EUA is the representative organisation of universities and national rectors' conferences in forty-five countries across Europe. EUA's mission is to promote the development of a coherent system of education and research at the European level, acknowledging the diversity of its members and the importance of solidarity.

Through projects and services to members, EUA aims to strengthen institutional governance and leadership, and to promote partnership in higher education and research both within Europe, and between Europe and the rest of the world.

QUALITY CULTURE IN EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES: A BOTTOM-UP APPROACH

REPORT ON THE THREE ROUNDS OF THE QUALITY CULTURE PROJECT 2002 – 2006

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QUALITY CULTURE
IN EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES:
A BOTTOM-UP APPROACH

REPORT ON THE THREE ROUNDS OF THE
QUALITY CULTURE PROJECT

2002 – 2006

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FOREWORD

This report is the result of a four-year project, which involved 134 higher education institutions grouped in 18 networks. The major aim of the project was to identify how internal quality culture can be developed and embedded in institutions.

The project report highlights principles and good practices in this area and can be useful to a range of higher education actors: first and foremost, to the higher education institutions and their students but also to quality assurance agencies and governments.

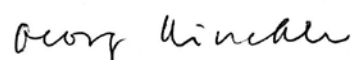There are many lessons that can be drawn from this work.

It is clear that grass-roots initiatives in higher education are often more effective than top-down directives. The sense of ownership and engagement that develops through grass-roots involvement is critical to success in higher education. This observation applies to public authorities and also, but to a lesser extent, to higher education leadership: both have to provide the appropriate pre-conditions for quality culture to emerge and develop but they should not impose it by decree or pre-defining it without discussion with the academic community. The aim is to establish a quality culture that encompasses the whole institution in a consistent and integrative manner.

One of the most important debates in quality is whether the purpose of external evaluations is accountability or improvement. It is has been acknowledged that it is difficult to do both at the same time. Regardless of the merits of this observation, the introduction of internal quality processes provides an essential balance to the requirements of external accountability. Quality culture can serve to improve institutions: external evaluation procedures can serve to provide the required accountability to the public.

The project involved many different types of institution located in 36 countries in Europe. Legal frameworks vary significantly across such a broad geographical area. The maturity with which some institutions approach the topic of quality was evidently linked to their higher degree of autonomy and provides further confirmation of the integral link between quality and institutional autonomy.

This project has had a very important impact on the discussions linked to the Bologna process and the objective of creating a Europe of knowledge. It demonstrated to policy makers that higher education institutions are aware of and committed to the need to demonstrate and improve their quality and that, as stated by the Berlin Communiqué, "the primary responsibility for quality lies with higher education institutions".

EUA will continue to work in the area of quality and provide its members with activities aimed at improving their institutional effectiveness. Currently, these activities include the Institutional Evaluation Programme (which has evaluated about 150 institutions in 36 countries), a series of management and leadership seminars, a project examining the preconditions for promoting creativity in higher education and a range of projects on doctoral education and joint degree programmes.

Professor Georg Winkler
EUA President

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Steering Committee

Where no mention is made of a specific round, the member participated in all three rounds of the project.
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Ferdinand Devinsky, Comenius University, Slovakia (QC I)
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Ivan Ostrovský, Comenius University (QC II and QC III)
Dirk Van Damme, University of Gent and VLIR, Belgium (QC I)

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1   Context

The "quality assurance movement" that emerged in the mid nineties and saw the establishment of national quality assurance agencies across Europe, has been growing for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is that it is seen as a condition for creating the European Higher Education Area.

Quality, however, was initially slow to emerge as key to the success of the Bologna process. As ministers met to take stock of progress and define mid-term objectives (Prague 2001, Berlin 2003 and Bergen 2005), the issue of quality has grown in importance and risen to the fore of the ministerial agenda to become one of the first policy objectives.

The challenge at European level – whether concerning the quality debate or other key Bologna issues – is to create a European higher education area that combines diversity across – and within – forty-five countries while adhering to unifying principles and values. The challenge for higher education institutions is to take an active role in order to ensure that academic (rather than bureaucratic) principles and values are respected and the convergence process is correctly implemented, in a way that benefits universities and their stakeholders.

Beyond national diversity, a consensus has emerged among all key policy actors – including higher education institutions – on the role that higher education institutions can and should play in the construction of Europe. This aspiration implies vesting greater responsibilities in higher education institutions and should translate into improved strategic leadership and management, in part through the development of an internal quality culture. It is in this way that higher education institutions will justify and expand their autonomy, increase their credibility and improve their capacity to engage critically in the democratic debate.

The Quality Culture Project was launched in 2002 in order to address these issues. The Project is part of the response that the European University Association developed to increase the capacity of universities to meet the accountability needs and the heightened demands that higher education improve its level of quality with fewer resources.

The choice of title for this project – "Quality Culture" – was deliberate. It is often the case that when speaking of quality, it is easy to revert back to such managerial concepts as quality control, quality mechanisms, quality management, etc. These concepts, however, are not neutral. They convey a technocratic and top-down approach that will backfire in academic settings. The self-perception of academics as successful professionals who are committed to excellence means that they dislike being managed.

Therefore, the term "culture" was chosen to convey a connotation of quality as a shared value and a collective responsibility for all members of an institution, including students and administrative staff. Quality culture signals the need to ensure a grass-roots acceptance, to develop a compact within the academic community through effective community building, as well as a change in values, attitude and behaviour within an institution.

It is essential that the rectoral team create the appropriate conditions for the academic community to deliver quality provision and that attention be paid to developing an agreed institutional profile, the commitment to institutional goals and objectives by the university community, and clearly defined and agreed objectives and strategies to meet them.

1.2   Project aims

The aims of the Quality Culture Project were to:

■ Increase awareness for the need to develop an internal quality culture in institutions, and pro-

mote the introduction of internal quality management to improve quality levels

- Ensure the wide dissemination of existing best practice in the field

- Help institutions approach external procedures of quality assurance constructively

- Contribute to the Bologna process by increasing the attractiveness of European higher education

1.3 Selection of participating institutions

A total of nearly 300 institutions from 40 countries (some of which could not receive Socrates funding and were unable to find a source of support) applied to this project over the three rounds.

These came from the major regions of Europe, although the largest number was from the Northern reaches of Europe. In terms of institutional size, the mean student enrolment was nearly 18 000 students, with the smallest institution enrolling 315 students and the largest 100 000.

The Steering Committee selected institutions in terms of the quality of their applications (which were rated by an independent consultant) and with the aim of creating networks that would be balanced in geographical terms and institutional size and type (i.e., universities and other types of higher education institutions).

It is worth noting that a significant number of institutions that had participated in the early rounds were interested doing so again. The Steering Committee decided to give priority to first-timers but did not exclude out of hand repeat applications.

1.4 Project method

In each round, the participating institutions were grouped into six networks focused on specific themes (cf. Annex 7.1).

Each institution was represented by one senior member who was responsible for organising the

project in his or her institution. They attended the various network meetings and prepared several documents: institutional presentations, analyses and action plans.

The coordinators were responsible for leading the work in their network, organising three network meetings, supporting the universities in developing appropriate action plans, and – following a template provided by the Steering Committee – writing the network reports. They met with the project Steering Committee twice (at the start and at the mid-point of the project) and provided the EUA Secretariat with the key documents as they were being produced.

The Steering Committee provided oversight and general guidance, monitored the progress of the whole project and is responsible for the project report.

The EUA Secretariat developed the Guidelines and the template for the network reports and provided support to the network coordinators by clarifying the conceptual framework and discussing with them all aspects of the project.

Each network held three meetings, giving rise to 18 network reports. The first meeting provided an opportunity for understanding each partner's institutional and national setting. The second meeting discussed the results of the institutional analysis and their implications (institutional action plans) while the third discussed the draft network reports.

Thus, the meetings were based on three sets of documentation (institutional reports, institutional analyses and action plans), which were the result of broad internal consultation within each partner institution to ensure their validity and to embed the project results. The network reports indicate that institutions gained valuable returns on efforts invested.

All networks have followed the EUA Guidelines for the project, albeit with some modifications, and greatly appreciated their constructiveness and dynamism. One network noted that "the project could act effectively as a form of external

review but with a developmental enhancement focus rather than the usual negative implications associated with an externally imposed system of audit".

The network reports clearly show that new partnerships among participating universities have been created within the groups, some of which set up "list serves" and newsletters to communicate on a regular basis. All networks reported that the spirit of partnership that emerged through their work demonstrated the success of the networks in establishing safe and supportive communities in which to discuss common problems.

Thus, it is hoped that the working method for the project can be used as a model for developing quality in institutions. The major lesson from this project is to avoid imposing quality processes but to give space for the academic community to take hold of this concept, discuss it, define it and shape the processes that will contribute to institutional improvement and effectiveness.

1.5 How to read this report

This report builds upon a great number of documents: the 134 action plans provided by each institution, the 18 network reports drafted by the coordinators and assistant coordinators, and the final reports written for the first two rounds of the project.

