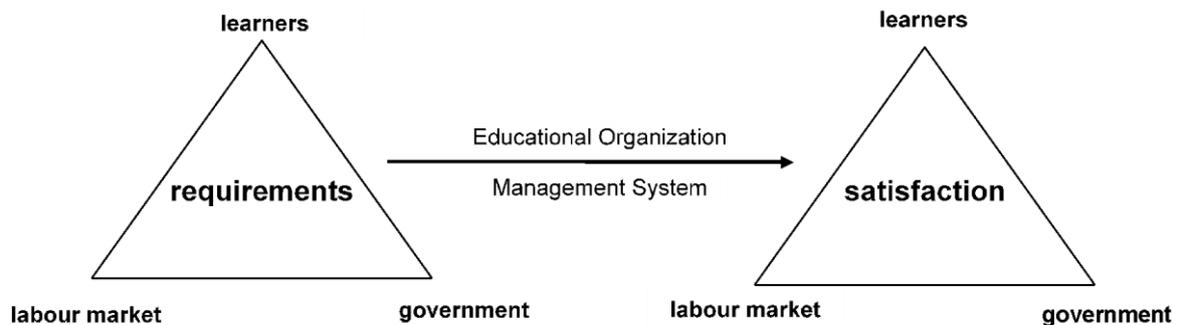


Figure 2: ISO 21001 focus on learners and other beneficiaries in Higher Education

Secondly, it acknowledges that learners need to be actively engaged in their own learning with the aim of each learner reaching their highest potential. To this end, the standard embraces a holistic view of education by defining the services offered by an educational organization to be supporting the acquisition and development of learners' competence, rather than the transmission of knowledge.

#### Additional principles of an Educational Organization Management System

Like ISO 9001, ISO 21001 highlights the importance of visionary leadership, engagement of people, a process approach, improvement (especially continual improvement) and relationship management.

Evidence-based decisions are critical to both standards, however ISO 21001 mandates that these extend beyond management decisions to include curricular decisions, thus embedding the scientific approach to teaching and learning into the management system.

Additionally, ISO 9001 requires educational organizations to consider their:

- **social responsibility**, i.e. the overall impact of their actions on economy, society and the environment (the triple-bottom-line principle);
- **accessibility and equity**, i.e. that organizations need to work to ensure that the widest possible pool of people have the ability to access their services and products (subject to resource limitations) and furthermore that this access is provided equitably, taking into account the special requirements of various learners;
- **ethical responsibility**, i.e. the need to conduct all their activities with integrity and professionalism, with a view to benefiting society;
- **data security and protection**, i.e. acknowledging that persons have the right to control the use of their own data, and that educational organizations are mere custodians of that data.



## Structure of ISO 21001

All ISO management systems follow a harmonised high level structure (ISO, 2017), to ensure that institutions can implement various management systems without conflict. ISO 21001 follows this structure, and is made up of the following parts

- the **Introduction** explains the context of the standard, its relationship with other standards, as well as gives an introduction to the process approach, risk-based thinking and formulating the organizational mission, vision and strategy;
- the **Scope, Normative References and Terms and Definitions**, explain where the standard should be applied, and the vocabulary used in the standard;
- **context of the organization** requires the organization to determine its context, including the needs and expectations of stakeholders, determine the scope of its educational organization management system and identify its processes;
- **leadership** outlines the roles and responsibilities of the organization's top management: including full responsibility for ensuring an organizational focus on learners and other beneficiaries, developing a policy that supports the organization's mission and vision, and implementing the management system. It also specifies requirements on what can be delegated and how
- **planning** addresses the actions the organization should take to address risks and opportunities, as well as to achieve its objectives
- **support** covers a broad range of topics including the:
  - resources an organization should take into account when implementing its management system, and the requirements they should meet. Such resources include human resources, facilities, psychosocial and physical environmental factors, monitoring & measuring resources, organizational knowledge and learning resources;
  - requirements for an organization to determine and monitor staff competence;
  - what, why, when, how and with whom to communicate and consult;
  - creating, updating and controlling documented information;
- the **operation** section lays down specific requirements for:
  - determining and communicating the requirements for an educational organization's products and services;
  - designing and developing those products and services, in particular:
    - curriculum design design & development;
    - summative assessment design & development;
  - control of externally provided processes, products and services;
  - delivery of the educational organization's products and services, in particular:
    - admission of learners;
    - summative assessment;
    - recognition of assessed learning / credentialization;
    - protection of stakeholders' property, including intellectual property;
    - protection of learners' data and transparency of data policies;
  - release of the educational organization's products and services;
  - control of the educational organization's nonconforming outputs;
- **performance evaluation** lays down requirements for monitoring, measurement, analysis and evaluation including monitoring satisfaction of learners and other beneficiaries, handling of complaints and appeals, internal audit and management review
- **improvement** specifies how the organization should correct nonconformities and create a culture of continuing improvement.



Additionally, the standard establishes compulsory requirements for special needs education and early childhood education. Informative annexes provide guidance on the principles for an educational organization management system, a classification of stakeholders, guidance for communication with interested parties, an illustrative list of processes, methods and tools, guidance on health and safety and an example of how to map ISO 21001 to regional standards such as EQAVET or the ESGs.

