

Synthesis report on quality measures relating to the organisation of management of the process of teaching and learning

The countries considered in the reports are in different situations; many (to a greater or lesser degree) are in a state of development in some respect with regard to general structures of quality systems. Some have centralised educational traditions; some have less authority vested in the centre.

1. Descriptions of programmes, courses, modules and other offerings provided by those responsible to ensure transparency and comparability.

Depending on the country, there are various levels and types of description provided. In some countries there are generic guidelines for different programme awards. These may be published by the Education Ministry in the country or by a separate quasi-autonomous national body charged with the oversight of quality matters on a national level.

There may also be framework guidelines for particular subjects. These may go so far as to lay down hours requirements in a given field for a particular qualification (as in France) although this degree of precision would be rare. There may be published benchmarks for particular levels and subjects which indicate key elements that should figure in areas of study. Such benchmarks are normally written so as to offer a general framework within which individual institutions and departments may create courses in line with the local conditions and requirements.

While information of the type described above is normally in the public domain, it would most usually be most easily accessible to institutions and staff establishing courses.

As part of their own validation/revalidation processes, institutions would in many instances require full descriptions of programmes and modules within those programmes.

Summary information about courses is in certain countries available to prospective students in the prospectuses which universities publish. Again in certain countries, programmes would have a programme or subject book describing factors such as study features, modules, hours of work and assessment requirements in a particular area. On enrolment on a particular module, fuller information about study and assessment would be made available to students. Increasingly, information about programmes and courses is openly accessible on the web.

2 Calculation of student workload (in relation to learning outcomes and levels)

Unusually, a general framework would be determined nationally with the specification of a number of contact hours for particular qualifications. Elsewhere, there may be a national norms which can be either explicit or may be implicit (if implicit, there will be a general understanding within the system which conditions practice across similar courses and institutions). In other countries, where this is mentioned as a consideration, departments have responsibility for ensuring equitable workloads for students.

Increasingly universities are implementing credit schemes which are either ECTS schemes or convertible to them. The use of such schemes may or may not be compulsory; there may be more or less latitude given to institutions in the details of structure and implementation but what is notable is a clear movement towards their adoption (fuelled to some extent, no doubt, by various quality mechanism and the need to promote mobility). Interestingly, one report indicated that the use of ECTS had initially been pioneered by the modern languages.

3 Information management structures

Universities in some countries have very comprehensive systems facilitated by new technology which contain information on a range of matters, including student details; enrolments on courses and modules; student progress and achievement and career destinations. Other universities would hold at least some of this information with career outlets seemingly the most neglected field.

In certain countries the university statistics feed into a national statistics database (eg Higher Education Statistics Agency in UK) to which universities are obliged to make annual returns. This enables general trends to be noted in higher education in the country as a whole and national decisions on HE to be made on the basis of clear statistical information, as well as permitting comparisons to be made between different institutions and other aspects relevant to HE. Sometimes the information is related to financial audit (as in France) while in other countries the linking of financial allocations to certain statistics such as student numbers or course completions has provided a powerful incentive to the development of such structures.

While the movement towards electronic provision of such information is general, certain countries report that technical difficulties or poor provision of information technology tools may impede development.

4 Division of tasks among staff members teaching on a specific programme.

In certain countries the number of hours and the type of teaching that may be given by particular categories of staff are laid down nationally (eg in Finland where teacher workloads are standard throughout the University system with an overall workload of 1,600 annual working hours being applied uniformly and covering any type of work: research, teaching or administration. In Austria staff are exempt from teaching during the four month summer period. In Lithuania professors do 6 hours per week and associate professors 10). Such conditions constrain local allocation which must respect national guidelines. In one country (France) staff who undertake teaching hours above the stated maximum for their category are paid extra. In certain instances, staff workloads may be a matter for local decision. The situation can be particularly damaging within those countries where there are no clear guidelines for teaching loads and it is the responsibility of the university / department to decide on levels of teaching and other duties. In the worst case scenarios, undue loads may have an adverse effect on the quality of teaching and the overall student learning experience.

It is quite widespread practice that allocation of teaching and other duties would be the responsibility of the line-manager (eg Head of Department or Head of Centre); elsewhere the study council or body responsible for a particular programme may assume this responsibility.

In allocation of teaching for particular staff members in the best instances, account would be taken of other duties related to teaching and the student experience and of research activity (level of involvement and areas of interest). Problems may arise in small departments where staff have to cover a range of work outside their own specialism.

It is also noted that on occasion, that there is often inadequate cognisance taken of and, consequently, time allocation given to, the range of tasks which language staff must perform and which are essential to the proper functioning of the programme and the student experience. There is also some differentiation in the work undertaken in different settings by teaching staff, on the one hand, and support staff employed in an administrative capacity, on the other.

One report also suggested that more clearly defined contracts for staff would aid management in the allocation of tasks.