In addition, this project was the counterpart and complement of EUA's Institutional Evaluation Programme. It is worth noting that the Institutional Evaluation Programme was invited to conduct the review of the seven universities in Ireland in 2004. These reviews focused on the universities' internal quality arrangements and provided EUA with a major opportunity to examine in detail the results of a unique grass-roots process in developing and embedding a quality culture in higher education institutions. This life-size experiment constituted an exceptional opportunity to understand better the obstacles and success factors in introducing

internal quality processes and has allowed EUA to reflect further on these important issues.

Thus, in highlighting the key findings identified by the networks, this report is an attempt to present the combined learning of EUA and the 134 institutions involved in this project over the past four years. The choice was made, in this report, to focus on the generic rather than the thematic aspects of quality culture in order to achieve a broad understanding of this area. Readers interested in a specific network report can contact the EUA secretariat.

II. DEFINING QUALITY AND INTRODUCING A QUALITY CULTURE

While the point of departure of the Quality Culture Project is 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 based on the list below.

The reason for this 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)

1.1   Defining quality

The networks in the first two rounds devoted considerable time discussing a definition of quality. The results of their discussions were confirmed by the third round partners.
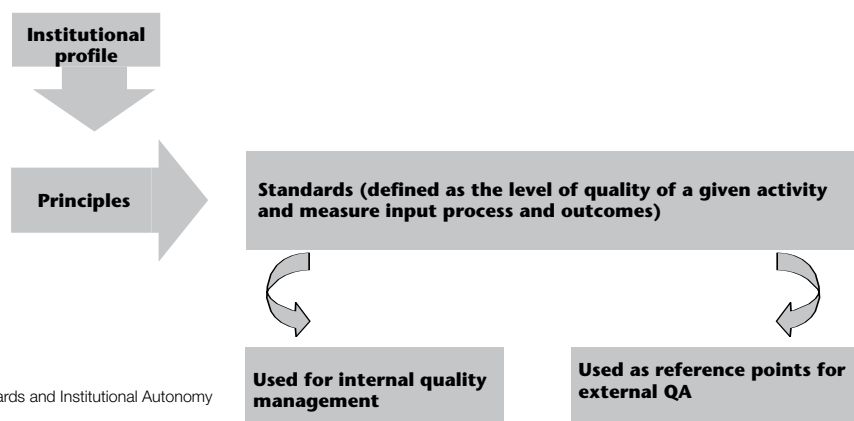
Most networks referred to the heterogeneity within the networks: each included institutions of different types, mission, size, age and geographic location. This diversity led the networks to agree that definitions of quality are culturally sensitive and that quality is a relative concept.

This is a key finding that will become increasingly important to consider in the context of the increased diversification of higher education institutions across Europe. It has implications for the ways in which external quality assurance needs to be carried out.

It seems that it would not be feasible, or indeed desirable, to apply a shared definition of quality to institutions that have different individual missions and that evaluation against a specific mission (fitness for/of purpose) is the realistic way to ensure that all institutions adhere to a shared quality agenda.

While an approach based on standards could lead to external quality assurance procedures that ensure compliance with standards, a fitness for purpose approach implies generally an improvement orientation: quality assurance must take as its point of departure the mission and objectives of a specific institution and recommend improvement in order to achieve the set goals.

If, however, compliance with standards is a policy goal, then it is up to the institution to identify its standards in accordance with its specific mission and goals as described in the following figure:

Institutional profile

Principles

Standards (defined as the level of quality of a given activity and measure input process and outcomes)

Used for internal quality management

Used as reference points for external QA

Figure 1: Standards and Institutional Autonomy

Indeed, in spite of the lack of a shared definition across the networks, all participants agreed that the challenge of defining quality across such a diverse group of institutions is not an obstacle for defining quality in each institution. Internal discussions of quality are helpful as a point of departure in order to develop awareness of the need to address this issue and create an internal quality culture.

The networks discussed different factors that influence the institutional definition of quality as well as some generic characteristics of quality. The different definitions or characterisations of quality that were discussed split approximately into two bundles: approaches that focus on quality of outputs vs. approaches that focus on quality of processes in developing, implementing and improving institutional activities.

In the outputs perspective, institutions examine the outcomes of university activity, such as teaching and research, and the extent to which set goals are achieved. Thus quality as outputs is associated with definitions of quality as excellence, fitness for purpose, "customer" satisfaction or effectiveness.

In the process perspective, institutions examine the activities that lead to the desired outcomes, such as governance structures, decision-making processes or administrative procedures. Quality as a process is thus associated with values, internal processes and effectiveness.

The choice of quality definitions changed over the three rounds of the project. While in the first round most of the networks tended to view quality in the outputs perspective – and defined quality mostly as fitness for purpose – in the second round, both perspectives were equally discussed. The third round, in contrast, tended to see quality in the process perspective. These differences may be attributed to the fact that each round made an effort to contribute to this discussion while taking into account the early stages of the project.

Obviously, it is important to look at input, output and process in order to get a full picture of an institution's position. Thus, there was broad consensus that if quantitative indicators are used (for the measurement of inputs/outputs) these must be balanced with qualitative measures (process). This helps to put the former into their appropriate context and to understand their meaning.

The dynamic aspect of quality – in both the outputs and the process perspective – is a dimension which was pointed out in all three rounds. Thus a focus on quality should always be to enhance and improve the current status and develop the systems that assure it. This means that quality is an ongoing exercise: it is not a state that is reached once and for all but one that needs to be pursued continuously.

2.2 Defining and introducing quality culture

The previous section summarised the discussion on defining quality. The networks were also asked to reflect on definitions of "quality culture" and how to introduce it. As will be seen below, they considered the structural and organisational issues that can nurture an institutional quality culture.

2.2.1 Defining quality culture

In addition to being asked to define quality, the networks were also invited to discuss how to define quality culture. However, only a few networks across the three rounds explicitly discussed definitions of quality culture perhaps because most network members took that definition for granted. Those networks that defined the concept came approximately to the same conclusion. As one network expressed it, quality culture refers to an organisational culture that intends to enhance quality permanently and is characterised by two distinct elements: on the one hand, a cultural/psychological element of shared values, beliefs, expectations and commitment towards quality and, on the other hand, a structural/managerial element with defined processes that enhance quality and aim at coordinating individual efforts. Thus, the cultural/psychological element refers back to individual staff members while the structural/managerial refers back to the institution.

These two aspects, however, are not to be considered separately: both elements must be linked through good communication, discussion and participatory processes at institutional level.

It is important to note that the network reports identified institutional autonomy and external accountability procedures as two factors that determine the maturity of a quality culture in an institution.

Particularly, external quality assurance procedures oscillate from approaches based on "excellence" to "fitness for purpose" and from "basic standards" to "consumer satisfaction" (Van Damme 2003). Van Damme argues that this pendulum movement is in perpetual motion and illustrates it in the following figure:
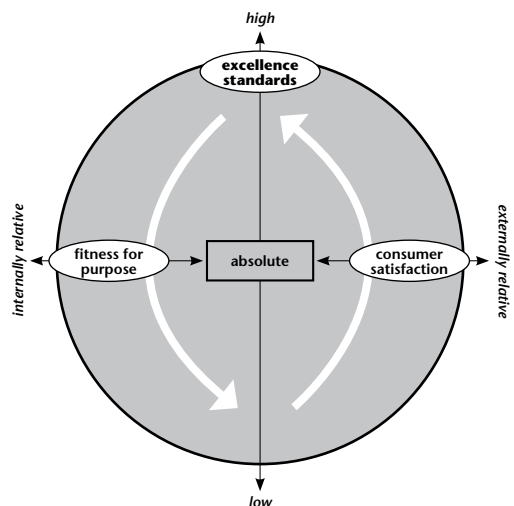

Figure 2: Mapping quality definitions

The networks agreed that:

■ Institutions characterised by a mature and successful quality culture are usually those that enjoy a high degree of autonomy.

■ Where external accountability procedures stress institutional responsibility and de-emphasise compliance with standards, institutional quality cultures are more mature and effective.

These are key findings that should inform quality assurance policies and the legal higher education frameworks. They should also suggest to institutions the importance of developing their own internal processes in order to avoid being buffeted by the QA policy pendulum swings identified by Van Damme.

2.2.2 Introducing a quality culture

The network reports gave concrete recommendations and examples of good practice on how to introduce quality culture in an institution. Mainly four features of this process were identified: strategy, leadership, engagement, and feedback. These features are discussed in more detail in Chapter III.

For now, it is important to stress that the introduction of quality culture requires an appropriate balance of top-down and bottom-up aspects. It is noteworthy that, while the first round participants discussed at length the leadership's role in introducing and promoting quality culture, participants in the second and third rounds gave greater emphasis to the importance of having a grass-roots ownership of the process. It could be argued that the second and the third rounds have successfully built on the experience of Round I of the project and that more universities have thus committed to the introduction of a quality culture.

