



**Information Project on Higher Education Reform  
Bologna Promoters' Training Seminar on  
Quality Assurance in Europe**

**22-23 November 2006  
Technical University of Munich, Germany**

***Work Group Training Material***

## Table of Contents

- **Workshop Themes and Objectives**
  - Workshop 1: Possible questions for discussion 3
  - Workshop 2: Possible questions for discussion 3
  - Workshop 3: Possible questions for discussion 4
  
- **Workshop 2 Material**
  - **University College Cork - Norma Ryan**
    - Case Study Presentation Slides 5
    - Glossary for Case Study 15
    - Case Study Description 16
  
  - **University of Turku - Riitta Pyykkö**
    - Case Study Presentation Slides 22
    - Glossary for Case Study 26
    - Case Study Description 27
  
  - **University College of West Flanders (HOWEST) - Lucien Bollaert**
    - Case Study Presentation Slides 32
    - Glossary for Case Study 36
    - Case Study Description 37

## Workshop Themes and Objectives

The plenary sessions will provide input for discussion in the workshops. The workshops are to provide an interactive environment for participants with the opportunity to learn from each other through the discussion and sharing of experiences. Workshop discussions will allow participants to develop an understanding of the connections between all aspects of quality assurance.

- **Session 1: How to Develop an Institutional Quality Culture? (I)**

In Workshop session 1, participants will discuss the articulation between the European, national and institutional levels and its impact on the development of institutional Quality Assurance strategies.

Co-Facilitators might first take time to clarify concepts in relation to the presentations in Plenary session 1 and then launch the discussion.

Possible questions for discussions:

- In the context of your work (at a HEI or agency), what are the links between the 3 levels?
- Having in mind these 3 levels and their interrelation, what are the role and scope of the institutional level and is it appropriate, or should it be different?
- Are all key actors sufficiently aware of the three levels? If not, how could awareness be raised among them?
- How to make the link between internal and external processes while developing internal QA processes in a HEI?

- **Session 2: How to Develop an Institutional Quality Culture? (II)**

In the context of the case study examples presented in Plenary session 2, participants will examine the role of the different actors, structures and processes involved in developing an institutional quality culture. The main objective is to invite participants to share the practices used or planned at their own institutions in order to identify the success factors, obstacles and key issues to be reported in Plenary session 3.

Possible questions for discussions:

- How to develop an institutional quality culture?
  - Processes and procedures: what works – what does not? Why? How to keep the institutional QA culture dynamic and efficient?
  - Actors: who should be involved and how to get them involved and motivated? Which actor/structure should head the process?
  - How to effectively distribute the workload?
  - How to integrate external QA requirements into an institutional QA strategy?
  - How to avoid too large a bureaucratic burden on the institution?

- **Session 3: Exploring Quality Assurance at National and European levels**

Based upon previous discussions, participants will discuss and evaluate the implications, positive and negative aspects of the range of external quality assurance practices and options including institutional evaluation vs programme evaluation, improvement orientation vs accreditation, 'fitness for purpose' vs standards and their relation to the European Standards and Guidelines.

Possible questions for discussions:

- What are the external QA methods used in your national/regional context: are they clear-cut or mixed models? How are concepts mixed? What would be an "ideal mix"?
- Is the national level linked to the European level?
- What do you think are the major pros and cons of the different methodological approaches to external QA on the national level?
- How do institutions in your country or region respond to the national and European levels? Is it appropriate or should they be responding differently?
- In general, how should European HEIs be responding to the national and European requirements? How do you envisage an ideal "division of labour" between the three levels?

**Quality Assurance in Irish Universities**

**A Case Study: UCC**

Dr. Norma Ryan  
Director of Quality Promotion  
UCC

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**UCC**

- A University located in the South of Ireland, with 16,000+ students, and the highest annual research income of all the Irish Universities
- Has a particular focus on delivering 4<sup>th</sup> level Ireland (graduate studies) and lifelong learning

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**UCC Mission**

- University College Cork is committed to fostering a community of scholarship that values independence of thought and critical enquiry, and enables students and staff to fulfill their full potential. In an environment of excellence in teaching, learning and research, the University's central roles are to create, preserve and communicate knowledge, and to enhance intellectual, cultural, social and economic life locally, nationally and internationally.

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## Strategic Framework 2006 - 2011

- Focus on graduate studies
- Focus on quality of undergraduate and graduate programmes, and on student support services
- Focus on increasing development of international research capability
- Aims to increase student numbers to 20,000 by 2010

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4

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## *Universities Act 1997*

- Legislation that established all Irish Universities as independent autonomous institutions
- Requires all Irish Universities to put in place quality assurance procedures

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5

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## Section 35: QA

- To promote the improvement of the quality of education of students and all related activities
- Responsibility for process rests with the University

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## National Agenda

- In 2003 IUA published:  
*A Framework for Quality in Irish Universities*
- Sets out a framework for QI/QA and was agreed to by all Irish Universities
- Is compatible with the European Standards and Guidelines that have been developed

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7

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## IUQB Irish Universities Quality Board

- Independent body established by Irish Universities in 2003
- Purpose: to assist the Universities in the quality agenda and to conduct reviews of the effectiveness of the QI/QA reviews on behalf of the Universities.

