Author(s)

Name: Maier, Kathrin

Position: Quality Manager

Organisation: University of Graz

Country: Austria

E-mail address: kathrin.maier@uni-graz.at

Short bio (150 words max):

Kathrin Maier, Quality Manager at University of Graz, holds a diploma degree in Educational Science. Kathrin Maier worked many years in the field of continuing education and quality enhancement. Current field of work: implementation, communication and maintenance of a quality system, to frame quality management as a tool for quality culture, coordination of the institutional audit and evaluation processes.

Name: Raggautz, Andreas

Position: Head of Performance and Quality Management

Organisation: University of Graz

Country: Austria

E-mail address: andreas.raggautz@uni-graz.at

Short bio (150 words max):
Andreas Raggautz holds a master's degree in Biology. After his position as assistant to the rector of the University of Graz, since 2004 he is director of performance and quality management. The department is responsible for the development, implementation and daily work of the quality management system, the internal and external performance agreements and the internal reporting system. His main interest is the connection between quality management and strategic steering. He is deputy representative of Universities Austria in the general assembly of the OECD-IMHE Programme and co-speaker of the Austrian network of universities quality managers. He was a delegated representative of the Austrian universities in the general assembly of the Austrian Quality Assurance Agency (AQA).

Name: Weirer, Wolfgang

Position: Dr. theol., A.o. Univ.-Prof., Associate Professor at the Institut für Katechetik & Religionspädagogik

Organisation: University of Graz

Country: Austria

E-mail address: wolfgang.weirer@uni-graz.at

Short bio (150 words max):
Dr. theol., A.o. Univ.-Prof., Associate Professor at the Institut für Katechetik & Religionspädagogik, University of Graz; Vicedean of the faculty of catholic theology; Habilitation in the fields of Katechetik / Religionspädagogik & Fachdidaktik Religion (University of Innsbruck); Visiting Professor in Wien and Innsbruck.
Main areas of research: Fundamental questions about religious education, questions concerning the justification of confessional religious education classes, cooperative religious didactics, biblical didactics, competency orientation in religious education, quality development of theological studies
Vice Chairman of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft Katholische Religionspädagogik und Katechetik (D / A / CH); Editorship of the Religious Education Journal „Österrei¬chisches Religionspädagogisches Forum" (unipub.uni-graz.at/oerf); Spokesman of the research focus „Lernen – Bildung – Wissen" (in collaboration with Professor Dr. Michaela Stock) of the Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz

After the Forum, the full text of all papers presented at the Forum 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.

Proposal

Title: Research evaluation @ University of Graz - reality, burden or future prospect?

Abstract (150 words max):

At the University of Graz (Uni Graz) one of the key quality management procedures in terms of research is peer-evaluation. After the first two cycles of evaluation, with different perceptions within the university, Uni Graz is currently conducting the third cycle with a considerably revised procedure and new aims as well. By the example of the faculty of theology the major changes and effects will be outlined.

The paper is based on: practice

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

 If yes, give details.

Text of paper (3000 words max):

Research evaluation @ University of Graz - reality, burden or future prospect?

Abstract

At the University of Graz (Uni Graz) one of the key quality management procedures in terms of research is peer-evaluation. After the first two cycles of evaluation, with different perceptions within the university, Uni Graz is currently conducting the third cycle with a considerably revised procedure and new aims as well. By the example of the faculty of theology the major changes and effects will be outlined.

Introduction

As reflected in its strategy 2013-2018, the University of Graz is committed to the assurance and enhancement of the quality of its activities. Quality management in this perspective is regarded as the key process to organize improvements for students, teachers and researchers, as well as for the university as a whole. Thus, the quality system is embedded in the university's organisational processes and culture.
The purposes of Uni Graz quality system are:

1. To ensure a comprehensive and systematic quality assurance and enhancement, that includes research, teaching, support of early stage researchers and services.
2. To promote the meeting of the organisational objectives defined in the university´s strategy by the organisational entities and their activities.
3. To improve compliance with internal and external requirements.

The quality management system at the Uni Graz is rather a (management) tool to support the continuous development of quality in education and research than an instrument of control. Continuous development shall be achieved by the linking of organisational and individual learning. The basic objective of the quality management structures is to serve sciences without dominating them. This is realised by the specific design which offers a variety of methods and creativity.