In order to embed a quality culture in an organisation and make it operational several factors have been identified and discussed in the networks. These factors include the structures of the organisation as well as processes and procedures related to quality culture.

In any case, a crucial factor and indeed the starting point of the development of a quality culture is the mission of the institution. The networks insisted time and again on the importance of basing and grounding a quality culture in the mission of the institution. A mission reflecting clear institutional priorities helps the institution to develop a strategy for quality culture and to embed it (cf. Chapter III).

2.2.3 Embedding a quality culture

While it is important to introduce quality culture sensitively, it is also important to monitor and evaluate it continually. Quality culture is fragile and very sensitive to over-bureaucratisation.

This consideration will become evident in the discussion about the staffing of quality units and the processes that are being implemented in many institutions (cf. Chapter III).

Linked to the issue of bureaucratisation and in order to be effective in improving quality, a commitment to quality culture requires a continuous investment in financial and human resources.

Several networks came to the conclusion that quality improvement is a costly exercise. These costs have to be seen as an investment for the institutions. Therefore, they need to be balanced against the results: they must be commensurate to the investment made and must not divert resources from the main activities of the institution.

The networks noted that while a high level of quality cannot be achieved with little funding, the costs related to neglecting quality must also be recognised. In the long run lack of appropriate funding for quality measures could lead to the institutional mission remaining unfulfilled. It could also mean that its position in quality league tables is compromised. Therefore, investment in quality is seen as indispensable for higher education institutions and, in order to minimise cost, the key question to ask is: what can be done better, rather than what additional activities should be embarked upon.

III. IMPLEMENTING QUALITY CULTURE: GOOD PRACTICE

Higher education institutions are characterised by the distribution of power and authority, the ambiguity and complexity of goals and purposes, and outcomes that are difficult to measure. Therefore, the challenge in terms of implementing a quality culture is two-fold:

■ To systematise standards and operations across an institution while taking account of differences among disciplines or between the administrative and academic units.

■ To develop a set of criteria and measures that captures successes and failures in a constructive and transparent manner.

The network reports highlighted the need to pay attention to process as an essential precondition for a successful introduction and embedding of an internal quality culture.

The following chapter discusses in further detail the recommendations and good practice from the network reports related to the implementation of quality culture. The chapter also highlights some selected concrete good practice examples from a few participating institutions in the Quality Culture Project.

3.1 Strategy, policy and planning

Strategic planning has been identified as a main factor for the successful embedding of quality culture in an institution. Indeed, developing a quality culture in a strategic vacuum may become a pointless exercise that can be de-motivating. Therefore, the institutional strategy can serve as a catalyst for quality culture and give it a strategic direction by embedding a definition of quality within it. This approach would ensure that the definition of quality that is chosen and the ways to achieve it are coherent with the specific institutional mission.

The discussion of institutional strategies highlighted three main aspects: the substance of the strategy, the process of strategic development and the challenges of implementing a long-term strategy.

3.1.1 Substance

The substance refers to the specific content of the strategy, which, as has been mentioned, must be linked to the institutional mission in order to ensure coherence. Elements of the strategy include examining the position of the institution in its environment, defining the particular niche and profile of the institution and coordinating action between the different levels and functions of the institution.

A specific challenge for higher education institutions lies in the ambiguity and the versatile aspect of institutional missions, which might lead to a tension or a contradictory strategy as, for instance, when no heed is given to achieving an appropriate balance between teaching and research. Therefore it is important that the institutional leadership formulates, discusses and communicates clear priorities and guidelines and includes them in the institutional overall policy plan.

To the extent, then, that an institutional strategy (that comprises a quality strategy) is a requirement, a useful point of departure can be a SWOT analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the institution and defines its mid-term and long-term goals. Therefore clarity about the institutional mission and position is a prerequisite for strategic planning in order to avoid dealing with contradictory or unrealistic aims.

3.1.2 Process

Several networks recommended setting clear priorities due to the impossibility of achieving all desirable goals at the same time, given limited financial and human resources. In this respect, it is crucial that all strategic and implementation plans include clear schedules for the different stages of the process.

As one network report noted, developing and implementing a shared and coherent strategy can be a major challenge for higher education institutions that have a long tradition of decentralisation. Therefore, the process will only be successful if there is a widespread and shared vision among members of the institution or at the very least a sufficient degree of agreement about overarching institutional aims. It is obvious that institutional settings, size, historical legacy, current legal frameworks and financial resources play an important role in this respect. Small institutions of easily manageable size find it easier to create a shared 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.

It is interesting to note that third round participants put most emphasis on the involvement and participation in the strategic process of all groups in the institution, especially that of external stakeholders. Stakeholder involvement was also discussed in the first two rounds; greater emphasis, however, was placed upon aspects related to the substance and the follow-up of the strategy. In terms of strategic content it seemed that research topics were most open to the consideration of stakeholders' feedback in the formulation of a strategy.

Strategic Development Process

Creating a quality culture in a traditional and well established university was not an easy project. When ITU decided to restructure its research, education and service to society functions and implement extensive reforms in all areas and levels in 1996, one of the most important goals was to create an internal quality culture. It took almost three years to get the bottom-up processes started and to combine them with top-down processes to realise the goals and then implement the reforms. In 1999, when many departments decided to seek international accreditation, it was clear that the idea of "becoming a global institution" has been widely accepted, especially by the young academic staff. More than 650 academic staff members out of approximately 900 were involved in this Continuous Quality Improvement project.

A strategic plan was prepared and sent to all members of the academic staff requesting their feedback. Copies were also sent to the deans of each faculty, the directors of each institute, and representatives of students and research assistants for evaluation and recommendations. The deans engaged their faculties in discussions of the report, and the steering committee organised a meeting with student and research assistant representatives. The draft was further improved based upon their feedback. This was presented to the Rector who submitted it for final ratification to the Senate. The final report was placed on the University web site for easy access by the academic and administrative staff and students.

The report also included a SWOT analysis on eight different functional areas of the university. The SWOT analysis was extensively reviewed by the internal stakeholders and their comments were incorporated into its final version. After this analysis, ITU started a formal development process of a strategic plan. This project was designed under the guidance of experts in the ITU Faculty of Management. These experts are well known in the industry for their contributions to the strategic planning of corporate structures. The coordinators of the strategic planning project prepared a draft work plan which was discussed and revised at several meetings in the Rectorate.

The eight SWOT analyses were reviewed in detail and reduced to a single general SWOT analysis incorporating all functions of the university in order to develop the strategic plan of the university for the next five years. The general SWOT analysis was first exposed to a prioritisation process by the self-evaluation steering committee and the Rectorate. Later a focus group meeting was organised with twenty-seven participants composed of internal and external stakeholders. At the end of a day's work, the group formulated their results in the form of 32 strategic actions and 51 projects. Then the list of these strategic actions and projects were sent to the meeting participants, the deans, and department chairs for weighting and identifying high priority strategies and projects. The results of this analysis are processed for further development of the strategic plan by a team of experts from the ITU Faculty of Management.

Istanbul Technical University, Turkey

3.1.3 Challenges in implementing a long-term strategy

The network reports identified challenges and difficulties in implementing a strategy that are linked to institutional planning and decision making. Such difficulties occur because the internal processes are influenced and often constrained by external and internal factors such as policy frameworks, financial constraints or conflicting pressures and demands.

In order to deal more easily with a fast changing environment – especially because funding for higher education is increasingly scarce – some networks mentioned the value of long-term funding contracts with the state, which would lengthen the planning horizon of the institution and ensure sustainability of activities. The process of developing a contract gives the opportunity to all institutional members to contribute to its development and provides the leadership with a tool to steer the institution.

In a fast changing environment, however, the institution must carefully consider the advantages and disadvantages of such contracts, which might inhibit timely future developments. Specifically, very detailed contracts can present a problem and care must be taken to ensure that there is some leeway in allowing the institution to adapt to changing circumstances.

3.2   Structures

Higher education institutions can support a quality culture by providing appropriate structures within their organisation in order to facilitate and maintain the quality commitment of its members. As will be seen below, the networks discussed such issues as types of organisational structures, their degree of centralisation and internal communication.

3.2.1 Types of organisational structures

Several networks discussed the need for stable and durable organisational structures to assure quality. In this context, network partners discussed whether to create new units or rely on already existing structures. The use of available structures minimises work

by using established communication channels and drawing upon already recognised responsibilities.

While the institutions in the first round of the project tended to recommend creating new structures in order to deal more systematically with internal quality, the institutions in the later rounds tended to recommend using available structures. This evolution may reflect the fact that many new structures now exist in institutions to coordinate the internal quality processes and that institutions are becoming increasingly aware of the risk of over-bureaucratisation in this area.

Another related question that requires careful consideration is how to staff the quality units – with specialised or academic staff?