In certain countries good practice would dictate that the allocation of teaching and other duties would be discussed openly be among those concerned to negotiate division of work (as in a staff meeting eg. Finland).

5 Systems for the external and internal evaluation of courses or programmes

In many European countries, accreditation and evaluation are undertaken by a separate body, set up by the Ministry of Education but with a certain independence from it. Sometimes, however, the evaluation/accreditation function rests more directly with the Ministry. Such difference in practice stems, no doubt, from the fact that some countries have traditionally had more centralised systems where overall regulations down to quite a fine level of detail are laid down for subjects and courses (eg Austria or France) whereas other countries have traditionally had a much less centralised tradition with Universities being considered as autonomous bodies (UK). Even at a time of greater control, such countries tend to work by persuasive monitoring devices linked to reward, renown and remuneration rather than decree (UK). It is, however, interesting to note a movement in some countries (Austria; Switzerland) towards the establishment of a separate body (projected or in process of implementation) where it did not initially exist.

There is also some movement away from entrusting quality maintenance to the university sector alone or indeed to a quality agency set up by them (self-regulation within the system) towards the establishment of a more independent or state agency (eg UK has moved to Quality Assurance Agency which still has strong input from universities but is constituted as an independent company limited by guarantee with a range of representation on its board from commerce and industry as well as the professions). In Poland too there seems to be a shift of this nature with establishment in 2001 of a State Accreditation Commission which now exists in addition to the University Accreditation Commission established in 1998 by the Conference of Rectors of Polish Universities.

Quality systems external to the HE institution may be seen to have the following potential elements and in European countries, they combine in various ways.

External to the University

- University audit (ie an evaluation of the systems and general health of a particular HE institution as a whole). Such procedures are relevant to the evaluation of courses/programmes if they contain a consideration of the university's procedures for their establishment and evaluation (this is the case, for instance, in the UK where universities have the authority to establish new programmes). It is also proposed in UK that audit will in future include selected subject trails.
- The accreditation (permission to run) new programmes. In certain systems, initial accreditation of programmes is given by the Ministry of Education in accordance with guidelines defined by them. This is, for instance, the case in France or in Finland. Sometimes this process may be interlinked with re-evaluation as in France. There it is also the Ministry which effects what may be termed revalidation since approval is given for a limited number of years (in this case 4) and re-accreditation must then be sought.
- Evaluation or re-evaluation of a discipline area with one programme or a raft of course provision. This may operate either for new provision (so that it is more or less the same

as accreditation) or for existing provision where it is a means of validating that the provision is in good health.

In evaluation, the principle of self-evaluation is widespread with external judgements being made on the basis of a report / course descriptions provided by the institution including information about the curriculum / staff qualifications / resources/ and, for existing provision, information relating to student performance. In some countries too, information would be required about career destinations. In certain cases, depending on the type of evaluation, there would be a site visit, including discussions with academic managers, staff and students. It would be good practice for there to be a report which would require a response from the institution, although on a rare occasion there is no feedback.

Such systems are not subject specific, although certain countries may have in existence guidelines or benchmarks (eg UK; Denmark; Poland) for at least certain subjects, including languages and translation / interpreting (the latter may or may not be considered a separate subject).

The time span for evaluation varies between countries from 8 yearly intervals to shorter periods of four or five years.

Sanctions would normally include the power to end or suspend (Portugal) degree programmes. In Portugal, funding may be reduced or withdrawn. In Denmark finance is conditional on the good conduct of quality assurance mechanisms and students are only eligible for loans and grants when attending programmes approved by the Ministry of Education.

Panels of evaluators would most frequently be staff from other institutions in the same country nominated by the National Agency, sometimes supplemented by members from outside the University sector. Sometimes (but more rarely) the panel would include or indeed be largely composed of international experts. However, the authority of such panels varies. In Estonia, for instance, international panels of experts make recommendations but the final decision rests with the Estonian Centre for Higher Education Evaluation which has commissioned them.

In cases of good practice evaluation, particularly at course/subject level will take note of views of existing and former students and employers (eg Belgium; UK) and for new courses a needs analysis will also be undertaken (as in Denmark).

Certain countries also report international validation but not in the area of languages For instance, St Gall had its Management School evaluated by the Community of European Management Schools and, again in Switzerland, Medical Schools are going through a process of international recognition. Similarly, Denmark reports that some universities have participated in international evaluation (but again not languages)

6. Internal quality evaluation

Universities will in many countries have internal systems of evaluation which may be part of the general state system or may be established by the University itself. If freedom is left to the universities of a particular country to establish their own processes, it would be customary for these to be the subject of institutional audit or review (as in UK) or to be fed into a wider institutional report made to the Ministry (eg Hungary). In the more elaborate systems, there will be a committee within the institution responsible for overseeing the system of quality monitoring. Individual departments would make reports, based on given indicators, which are

be fed into the relevant university system and, in the best instances, lead to action and improvement.

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