Especially in the area of research, the intention of quality management is to assess quality in different dimensions and to facilitate discussions about quality. Quality management triggers critical questions about criteria and about the plausibility of indicators (e.g. number of publications) and their impact. In order to pursue high quality and to question management decisions regarding their impact on quality, quality management has to be integrated into planning and evaluation processes. For these reasons, Uni Graz has established the comprehensive research evaluation.

In the implementation of the research evaluation priority was given to the creation of a supportive environment for outstanding research. Quality work in this respect aims to provide a scope for creativity and innovation. The main aims are:

– Enhancing the profile of research core areas and international visibility
– Increasing visibility of performance and transparency of publications
– Establishing procedures to support research

The evaluation procedures are regulated internally in the statute of the university. The procedure of the first research evaluation at Uni Graz was designed 2001 in a collaborative process involving faculties, the academic senate and the rectorate with the aim to evaluate quality and past performance in a national and international context. Today Uni Graz has already finished two cycles of the area-wide research evaluation, the first one started in 2002, the second in 2008. Currently the third cycle is in progress.

Research Evaluation – Background

Procedure and methodology – First Cycle

The aim of the rectorate in the first cycle was to get information about the overall performance of the units as well as to get an overview on necessary changes concerning the organisational level. The main focus of the evaluation was an assessment of the performance during the past 5 years in research, resources and services of the evaluation unit. The main steps of the first cycle were a self-report of the evaluation unit, a site-visit by peers and a peer report. More often than not, the self-report was written by the head of an evaluation unit[1] without consultation of other staff members. The evaluation units nominated 3-5 peers from Austria and other countries per unit. Based on the peer report, consequences were discussed in a follow up-workshop and afterwards stipulated in performance agreements. During that period, no additional financial resources for improvements or awards were available.

Case Example Theology - part 1

Research evaluation 2002

At the Faculty of Catholic Theology, three research evaluations took place in during the last ten years. The first evaluation in 2002 was called "research and structure evaluation". At that time, the faculty gained first experiences in the consequent and structured collection of research data and the institutes gained first experiences on writing a self-report.

Already in 2002 peers made assessments about strengths and weaknesses concerning the institutes. They were also invited to join the follow-up workshops. The results of the research evaluation influenced the following performance agreements in terms of research. The core areas of the faculty were defined more contoured and an emphasis was set on access to literature and on the libraries.

---

[1] An evaluation unit is composed of one or more institutes, departments or centers; e.g. the unit "theology" consists of 14 institutes.

The first experiences in terms of the research evaluation showed that the structure of the evaluation processes was mostly focused on the past. In the process much attention was given to the history of the institutes as well as the individual performances of the researchers. On this basis, each institute and the faculty itself had to analyze their strengths and weaknesses. After a site visit, the peers wrote reviews about the performance of each institute. For the Faculty an additional aim of the evaluation was to get information about convergences in the research areas of the institutes and to identify research core areas from the peer reports.

One result of this process was e.g. the question how to award the "best" institutes and researchers and how to motivate others to increase their performance. Those results were not very successful in the end, because from the researcher's point of view the achievements for the faculty were not rewarded on the individual level.

First adoption - Second Cycle

With the experience of the first evaluation and the critical feedback by the faculties the second cycle of the evaluation started in 2009. In order to achieve comparability to the results of the first cycle, only slight methodological adaptions were made. The aim was not only to assess the past performance, but also to develop a prospective research profile. The item "services" was replaced by measures for young researcher training. The peers came strictly from abroad, and an additional peer with a different subject expertise was added. The integration of a "non-subject" member in the peer team had a very positive effect. Not intended but very enriching, the expert's opinion became more critical and more objective because of the participation of the "non-subject" member.

The follow up workshop (with the speaker of the peer-group, vice-rector research, the respective dean and representatives from researchers of the evaluation unit, interest groups and the unit involved in quality management) was integrated in the procedure and a compendium of possible consequences was developed by the rectorate. The results were integrated in the university's development plan.