■ A category of "quality assurance professionals" is becoming increasingly common in many countries and it is tempting to hire them to staff these quality units. This can ensure professionalism and expertise but may also lead to a rift between the quality unit and the academic staff if the quality unit staff members are not firmly grounded in an academic culture.

■ An alternative solution is to staff the quality unit with academics and rotate them occasionally. Such staff rotation would ensure that the quality unit remains grounded in the university and is not perceived as the private domain of its staff.

■ It is important to note that when academics lead administrative services, the university often does not seem to recognise the need to have skilled administrative staff to support them appropriately. This situation may lead to over-bureaucratisation, with the administrative staff producing rules rather than services.

The ideal solution may be a combination of the two options, which would ensure skilled administrative support as well as academic engagement. This requires careful selection of the administrative staff and proper staff development in order to ensure their skills.

3.2.2 Degree of centralisation

A question, which has not been answered conclusively, is where to locate the units responsible for quality and if the central leadership should be responsible for them. A quality structure can be organised at the central institutional level but it can also be organised in a decentralised way, with each faculty or department having similar quality related structures. Each option has advantages and disadvantages:

■ Decentralised structures have the advantage of ensuring a greater sense of ownership locally and are more adapted to local circumstances but they could end up working at cross purposes in terms of the whole institution.

■ Centralised structures can bring greater coherence across the institution but may end up being too distant for an appropriate understanding of local conditions.

Obviously a consideration of the institutional size, culture and degree of faculty autonomy are important in deciding where to lodge these quality units.

In any case, whether centralised or decentralised, it is essential to consider how to minimise the potential downside of quality units. Because institutional members will not see quality as their individual responsibility they will tend to delegate it to the separate unit and, in so doing, hinder rather than foster the development of a quality culture thus preventing a wider ownership for quality. Since the hallmark of a stable quality culture is shared ownership by all, quality cannot and should not be confined to a unit alone.

3.2.3 Internal communication

In order to foster quality culture effectively, ensure the involvement of all and minimise the danger of isolating quality culture in a quality unit, an information and communications strategy was identified as an important factor.

When speaking of an information and communications strategy, it is crucial, however, to distinguish between information – which relates to facts – and communication – which relates to ideas and promotes exchange and discussions. To foster quality, both reliable information and exchange of ideas should be considered and approached in an inte-

grated fashion within the institution. In other words, effective communication relies on multiple communication channels and ensures feedback loops.

When first introducing quality culture, it is essential to discuss widely the reasons for doing so. Typically, the leadership is aware of the dangers of standing still in this area but the staff may not necessarily see this. Higher education institutions have had a long tradition of striving to be the best at what they do and use the informal mechanism of peer pressure to achieve this goal. The change from an informal and implicit to a formal and explicit quality culture is not always easy to understand and needs to be explained and discussed.

Similarly, when the processes are in place, information about and discussion of quality monitoring results are essential in generating confidence and credibility in the organisation.

3.3 Internal evaluation process and feedback loops

An increasing number of institutions are developing internal evaluations of programmes and activities. These usually include a self-evaluation that analyses performance against agreed goals and objectives and a peer review. Experience shows that it is best that the peer-review team includes mostly members from outside the institution and, when possible or appropriate, international experts.

As one network noted, (self) evaluations are of special importance to higher education institutions as they constitute an appropriate means of evaluating the performance of higher education institutions. While business enterprises have financial performance indicators at their disposal in order to assess the success of their operation, these indicators are not available for higher education institutions.

The evaluation processes should have consequences but it is important that these lead to improvement and are not conceived as control mechanisms or associated with punishment. Networks across the project emphasised that a controlling quality culture is incongruent with academic values. Indeed, as an "expert organisation", higher education institutions

need to motivate all their members through involving them in discussions of key decisions.

In addition, it is important to point out that if the academic community, including the students, do not see positive results from internal quality processes, discouragement and cynicism will set in and lead to an erosion of the quality culture that will be difficult to put right again.

Feedback loops and continuous evaluation of goals and processes are important features of a quality culture and an integral part of the strategic planning process. These processes allow the institution to learn from its experience, share good practices across faculties and minimise and correct mistakes.

The network reports, however, drew a very diverse picture of organisational decision-making and feedback loops in their institutions. While feedback loops are seen as an important feature of organisational decision making, some institutions are more advanced than others in this respect and still others are in the process of setting up or reforming their procedures.

In summary, five conditions that ensure that internally driven evaluation procedures support and enhance quality culture include:

■ Integrating the evaluation process 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.

■ Introducing transparent rules and procedures which are discussed and then clearly documented and communicated to the institutional community.

■ Designing evaluations in such a way as to discourage mere compliance with evaluation criteria and indicators but rather encourage adherence to the spirit of quality that forms the foundation of the indicators. Compliance with indicators will be detrimental to quality in the long run.

■ Involving academic and administrative staff, students and external stakeholders in internal procedures.

■ Implementing follow-up procedures 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 in these procedures and will not support them.

One network described a model of a decision-making process including a feedback loop. The process starts in its first phase with an awareness phase where the institution creates acceptance of a problem and rallies support for its solution. In the second phase, the concept phase, the senior leadership decides on a strategy and priorities for the following implementation phase, which involves actors at all levels of the institution. In the final phase the results of the implementation are evaluated and, if necessary, corrected.

Strategic Planning Cycle and Quality

To support top level strategies and policies, the Quality Manager implements a brand new planning process that consists of four main systems:

1. Forecasting System
This first step aims at helping each unit head to formulate this unit's mission. The mission developed also identifies the long-term goals of the unit. Thereafter, two additional documents are produced: The annual Strategic Action Plan, which emphasises the medium-term goals and is validated by the Steering Committee, and a software-based plan of the yearly operational short-terms goals and activities. Action Plans are discussed with appropriate stakeholders, depending on the nature of the unit: companies, students, foreign teachers, community…
The Forecasting System aims at sharing information at all levels inside the school and with external stakeholders. It is also helpful in clarifying the unit's mission and policies, together with actions to be implemented to improve the unit's functioning.

2. Piloting System
This second step aims at collecting all the data during the implementation phases to ensure that performance indicators will be available for the next cycles. The Piloting System results in Performance Scorecards that gather both quantitative and qualitative data connected to the unit processes. The performance indicators were derived from benchmarking with accreditation bodies, competitors, and through advice given by external partners, and improved internally in order to ensure the adequacy of the mission, while considering stakeholders' needs.

3. Reporting System
This third step consists of a synthesis of the data collected through the Piloting System. Normally each head of a unit organises meetings with his/her staff to ensure both communication and commitment to the conclusions drawn from the analysis of the data. As the Annual Activity Review will determine the following Strategic Action Plan, it is of utmost importance to involve a wide range of staff at this level, and discuss with them lessons learnt, strengths and weaknesses of the unit, which Strategic Action Plan targets have not been met and the reasons behind this.

4. Controlling System
The General Director and Quality Manager receive the Annual Activity Review and organise an internal audit. The Annual Activity Review is also presented to – and discussed with – the Steering Committee during this process, and is included in the Annual Report to the Board of Directors.

Lille Graduate School of Management (ESC Lille), France

Finally an increasing number of institutions are setting up partnerships of various kinds (e.g., joint degrees, associations of institutions in a region). These constitute a special challenge in terms of internal quality arrangements. It is helpful if partners agree on a common quality assurance philosophy, which takes into account differences among partners located in different countries. These differences can be legal or be imposed by the external quality frameworks. The quality of such partnerships can be increased if they are evaluated internally on a regular basis and are anchored in the institutional strategy.

3.4   Senior leadership

The institutional leadership has a central function in the implementation and operation of quality culture. It needs to explain why internal quality processes have become so essential and to create the conditions for introducing and embedding these processes by promoting a discussion of these issues, clarifying the responsibilities, developing – through consultation – transparent frameworks and ensuring the appropriate follow up of internally organised quality reviews.

Thus, the networks addressed four different functions as detailed below: setting the overall institutional strategy and coordinating its implementation, promoting and communicating quality culture, developing relations with the staff and monitoring quality.

3.4.1 Strategy and coordination

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. Leadership must also clarify roles and responsibilities within the institution and – in its coordinating role - maintain close cooperation with the leadership at faculty and departmental levels.

In this respect some networks made the distinction between leadership and management. While leadership sets the overall strategy and sets the direction for change (doing the right things), management executes the defined policies (doing things right). Leadership is particularly important at times of change while management, in effect, maintains the "ship" steady. This shows the necessity of both a strong and visionary leadership as well as a functional and well staffed administration.