### **Relation between the European Standards and Guidelines and the ESG**

As a standard on how to create an educational organization management system, ISO 21001 also provides a template for an organization to set up a management system that responds to external requirements such as those set up by the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESGs).

This section provides a brief discussion of how ISO 21001 may help compliance with each ESG standard from Part 1 - Standards and Guidelines for Internal Quality Assurance:

#### **Policy for Quality Assurance**

While the ESGs require a quality assurance policy, which should be implemented through appropriate structures and processes they provide little guidance on how to design, implement, monitor and revise such a policy.

The main strength of ISO 21001 is that it provides detailed requirements on how an educational organization can manage each of these stages across the entire breadth of its operations.

#### **Design and Approval of Programmes**

Broadly speaking, the requirements of the ESGs and ISO 21001 reflect each other in this area.

#### **Student-Centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment**

Like the ESGs, the ISO 21001 principle of “Focus on learner and other beneficiaries” specifies that learners should be engaged in their own learning. ISO 21001 provides guidance on how to embed this principle at every level of an educational organization’s management system.

#### **Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification**

Broadly speaking, the requirements of the ESGs and ISO 21001 reflect each other in this area.

#### **Teaching Staff**

While the ESGs only speak about teaching staff, ISO 21001 sets requirements for recruiting, assuring the competence of and developing of all staff including management, administrative staff, teaching staff and teaching support staff - recognizing that all these staff have an important role to play in ensuring a well functioning educational organization. Additionally, ISO 21001 shows a stronger focus on performance evaluation of staff.

#### **Learning Resources and Student Support**



Similar to the ESGs, ISO 21001 specifies requirements for ensuring adequate support to learners and educators - however, ISO 21001 extends this concept to cover human resources, facilities, psychosocial and physical environmental factors, monitoring & measuring resources as well as organizational knowledge and learning resources.

### Information Management

Similar to the ESGs, ISO 21001 sets requirements for information management. It additionally specifies requirements for data security, handling of data, and which institutional records need to be kept and maintained as documented information. In addition, ISO 21001 contains an entire annex of types of records which may be useful in monitoring and evaluation of an organization's activities.

### Public Information

Like the ESGs, ISO 21001 specifies requirements on which information should be published, together with detailed requirements on ensuring it is accurate, objective, up to date and readily accessible. Depending on the information in question, it specifies requirements on what should be made public, and what should be released only to relevant stakeholders.

### Ongoing Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes

ISO 21001 is not a service-standard, but a management standard. As such, it does not contain specific requirements on the ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes. However, it does contain extensive requirements on the ongoing monitoring and periodic review of all operational processes within an organization, while giving specific requirements for curriculum design, assessment, award of credentials and admissions. It also provides detailed requirements on how to identify areas for improvement and non-conformances, how to register and document these, and how to take action based on their identification.

### Cyclical External Quality Assurance

All ISO documents containing requirements for products, processes, services, persons, systems and bodies are written in accordance with the "neutrality principle", such that conformity can be assessed by a manufacturer or supplier (first party), a user or purchaser (second party), or an independent body (third party) (ISO Directives Part 2, clause 33.1) - as such, ISO 21001 does not contain a requirement for cyclical external quality assurance

## Conclusions

Until today, there has always been a high degree of tension between ISO quality management system standards and stakeholder-originated standards such as the ESGs, with the former seen as being better suited to help organizations meet commercial requirements rather than educational objectives.

In its drafting, ISO 21001 brought together experts from quality management, education-policy experts and teachers to bridge this gap. Within Higher Education, ISO 21001 can be seen not as a competitor or a replacement for the ESGs but as a complementary tool which can help educational organizations to demonstrate their commitment to effective educational management practices. Both standards share a commitment towards a culture of organizational improvement and widened participation of stakeholders. Chiefly, ISO 21001 provides institutions who require it with a voluntary standard as to how to "implement, monitor and revise" their management systems in line with the ESGs.



**References:**

Cuthbert, R. (2010). Students as customers. *Higher Education Review*, 42(3), 3-25.

El Abbadi, L., Bouayad, A., & Lamrini, M. (2013). ISO 9001 and the Field of Higher Education: Proposal for an Update of the IWA 2 Guidelines. *Note From the Editor*, 14.

International Standardisation Organization (2017) ISO 21001 FDIS - Educational Organization Management Systems.

Rosa, M. J., Sarrico, C. S., & Amaral, A. (2012). Implementing quality management systems in higher education institutions. In *Quality assurance and management*. InTech.

**Discussion questions:**

How can higher education institutions balance the requirements and assure the satisfaction of learners, government and the labour market?

To which extent should organizations harmonise their management systems?

How can institutions use voluntary tools such as ISO 21001 to enhance their conformance with the ESGs?

*Please submit your proposal by sending this form, in Word format, by 24 July 2017 to [QAForum@eua.be](mailto:QAForum@eua.be). The file should be named using the last names of the authors, e.g. Smith\_Jones.doc. Please do not send a hard copy or a PDF file.*