The Quality Audit of the University of Graz assesses the research evaluation as follows:

The effects of these evaluations may include harmonised studies, the establishment of doctoral programmes and schools, more money for research groups instead of just individuals or more money being allocated to the research infrastructure in general. According to the university leadership, these two rounds of evaluations had been important for formulating the university's research strategy, and the second round in particular has resulted in much discussion within the faculties. Several researchers also expressed satisfaction that the evaluations had greatly increased openness and transparency about the research results. However, in spite of such direct follow-up effects, the research strategy does not seem to be totally clear to all faculty staff members beyond the level of performance agreements. Also, there were different views within the different faculties as to the usefulness of these evaluations. (Haakstad et al 2013, p. 49)

Development of the recent process

The new design – Third Cycle

Before starting the third cycle 2015, the evaluation process was revised. The experiences gained in the first two evaluation cycles led to strategic considerations and to the profiling of

the university as well as to a revision of the evaluation process. The revision has affected all elements of the evaluation process:

The new research evaluation focuses even more on strategic development, establishment of a research profile, support for early stage researchers and PhD-students. Past performance is only used to describe the present know-how and international standing, but the latter is not subject of the assessment by the international peers. The main aim of the recent process is to intensify the discussion on the future development within an evaluation unit. All in all the focus changed from quality assurance (and a bit of control) to quality culture and development.
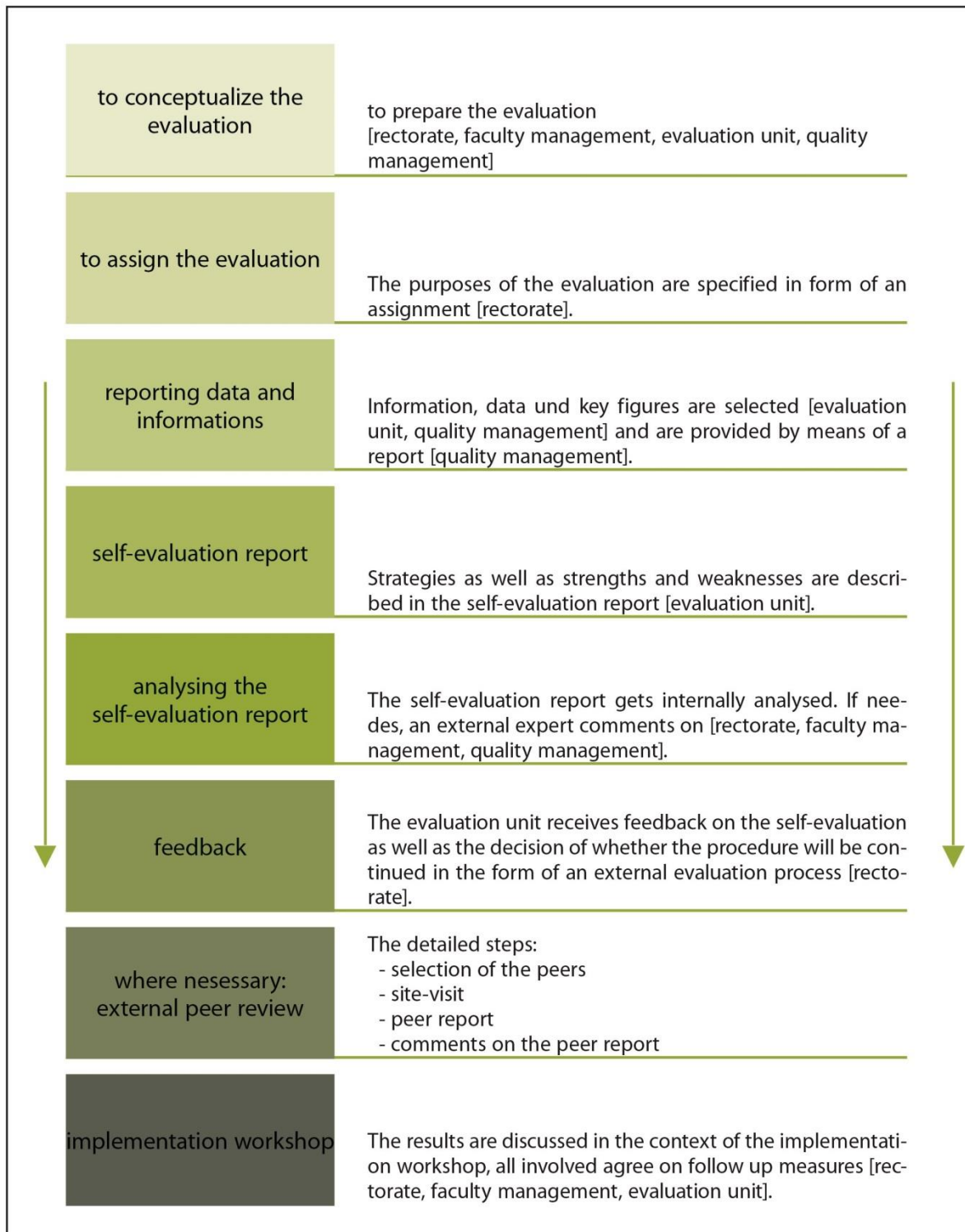
to conceptualize the evaluation	to prepare the evaluation [rectorate, faculty management, evaluation unit, quality management]
to assign the evaluation	The purposes of the evaluation are specified in form of an assignment [rectorate].
reporting data and informations	Information, data und key figures are selected [evaluation unit, quality management] and are provided by means of a report [quality management].
self-evaluation report	Strategies as well as strengths and weaknesses are described in the self-evaluation report [evaluation unit].
analysing the self-evaluation report	The self-evaluation report gets internally analysed. If needes, an external expert comments on [rectorate, faculty management, quality management].
feedback	The evaluation unit receives feedback on the self-evaluation as well as the decision of whether the procedure will be continued in the form of an external evaluation process [rectorate].
where nesessary: external peer review	The detailed steps: - selection of the peers - site-visit - peer report - comments on the peer report
implementation workshop	The results are discussed in the context of the implementation workshop, all involved agree on follow up measures [rectorate, faculty management, evaluation unit].