The distinction between leadership and management is applicable to the issue of quality as well. In the words of one network, "quality commitment" must be distinguished from "quality management" and both combine to produce an effective quality culture:
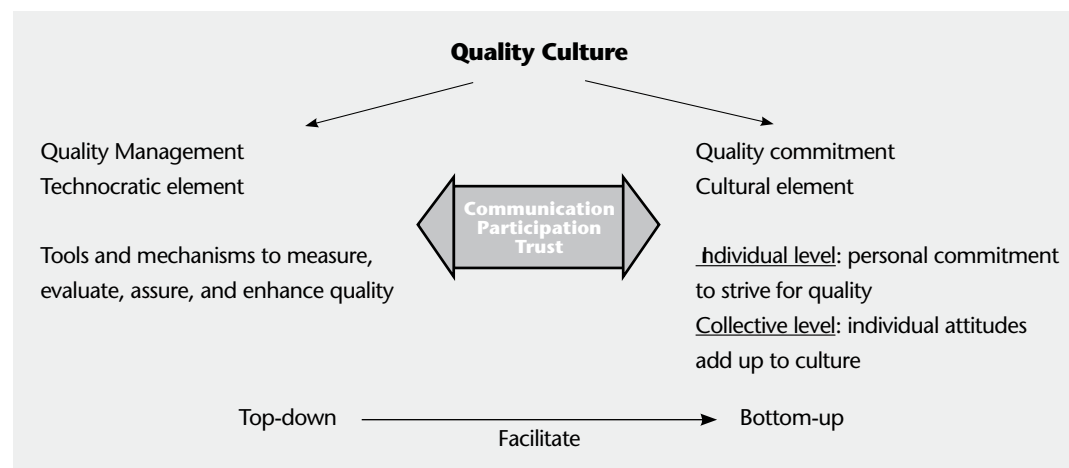
Figure 3: Quality Culture and Quality Management

Thus, "quality commitment" aims at creating the engagement of the community in order to meet and improve objectives and to ensure a bottom-up approach to quality. By contrast, quality management is the technocratic side of quality culture and refers to tools and mechanisms to measure, evaluate, assure and enhance quality. Both elements are essential and must be mediated by effective communication and participation.

3.4.2 Promotion and communication

After setting the basic strategy, the leadership's task is to promote and communicate this strategy to staff members, students and external stakeholders. Leadership involves promoting the vision and the notion of quality culture and raising the awareness of staff members in this regard. Some networks mentioned the importance of "champions" at senior level to promote the strategic agenda of the leadership and recommended including internal quality in the remit of one vice-rector.

Furthermore, the institutional leadership has to communicate quality goals and related decisions to staff, students and external stakeholders. The focus should not be solely and primarily on the communication of facts, but rather on conveying the values of quality related activities and thus giving meaning to the information.

Communication, however, is not merely internal. The role of leadership is also to represent the institution to the outside word, to communicate change processes externally, mobilise support for them and ensure accountability to the public.

In this context, it is worth pointing out that external communication will become increasingly important in Europe for a variety of reasons. The ageing of the population will lead to a shrinking of the student body and will increase competition among institutions. On the positive side, there are the Bologna process, which aims at increasing student mobility, and the attractiveness of European higher education, as well as the emergence of joint degrees and a variety of inter-institutional research and education partnerships.

All these developments necessitate that higher education institutions demonstrate their quality to external partners and to the wider public. Designing internal quality processes has become a required starting point for this demonstration.

3.4.3 Relationship between leadership and staff

A central issue in promoting quality culture is the relationship between the leadership and academic and administrative staff. The leadership needs to create conditions that are beneficial to quality culture and that ensure that staff members can perform to the best of their abilities in a way that is congruent with the values of the organisation. This involves good communication, motivation and providing opportunities for staff development, but also reducing the administrative workload for academic staff in order to create free time and resources for developing new ideas.

An open climate conducive to quality culture requires several elements:

- A follow-up to the results of internally organised reviews and a positive "can do" and proactive approach to problem solving rather than a punitive or merely reactive one.

- A balanced mix of top-down and bottom-up elements.

- Self-empowerment of staff: This approach relies on staff developing and improving their activities with the input and support of coordinating units.

Finally a leadership style conducive to quality culture requires the integration of all relevant members of the institution in the decision-making process, including academic and administrative staff and students. This will promote ownership and will contribute to mobilise "quality champions" across the institution.

3.4.4 Quality monitoring

The fourth central task of the senior leadership, which has been highlighted by many networks, is the monitoring of quality and the integration of quality monitoring results in the decision-making process of the institution. As already pointed out, the leadership has to ensure that monitoring has a clearly supportive and developmental role and is not considered as a controlling mechanism by staff members.

3.5   Academic and administrative staff

As members of knowledge-based organisations, academic and administrative staff members are the most important assets of higher education institutions. All networks recognised that staff members are the main actors in implementing any change process and anchoring it in the institutional reality. Similarly, their role in embedding a quality culture in their institutions is indisputable.

An active participation of staff members and giving them substantial responsibilities will increase their sense of ownership and will lead to positive changes and improvement (ownership by empowerment). In order to achieve this process, staff members have to be informed about the goals of the quality culture and be given the opportunity to discuss them. This implies developing processes and channels of communication that are both top-down and bottom-up.

In this context three issues have been discussed in the networks: recruitment of staff, staff development – on which most emphasis was put in the network reports – and incentive systems.

3.5.1 Staff recruitment

Networks noted difficulties with human resource policies and employment procedures and could not come to an agreement on these issues because of the diversity of national employment frameworks. While one network suggested redefining recruitment criteria in order to provide more incentives to hire academic staff with the profiles that fit the institutional mission, another network noted that none of the participating institutions saw a need to change recruitment procedures, even when these procedures are highly bureaucratic.

Irrespective of these challenges, it is important to note that institutional autonomy with regard to employment issues is limited in some countries. Changing recruitment procedures is particularly difficult in countries where academic staff members are civil servants and their appointment is controlled by the state. Nevertheless, institutions should carefully investigate the scope of their autonomy and make use of any opportunity available to develop their own initiatives.

Regardless of the scope of their autonomy, all higher education institutions need to develop a human resource strategy and make an effort to become attractive employers.

3.5.2 Staff development

Nearly all networks emphasised staff development as a major requirement for increasing the quality of their staff and embedding quality culture. Staff development schemes must include training and other measures (funding for participation in international conferences, etc.) to develop skills, strengthen accountability and quality awareness and increase the motivation of staff. Such training should be offered on a permanent basis.

At Copenhagen Business School (CBS), staff development is a crucial issue and it is increasingly becoming a standard requirement for departments and administrative divisions to address this matter in the light of the strategic objectives of CBS in the annual plans and reports. The cornerstone of the dialogue between the individual employee and the local leader or manager (e.g., Head of Department or Head of Office) is the annual appraisal interview.

The appraisal interview:
- Clarifies the connection between the employee's working effort and the goals and results of CBS
- Increases knowledge about the leader's or manager's and the employee's wishes and expectations in general, as well as understanding the present and future working tasks and conditions
- Secures a continuing competence development of the employee
- Gives the leader or manager greater knowledge about the working conditions of the employee
- Gives the leader or manager feedback
- Creates work related and organisational visibility in the organisation
- Creates a positive and dedicated working environment

The interview is a supplement to the daily work and personal contact between the leader or manager and the employee, and it is mandatory.

Copenhagen Business School, Denmark

Staff development should be designed specifically to the needs of the groups concerned, e.g., leadership development for members of the institutional leadership, including targeted training to increase the proportion of women in leadership posts, specific training for young researchers, training in new teaching methods for teaching staff and skills development for the administrative staff.

Support of Young Researchers

An independent university-funded programme is targeted towards training young researchers through active collaboration in research projects selected for their high scientific quality. Two-year fellowships are granted to young PhDs with the possibility of renewal for two additional years after passing through a competitive evaluation. This training programme also provides a channel for selecting strongly motivated and skilled researchers and faculty for hiring at Italian and foreign universities and research organisations.

A shared criterion for allocation of resources in all the above programmes is the evaluation of the scientific quality of the proposals submitted by the researchers. This is performed through a peer review process that makes use of on-line procedures for submission, anonymous evaluation by the referees and final selection of the proposals by a specially appointed committee.

University of Padua, Italy

Apart from the lack of resources, a challenge in the area of staff development that has been identified frequently is the low participation and even resistance of academic staff. Staff development is often seen as unnecessary, time-consuming and a means of control by the senior management. 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.

Finally, it is important to note that staff development schemes must be put in place at the same time as quality culture is introduced in order to signal that the new internal quality processes are not meant to be punitive.

3.5.3 Incentive systems

While all networks agreed that a punitive quality culture is counterproductive, some recommended using incentives in order to motivate staff. Institutions could consider if incentives of a financial or non-financial nature should be offered to enhance performance. These types of policies have advantages and disadvantages:

- Reward schemes and incentives can serve to motivate staff members and ensure the strategic direction of the institution by rewarding exceptional performance.

- Reward mechanisms might introduce a competitive culture within the institution. While this new culture might produce positive results in the short term, it might become, in the long term, counterproductive in that it prevents effective team work.

- Motivation based on external incentives is usually fragile and might lead to a dysfunctional quality culture by encouraging staff members to expect rewards before embarking on any new activity.