Figure 1: Main steps of the evaluation process

Evaluation design

As the aim of the evaluation changed to a more strategic perspective, and due to the fact that strategic changes need time to show effects, the evaluation interval was extended from five to seven years.

The evaluation processes are more or less individually designed to meet the needs of an evaluation unit in an appropriate way, including the interests of all stakeholders involved. Jointly agreed objectives and process steps contribute to a successful and accepted evaluation.
After the assignment of the rector and setting the goals for a respective evaluation unit, the evaluation units start the process. The evaluation units are merely composed by thematic meaningfulness than organisational demands. Each evaluation unit appoints a speaker.

Self-assessment
The former simple self-report has been strengthened and augmented with a self-evaluation part ("self-assessment"). To support the self-assessment, a template for the self-report with concise topics and questions was developed. It now focusses much more on future developments than on past performances and it's now possible to adopt this template for each evaluation unit, depending on the goals of the evaluation.
Different quality cultures and different indicators for the quality of work in the subjects are respected. The corresponding data and key figures are provided at the beginning of the self-evaluation process, thus an evaluation unit has the possibility to refer to their former activities.

Peer evaluation
In the first two cycles all research evaluations were conducted with an external peer involvement. These external experts are no longer obligatory. The rectorate can encourage external peer review depending in the findings of the self-assessment and the subsequent internal analysis, especially in case of a reorganisation or decisive personnel changes (for example, within the faculty of theology about 80% of the professors will retire until 2024). External peer-visits are only conducted if there is a relevant scope for changings. When giving reasons the faculty can also request a peer-review process to the rectorate. The number of peers depends on the size of the evaluation unit.
The peers receive the self-assessment as a base document. The procedure involves the phases: site-visit, review in the form of a peer report, statement of the evaluation unit and implementation planning in the framework of the follow-up workshop.

Focus on consequences
The results of the research evaluations are used for strategic development and resource allocation. In preparation on the follow-up workshop, the rectorate, the dean and the evaluation unit have to develop measures to tackle the plans of the unit and/or the recommendations of the peers, including decisions on resources and staff planning. During the workshop, which has an obligatory character, measures are agreed. The latter will be taken into account in the performance agreements with the faculties.