3.6   Students

Nearly all networks regarded student involvement as important for the development of an institutional quality culture. Their actual level of involvement, however, varies strongly across institutions, with the most common forms of involvement including filling out teaching evaluations and participating in decision-making bodies.

3.6.1 Students' evaluations

Teaching evaluations are widely regarded as an important tool to ensure the feedback of students on the teaching process. Such systems are already in place in many institutions, but their degree of formality and usefulness varies. Some of the obstacles that have been identified include:

- Making the evaluation questionnaire available on line only: this may restrict its access to students with computers.

- Leaving the administration of the questionnaire to the individual good will of teachers.

- Failing to put in place a process which guarantees students the confidentiality of the questionnaire.

- Failing to demonstrate that the questionnaires will result in concrete improvement.

Taking the following points into consideration could ensure a successful outcome:

- It is important that the questionnaires are designed in such a way as to yield clear and useful results.

- Many questionnaires designed to evaluate the teaching process are based on a faulty premise: they assume that the teaching process is one-way with the teacher educating the students. A more appropriate premise is to think of the teaching process as a transaction or a relationship in which both the teacher and students are actively involved. This premise allows for the design of a questionnaire that helps students reflect upon their own role and performance as well as

those of their teacher rather than focus solely on the teacher's performance.

■ It is essential that programme committees meet yearly to consider and discuss the consolidated results of these questionnaires and to prepare a report on the actions that have been taken to improve.

While the evaluation of teaching is essential, it is also important to seek students' evaluations of other components of their overall educational experience. These can be done through a variety of mechanisms:

■ Exit questionnaires of graduating students

■ Interview of students after they return from an international exchange programme

■ Interview of international students currently hosted by the institution

■ Evaluation questionnaires of specific student services (e.g., libraries, academic advising, careers office, etc.)

3.6.2 Student involvement in decision-making bodies

Network discussions revealed that student participation in decision-making bodies is usually relatively low and that institutions experience difficulties in increasing it. This is sometimes true even when the law mandates student participation. It is essential to identify the reasons for low student participation and to develop solutions if only because the recent trends towards considering students as paying customers or consumers will only contribute to exacerbate this tendency.

Most students are confronted with the notion of student participation for the first time when they enter higher education. They need to understand what it is about and the benefits it holds for them and the institution. They also need to develop a sense of ownership of the quality issues.

Some ideas to improve student participation include providing appropriate support for student groups, developing their leadership skills and their capacity to understand strategic institutional issues and involving them in the appropriate bodies where their contribution would be of added value.

Whatever solutions are selected, it is clear that institutions that are focused on students are more successful than others in this area. Such student-focused institutions offer an array of formal and informal events, services and activities that clearly signal to the student body that the institution's mission is to serve them as a priority. These institutions also offer their students opportunities to participate as volunteers in a range of student support services (e.g., as academic tutors, academic peer advisors, etc.)

Engagement of Students in Research Activity

An important aspect of the university's research strategy is motivation and engagement of students in research activity. The university considers the education of highly qualified young scientists (future university staff members) a prerequisite for the continuation and development of a good research tradition. In practice this policy is carried out by the faculties in numerous "student research circles" which are focused around various disciplines. The results of their activity are presented during Student Research Sessions twice a year and published in conference proceedings, while the highly acclaimed papers are also published in scientific journals. The scale of this activity is well reflected by the 350 presentations during the last Students Research Session in May 2005.

AGH University of Science and Technology, Poland

3.7   External stakeholders

Over the course of the project, there has been a clear tendency to acknowledge the increased need to consult external stakeholders as reflected in the emergence of governing boards that include them.

In general, the networks regarded as beneficial the cooperation with external stakeholders, especially in building industrial partnerships and in obtaining external opinions.

The networks warn, however, that institutions need to exercise caution: typically, external stakeholders (e.g., employers, politicians) have a short-term perspective and their advice might not always be in the long-term interest of the institution. In addition, one network stressed the need to uphold academic values and use the Magna Charta as a guiding document for industrial partnerships.

The links with external stakeholders should be in line with the institutional mission and thought through strategically. For example, the networks recommended a strong presence of external stakeholders in the strategic development process in such areas as industry relations and applied research. In other areas, such as teaching, the presence of external stakeholders was viewed with greater caution.

The third round put a special emphasis on the importance and value of involving alumni. The main areas where alumni involvement could be beneficial are partnerships with industry and advice on redesigning study programmes and courses as well as services. Here too, however, it is important to be cautious about the advice given by alumni: the more attached to the institution they are, paradoxically, the more inclined they are to resist change. They would rather leave things as they remember them.

3.8   Data collection and analysis

The issue of information was discussed widely across the networks and was considered as important. As was noted frequently, however, many institutions seem to identify the issue of data collection and information systems as an area of weakness. As a demonstration of this point, while much progress was noted over the three rounds in respect of many themes in the project, the issue of data collection and analysis received most attention in the second round of the project. By contrast, the first round partners simply acknowledged the deficit in this regard while in the third round nearly all networks reported that not enough attention was given to these questions.

As will be discussed below, the three main aspects that have been discussed included collection of data and indicators, the internal analysis of data, and integrated data and information systems.

3.8.1 Collection of data and indicators

Before collecting data, its scope and purpose needs to be carefully defined. In terms of quality processes, it is important to find reliable quantitative and qualitative indicators for measuring quality in the institution. 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 but also in relation to subjects and knowledge areas.

While lack of data collection characterises many institutions, at the other extreme, some institutions have put in place processes that have led to data overflow and increased workloads that are associated with their collection. This may produce resistance from staff members, especially when the value of the exercise is not clear and there is no consistent follow up. The recommendation is to restrict the amount of data collected to clearly defined goals.

One network described three key requirements for collecting data:

■ Regular collection and analysis of data and dissemination of the results

■ The need for standardised data collection to enable inter- and intra-institutional analysis and benchmarking

■ Recognition of external standards and reference points

Evaluation of Research Quality and Reviews

At the Rovira i Virgili University there are two mechanisms for reporting and reviewing the progress and quality of research activities. The first relies on the evaluation of research groups and uses the web as a means for reporting individual results. The second is based on the annual aggregate report of research results published by the university.

The evaluation of research groups is based upon several key elements:
■ Agreement of the research community on the criteria to be used and the parameters of the evaluation
■ Communication and dissemination of the criteria to the whole research community
■ Strict application of the criteria to all research groups
■ Total transparency of all research groups. The results are available to all applicants and posted on the web
■ Link between the evaluation process and the support received by the research group
■ Transparency on the support received by every group

The annual consolidated report of research results is comprehensive and includes all the results obtained by all departments. So far, it has been published in a book but the next issue will also be available in an electronic version.

Rovira i Virgili University, Catalonia, Spain

3.8.2 Data analysis and integrated information systems

Data analysis has been identified by many networks as the basis for strategic planning. Therefore, it is necessary to have processes in place that provide reliable and comparable data. These data can then be used for internal and external benchmarking.

The organisational structure has been identified as an important factor of how information is processed within the institution. Central data processing is more complicated where faculties have great autonomy.

A possible solution is to have an 'institutional research office' that is centrally located and serves all faculties and the central leadership. This office (distinct from a research management office) is responsible for data management and analysis.

Ideally, higher education institutions should have integrated information systems that help them to collect data, link different databases and disseminate and make available information to the members of the institution. While there is a clear trend to introduce integrated information systems, these kinds of information systems do not exist yet in many higher education institutions.

An Integrated Research Information System

The integrated network system at the University of Udine was created to organise information concerning research and technology transfer in order to have a clear and organic framework of information. The need for a more efficient system than the traditional databases directed the organisation of the project and led to the development of automated archives.

The main aims of the project are:

To integrate information sources
Research archives will be integrated in order to allow combined access to resources that are available in different databases in order to guarantee correct and exhaustive data.

To gather data
New archives will be created in order to have access to data that is now available only in paper format. Moreover new archive databases will be developed and implemented in order to guarantee an easier use of instruments and information.

To provide access through web networks
Uniform web intranet access will allow consultation of all available archives and equipment. Intranet, Extranet and Internet will guarantee access to the portal. Control and security policies will regulate access to the system; rules differ according to category of users.

To provide intelligent interface in order to recover information
Data will constitute a wide and useful source of knowledge and it will grow and follow the development of the University and its research activities. The system will provide:
- synthetic and high level configurations of data
- filters and classifying processes to select information
- a personalised access to the system, according to the interests and goals of the research users

The system is not only meant to be a support for data management activities, it aims to become an instrument of synthesis and information management concerning all the University's activities: strategic organisation of the institution, management of research projects, didactic activities and advanced services provided for external users.