Case Example Theology - part 2

Research evaluation 2015/16 already persuaded new aims from the very beginning. The faculty of theology had started a development process three year ago, which focusses on research and also on teaching, staff development and structure of the faculty. On the basis of quantitative data and of parameters like the numbers of students and of publications, the faculty directorate tried to figure out the strong and weak points of the faculty in a national and international context and also the potentials of development for a faculty of theology at the location of Graz. The results of this process, which took several months, were discussed with three external experts. These peers were selected by the faculty as evaluation unit itself – because we knew the questions we focused on and so we had very specific ideas, who could help us answering those questions and help us developing the profile of the faculty for the next 10 years. We had a very intensive discussion with each peer during his/her site-visit and got a lot of strengthening feedback, but also detailed suggestions for our development. The first result of this process was to shape a "branding" for our faculty, which is "theology in present contexts". Currently there are five contexts relevant for our faculty: ethic discourses; Gender; Islam and Judaism; arts and media; and concepts of world and existence. Those five contexts are now the focus for the further development of the faculty of theology, beginning with staff development up to a new structure of the faculty. In a next – third – phase, the evidence of the evaluation process was discussed with the researchers of the faculty. The feedback resulted in another new version of the concept of faculty development. The faculty had to get used to this new form of evaluation and development process, because in the beginning it has been a "top-down" process, with much initiative growing out from the dean of the faculty and his team. Only in the third phase the specific perspectives and aspects of the individual researchers were included in this process. Finally, the results of this evaluation and development process were presented to the university management. Those results were the basis for agreements on goals and performances between the University and the faculty and for the further development of the staff structure.

A paradigm shift?

The faculty of theology considers itself as a "learning organization". Research evaluations since 2002 showed chances, but also risks of such processes. Together with the university management the faculty of theology decided to opt for a different focus: the new design should aim more for the development than past performance. Linking different processes saved resources, time and individual engagement and made it possible to develop innovations.

The new design confronted us with the challenge to communicate those changes inside the faculty and outside.

From the faculty management's point of view there are lots of advantages in the new design of research evaluation:

On the one hand, multiple processes and aspects were linked with each other. The results were more concrete and profound than after previous evaluations. Although research is a core area and a unique selling proposition of universities, student numbers or other parameters concerning teaching more than research often master them. From this perspective, it was an advantage to link research evaluation and the development of teaching programs in this new design of evaluation and development process.

On the other hand, it was important for the staff of the faculty to discuss their own quality concept and to develop quality parameters.

From the individual researcher's point of view, the late possibility of participation was a disadvantage of this new kind of evaluation process. Nevertheless, the results are judged as sustainable and as being forward-looking. Only a few adjustments were necessary because of substantive feedback.

However, overall, it is to consider how to stimulate new developments by evaluations, and also, how those developments can be backed up by the commitment of the hole staff of the evaluation unit, how it is possible to ensure reputation and visibility for most of the researchers. And the connection between the results of evaluation and the allocation of resources needs to be clarified

Conclusion and outlook

The aim of quality management at the Uni Graz is to generate adequate framework-conditions for excellent research. The research evaluation serves the quality management and performance maintenance in a national as well as an international context and it serves the accordance of the university's research activities with the strategic planning.

The general measures to promote research at the Uni Graz are closely connected to the measures to support quality of research. During the process of developing the new tool "research evaluation", the university learned much about the different impact of the process for stakeholder and management, and we learned that the same concept does not fit for all units, because different quality cultures have to be taken into account. Some units have already developed an internal quality culture towards high quality research, these units do not need external control, but external support and feedback from peers. At best the recent research evaluation results in an (bottom-up developed) innovative and focused research strategy for the evaluation unit.

The more the evaluation shifted to future prospects, the more the units needed time to implement these changes and the more time was needed until results became visible. Even more time has to be given for the next cycle of an external evaluation.

References:

BMWFW: Universities Act 2002,
http://wissenschaft.bmwfw.gv.at/fileadmin/user_upload/Kasparovsky/E_UG.pdf, donwload 12.07.2026

Haakstad J., M. Frederiks, H. Keränen, J. Lanares, K. Levä, A. Priscariu, K. Hiltunen: Audit oft he University of Graz 2013. The Finnish Higher Education Council 6:2013

University of Graz: Satzungsteil Evaluierung (in German only); https://online.uni-graz.at/kfu_online/wbMitteilungsblaetter.display?pNr=2219007 donwload 12.07.2016

Discussion questions:

1 Is the outlined development and the strong focus on research plausible and comprehensible in your understanding?
2 Is the outlined research evaluation from your perspective an absolute academic necessity?
3 Is a less strictly regulated evaluation procedure appropriate to develop strategies linked to resource allocation? Would it be accepted in your culture, your system?

Please submit your proposal by sending this form, in Word format, by 25 July 2016 to QAForum@eua.be. The file should be named using the last names of the authors, e.g. Smith_Jones.doc. Please do <u>not</u> send a hard copy or a PDF file.