University of Udine, Italy

IV. THE IMPACT OF THE PROJECT

As mentioned in the introduction, the hallmark of the project was its grass-roots model. This was illustrated by the fact that the networks were given ample room to define all aspects of the topic. This approach exemplifies the way that EUA usually works with its members but it was also an indication that there was no prior research that had been done in the area and that – at the project launch in 2002 – there was no systematic knowledge of the existing practices in internal quality. Thus, a major consequence of the project was to fill this knowledge gap.

The fact that institutions were asked to analyse their own situation and come up with action plans required that, at the end of the Quality Culture Project, EUA inquire about the progress of implementing quality culture in the participating institutions in order to measure the institutional impact of the project. A questionnaire was sent to the 90 institutions that participated in the first two rounds to assess how the project affected them (cf. Appendix 3 for the questionnaire). The third round institutions were not polled because, at the time of writing, it was too soon to measure the project's impact on their institutions. EUA received 47 responses, a response rate of more than 50 per cent.

4.1 Objectives in participating in the project

The results of the questionnaire revealed that institutions had different objectives for participating in the project. The objectives that were mentioned, by order of frequency, included:

- To raise awareness for the need to foster a quality culture among the members of the institution

- To develop a quality strategy

- To implement an evaluation system, either internal or external

- To introduce quality culture especially in the two main areas of teaching and research by improving the quality of education and study programmes and research activities.

4.2 Implementing a quality culture

In terms of specific follow-up activities, institutions mentioned the identification of performance indicators, benchmarking and the introduction of (programme) evaluation schemes.

The responses to the questionnaire showed that nearly all institutions implemented their action plans in all faculties. While institutions have chosen a variety of implementation strategies with different goals and phases, the main strategy that was adopted was the establishment of a working group of academics and internal stakeholders to develop proposals for the implementation steps and to coordinate the process. This strategy was validated by the relevant committees and the institution at large in order to ensure its acceptance.

Furthermore the institutions frequently mentioned the following activities:

- information of members of the institution about the new strategy and planned reforms

- self evaluation of the institution

- staff development and training

Although most institutions evaluated their implementation progress positively and responded that large parts of their set objectives have already been achieved, they acknowledged the challenges that lie ahead in implementing a quality culture. The most prominent challenge, which is reported by several institutions, is to ensure the commitment and ownership of the quality process by academic and administrative staff and the resistance to any change often caused by defending traditions.

In addition, it was also noted that quality improvement is a continual process that does not have a defined end but must constantly strive towards better quality. Therefore, the lack of a clear end point makes it difficult to measure impact.

Most institutions, however, noted that they considered achieving some set of indicators as a sign of success of the reforms. Furthermore the acceptance and awareness of quality cultures and positive evaluations were often viewed as a sign of success.

One university circulated its network report to the quality officers in all the other universities in the country and asked them to fill in a survey, which resulted in a booklet on student services, after workshops and an experts' conference were held and a consultation process took place on the interim report (IUQB 2006).

Regarding the question of who in the institution is involved in developing quality culture, more than half of the respondents mentioned a vice-rector.

About a third of the institutions employ a quality manager.

4.3   Evaluating the project

The questionnaire also asked participants to evaluate the Quality Culture Project. In general, the project was judged very positively by the participants. In particular, the institutions rated very highly the exchange with partner universities from across Europe enabling them to discuss quality related issues and to exchange good practice.

The institutions also valued the institutional strand of the project. They were asked to carry out internal discussions and a SWOT analysis and develop an action plan. They found that the internal discussions served as a good platform to start or to develop an internal quality process and to trigger a change process.

Boğaziçi University, Turkey

The discussions within the institution were excellent opportunities to bring quality issues into the agenda of the institution … The project led a large group of stakeholders to concentrate on institutional objectives for which normally no time was allocated before.

Closely related to the support of the internal process is the desire of many institutions for a follow-up meeting in order to evaluate the process of quality culture implementation together with the network partners. Such a meeting would have supported the internal implementation in a stronger way. Some institutions would also have appreciated more concrete help from the project in implementing an internal quality culture and one institution regretted that its participation was confined to only one round, which curtailed the full impact of the project.

V. CONCLUSIONS

5.1   Key learning

Based on the network reports, it is clear that the network discussions have been rich and useful and that participating institutions have demonstrated great enthusiasm for and commitment to this project.

Networks identified the principles, goals and structures needed as well as the gaps in university provision (e.g., lack of central research management office, of institutional data, staff development or internal and external communication strategy).

Their conclusions point to the following issues:

- As a multi-faceted concept, quality is difficult to define and must be contextualised.

- A higher degree of institutional autonomy translates into a more mature and effective internal quality culture and is associated with a definition of quality as improvement. Less autonomous institutions have a narrow perspective that is confined to accreditation and lead to a compliance-driven, bureaucratic and less effective internal quality culture.

- Agreement on a formative rather than a punitive approach to quality culture and a stress on staff development schemes.

- Appreciation of the central role students can play in quality culture.

- Emphasis on the external stakeholders' role in quality culture, while stressing the need to set appropriate boundaries on their relationship with the institution.

- Success factors for effectively embedding a quality culture include the capacity of the institutional leadership to provide room for a grass-roots approach to quality (wide consultation and discussion) and to avoid the risk of over-bureaucratisation. To use a metaphor favoured by the chair of the Steering Committee, Henrik Toft Jensen, all cathedrals have the same architectural components (e.g., spires, columns, etc) but each is decorated in a different way.

5.2   Next steps

Overall, the participants were satisfied with the Quality Culture project and its outcomes. Thus, EUA will continue to offer such projects to its members and the European higher education community. The next steps for EUA in the quality area involve two initiatives. These are the European QA Forum and the Creativity Project.

5.2.1 The European QA Forum

The EUA's initiative for an annual European QA Forum grew out of the observation that discussions about QA procedures are taking place in the confines of some countries but not at European level. European QA discussions are limited, on the one hand, to QA agencies benchmarking their procedures and, on the other hand, to higher education institutions discussing among themselves trends in higher education at the European or international level and the implications of these trends for quality assurance.

Therefore, it seemed important to bring together these two constituencies to discuss how QA procedures should evolve and adapt to emerging higher education trends. The proposal for a forum was included in the QA text adopted by the ministers in Bergen and the first European QA Forum will take place in November 2006 and will focus upon internal quality processes.

5.2.2 The Creativity Project

The major concern that started developing toward the end of the Quality Culture Project centred on the risk that internal quality processes – even when they are developed in the right way – may end up as internal bureaucratic processes. In addition, when QA agencies start encouraging, designing or perhaps imposing internal quality processes, will they miss the grass-roots elements that were so fundamental to the Quality Culture Project? In other words, will the sometimes bureaucratic external quality assurance policies be transferred to the universities and create a bureaucracy within?

In order to remind the higher education community, including the QA agencies, of the need to

promote creativity and avoid over-regulation, the EUA developed a new project – creativity in higher education.

The starting point of this project is that Europe's universities can contribute to the construction of European society by strengthening their capacity for creativity and innovation. This can be achieved through optimal governance, structures and decision-making processes; cooperation with stakeholders; students' involvement; a strong link between research and education; appropriate public policy and a culture of risk-taking.

This project aims to identify a range of conditions, success factors and good practices that enhance the creativity and innovative potential of higher education institutions.

The project is targeted at higher education institutions and their external stakeholders, i.e., academic and administrative staff, the senior leadership, students, industry, employers, the local community and governmental authorities. The project is also targeted at quality assurance agencies, few of which take into consideration explicitly the creativity potential of higher education. The project should help to identify how quality assurance can contribute to raising the creativity and innovation level in Europe. Project results will be available in March 2007.

5.3   Policy impact

There has been a wealth of lessons learned from this activity. Many of the specifics are contained in the network reports and the two previous Quality Culture reports. These reports identify good practices and give specific advice on how to develop quality in higher education.

The Project had major consequences for European higher education. It led to the inclusion of statements in the Berlin and Bergen Communiqués that explicitly refer to the role of higher education institutions in ensuring quality. This was not a minor achievement given that the quality debate had been shaped and dominated by governmental or semi-governmental agencies.

The project also enabled EUA to develop a QA policy position based on a number of principles, which contributed to allowing the association to negotiate with partner organisations (ENQA, ESIB and EURASHE) a paper on European standards and guidelines, which were adopted by the ministers in Bergen (2005).

One of the major lessons of this project is that when institutions take the initiative to develop their own quality processes, they demonstrate their sense of accountability and responsibility to the public (students, parents, and governments) and – at the same time – are able to enlarge the scope of their autonomy.

Most importantly, by taking the initiative, higher education institutions define the terms of the policy debate and demonstrate – through the processes that they have developed – their understanding of what is desirable and feasible in quality assurance.

VI. ANNEXES

6. 1 Participating Institutions

Altogether 134 institutions from 36 different European countries participated in the three rounds of the Quality Culture project. The most active countries in the project included:

- Germany, with 11 institutions
- Austria, Lithuania, Poland and United Kingdom, each with eight institutions
- Romania and Slovakia, each with seven institutions

The three sections below list all the institutions that participated in the project. Those marked with an asterisk were not eligible to receive Socrates funding and secured their participation through other means.

Round I (2002 – 2003)

48 institutions participated in the first round of the project representing 28 European countries. They were grouped into six small networks working each on a specific theme.

Network 1: Research Management
Bogazici University, Turkey – coordinator, Öktem Vardar
Humboldt University Berlin, Germany
University of Thessaloniki, Greece
University of Udine, Italy
University of Bucharest, Romania
University of Zilina, Slovakia
Rovira i Virgili University, Spain

Network 2: Teaching and Learning
Leeds Metropolitan University, United Kingdom – coordinator, Clare Stoney
Aalborg University, Denmark
Tbilisi State Medical University, Georgia *
University of Hamburg, Germany
University of Latvia, Latvia
Warsaw Technical University, Poland
Babes-Bolyai University, Romania
University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Network 3: Student Support Services

University of Padova, Italy – coordinator, Luciano Arcuri
Viborg National Institute for Social Education, Denmark
Université Claude Bernard Lyon 1, France
Hochschule Brandenburg, Germany
University of Debrecen, Hungary
University College Dublin, Ireland
Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona, Spain
London Metropolitan University, United Kingdom

Network 4: Implementing Bologna
University of Greifswald, Germany – coordinator, Jürgen Kohler
K.U.Leuven, Belgium
University "Dzemal Bijedic" of Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina*
University of Cyprus, Cyprus
University of Tampere, Finland
University of Rome "Tor Vergata", Italy
University of Aveiro, Portugal
Uludag University, Turkey

Network 5: Collaborative Arrangements
University of Bergen, Norway – coordinator, Jan Petter Myklebust
Belarusian National Technical University, Belarus *
University of Rijeka, Croatia *
University of West Bohemia, Czech Republic
Technische Universität Braunschweig, Germany
University of Economics in Katowice, Poland
University of Pitesti, Romania
University of Economics in Bratislava, Slovakia
Brunel University, United Kingdom

Network 6: Communication Flow and Decision-Making Structures
University of Vilnius, Lithuania – coordinator, Birute Maryte Pociute
University of Tartu, Estonia
Lille Graduate School of Management, France
Technical University of Łódž, Poland
University of Porto, Portugal
University of Novi Sad, Serbia and Montenegro *
Technical University of Valencia, Spain
Yildiz Technical University, Turkey

Round II (2004 – 2005)

Round II of the Quality Culture Project started in February 2004 with 44 institutions from 23 countries in Europe:

Network 1: Research Management and Managing Academic Staff Career
Cracow University of Economics., Poland – coordinator, Janusz Teczke
University of Graz, Austria
University of Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines, France
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece
Budapest University of Economics Sciences and Public Administration, Hungary
University of Padova, Italy
State University - Higher School of Economics in Moscow, Russia *
Alexander Dubcek University in Trencin, Slovakia

Network 2: Student Support Services
Napier University, United Kingdom – coordinator, Andy Gibbs
Agricultural University in Plovdiv, Bulgaria
Janicek Academy of Music and Performing Arts, Czech Republic
Fachhochschule Frankfurt am Main, Germany
University of Vilnius, Lithuania
Warsaw School of Social Psychology, Poland
Sabanci University, Turkey *

Network 3: Implementing Bologna Reforms
University of Pecs, Hungary – coordinator, Antal Bókay
Universitat d'Andorra, Andorra *
FH Joanneum, Austria
University of Ghent Association (4 HEIs), Belgium
University of Paderborn, Germany
Marijampole College, Lithuania
University of Trollhatten – Uddevalla, Sweden

Network 4: Teaching and Learning
Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration, Austria – coordinator, Manfred Lueger
Université de Lausanne (UNIL), Switzerland *
Université François Rabelais, Tours, France
Eszterhazy Karoly College, Hungary

National University of Ireland (UCD), Ireland
Klaipeda College of Social Science, Lithuania
Medical University of Gdansk, Poland
National School of Political Studies and Business Administration, Romania
Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia
University of Bristol, United Kingdom

Network 5: Partnerships Between Universities and Other Types of HEIs
K.U.Leuven Association (14 HEIs), Belgium – coordinator, Frank Baert
University of Vienna, Austria
Belarusian National Technical University, Belarus *
University of West Bohemia, Czech Republik
University of Economics in Bratislava, Slovakia

Network 6: Programme Evaluations
Freie Universität Berlin, Germany – coordinator, Werner Väth
Pädagogische Akademie der Diözese Linz, Austria
University of Leon, Spain
College of Nyiregyhaza, Hungary
Hogeschool van Arnhem en Nijmegen, Netherlands
Poznan University of Economics, Poland
Ovidius University of Constantza, Romania

Round III (2005-2006)

The third round of the project saw the participation of 42 institutions from 24 European countries that worked on the following themes:

Network 1: Research Strategy and Industrial Partnerships
AGH University of Science and Technology, Poland – coordinator, Andrzej Korbel
Medical University of Graz (MUG), Austria
University of Mining and Geology «St. Ivan Rilski», Bulgaria
Tomas Bata University in Zlin, Czech Republic
University of Applied Sciences Cologne / FH Köln, Germany
Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Romania
Istanbul Technical University, Turkey

Network 2: Leadership

Universidade do Minho, Portugal – coordinator, Manuel Mota
Freie Universität Berlin, Germany
Université Paul Cézanne Aix-Marseille, France
University of Zagreb, Croatia *
Kaunas University of Medicine, Lithuania
Technical University of Košice, Slovakia

Network 3: Implementing Bologna Reforms

«Gh. Asachi» Technical University of Iasi, Romania – coordinator, Gabriela Maria Atanasiu
University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences, Austria
University of Prishtina, Serbia and Montenegro (Kosovo) *
Åbo Akademi University, Finland
Athens University of Economics and Business (AUEB), Greece
Dublin Institute of Technology, Ireland
Politechnika Koszalińska (Technical University of Koszalin), Poland
St. Petersburg State University, Russia *
University of Mersin, Turkey

Network 4: Teaching and Learning: Implementing Learning Outcomes

University of the Aegean, Greece – coordinator, Sokratis Katsikas
Université de Liège, Belgium
The University of Hradec Králové, Czech Republic
UCC, National University of Ireland Cork, Ireland
University of Camerino (Unicam), Italy
Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania
South East European University, FYROM *
University College Winchester, United Kingdom

Network 5: Women in Universities: Research, Teaching and Leadership

Agricultural University, Bulgaria – coordinator, Anna Aladjadjiyan
FH Joanneum - University of Applied Sciences, Austria
Central European University, Hungary
Siauliai University, Lithuania
The Karol Adamiecki University of Economics in Katowice, Poland
Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, Slovakia
University of Sunderland, United Kingdom

Network 6: Joint Degrees

Universität Duisburg-Essen, Germany – coordinator, Axel Hunger
Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania
Zuyd University, Netherlands
Stockholm University, Sweden
Heriot-Watt University, United Kingdom

6.2 Evaluation Questionnaire

I. Description of Institution

1. Name of the institution:...

2. City:...

3. Country:...

4. Quality Culture contact person:..

5. E-mail address:..

6. Size (number of full-time students or full-time equivalent):..

7. Type of institution: ❑ University (grants Ph.D. degrees)   ❑ Other higher education institution

please specify: ....

8. Participation in the Quality Culture Project   ❑ Round I (2002-2003)   ❑ Round II (2004)

9. Name of network:...

10. Did you coordinate a network?   ❑ Yes   ❑ No

II. Implementation of Quality Culture

1. What were the three main objectives of your action plan to implement quality culture at your institution?

a. ....

b. ....

c. ....

2. Briefly describe your implementation strategy?...

....

3. To what extent have these three objectives been already successfully implemented and what still remains to be done?..

....

....

4. Which main challenges did you encounter during this process and how did you address them?

....

....

....

5. In your opinion, what are the indicators for a successful implementation of quality culture?

....

....

....

6. Who is involved in developing quality culture at your institution?

a. Please name the person(s) in charge of quality within your institution (name, title/function and e-mail address).

....

....

b. Which faculties are involved?   ❏ All faculties   ❏ Selected faculties (please list):

....

....

7. Please comment on any future plans or projects in the area of quality culture at your institution.

....

....

....

....

III. Quality Culture Project

1. Please give an overall grade for the support you received during the project

a. from your coordinator (if you were a partner institution) or

++	+	+/-	-	- -
❏	❏	❏	❏	❏

b. from EUA (if you were a coordinating institution).

++	+	+/-	-	- -
❏	❏	❏	❏	❏

2. Please give an overall grade for the usefulness of the project in helping you to develop and implement quality culture?

++	+	+/-	-	- -
❏	❏	❏	❏	❏

3. In what ways did you expect more help from the project?

....

....

....

4. Which project activities did you find most useful?

....

....

....

5. What should have been done differently in the project?

....

....

....

IV. Any other comments

....

....

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