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8

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## UCC action

- The Governing Body appointed members to a Quality Promotion Committee in 1998
- Governing Body approved the setting up of the Quality Promotion Unit in 1999

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9

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## Quality Promotion Committee

- Committee of Governing Body with executive authority
- Chaired by President of UCC
- Has representatives of
  - Academic Staff
  - Administrative and Support Staff
  - Governing Body external members
  - Students

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10

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## Quality Promotion Unit

- Facilitates the implementation of Quality Improvement/Quality Assurance (QI/QA) procedures in UCC
- Assists in the Follow-Up procedures following a QI/QA review of a unit

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11

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## UCC Strategy for QA

- To review/evaluate all departments/academic support units/academic programmes over a 6 year period
- To involve students, employers, past graduates, staff

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12

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## Methodology

- Self-assessment
  - Include use of questionnaires
- Peer review
  - institutional/national/international
- On-going quality improvement

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13

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## Self Assessment Report

- Report to provide succinct, comprehensive statement of unit activities
- Core of the Report is a self-critical analysis of the unit, including how the unit sees itself contributing to the Mission and Goals and Objectives of the university

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14

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## Self Assessment

- Must include assessment of
  - Staff profile
  - Teaching
  - Research
  - Support services, including facilities
  - Contribution to society

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15

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## Self Reflection

- S - Strengths
- W - Weaknesses
- O - Opportunities
- T - Threats/Challenges
- Benchmarking (aspirational)
- Will suggest and emphasise appropriate improvements/changes

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16

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## Supporting Documentation

- Agreement reached with Review Group and Director of Quality as to what exactly is required in each individual case
- Factual details are given in appendices

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17

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## Evaluation of Teaching

- Evaluation by students
- Questionnaires
- Focus groups
- Views of external stakeholders
- Teaching portfolios
- Peer review

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18

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## Evaluation of Research

- Peer reviewed publications
- Books/chapters in books
- Supervision of graduate students
- Research grant income
- Other scholarly activity

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19

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## Review

- Evaluation of Self-Assessment Report
- Site Visit to meet with staff and students and other stakeholders
- Report on findings
- Recommendations for change/improvement

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20

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## What happens report?

- Report is considered by
  - Staff of Department
  - Quality Promotion Committee of Governing Body
  - Budget decision makers in UCC
  - Governing Body

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21

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## Recommendations in report

- Discussed with Dean of Faculty/Vice-President and the Director of Quality
- A Quality Improvement Plan is agreed upon and acted upon by unit in first instance

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22

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## Publication of Report

- Review Report is published on University web site.
- Report of Quality Promotion Committee to Governing Body also published.

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23

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## Follow-up

- Unit submits a report on actions taken and outcomes within 18 months of completion of the review to the Quality Promotion Committee
- Report on progress is considered by Governing Body and published.

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24

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## Review of QI/QA process

- A major review of the process in UCC and the other Irish Universities was conducted in 2005 by the EUA. The review was commissioned by the IUQB and the HEA on behalf of the Universities. The Report endorsed and commended the quality processes in place.

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25

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## Major Successes

- Acceptance of quality review process
- Appreciation of need for self-reflection
- Ownership by unit being reviewed seen as a benefit to unit
- Follow-up procedures ensuring actions taken on recommendations for improvement

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26

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## Challenges

- Acceptance of benefits of second cycle
- To reduce the workload for departments/programme boards of study in gathering data
- To ensure University acts on recommendations requiring resources

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27

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## Future Activities

- Development of thematic reviews, e.g. of total research activity of University
- Complete second cycle of quality reviews
- Development of improved information systems within the University to provide good data.

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28

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## Web sites

- <http://www.ucc.ie/quality>
- <http://www.iuqb.ie>

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29

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**Quality in Irish Universities  
UCC: A Case Study**

**Dr. Norma Ryan  
Director of Quality Promotion  
University College Cork  
National University of Ireland Cork**

**GLOSSARY**

**Governing Body (GB):** Also referred to as the Governing Authority, the Governing Body is responsible for all decisions made in the University. It is equivalent to the University Senate or Council and is the highest authority of the University.

**HEA:** Higher Education Authority. The statutory body in Ireland responsible for public funding element of the Universities.

**IUA:** Irish Universities Association. Equivalent to a national rectors conference. Formerly known as CHIU: Conference of Heads of Irish Universities.

**IUA Quality Committee:** A committee of the IUA with responsibility for coordination of policies and procedures relating to quality improvement and quality assurance in the universities. This responsibility is exercised in the context of national legislation and policy, EU and other international standards and recommendations, the roles of the IUQB and the Bologna Process.

**IUA Quality Officers Group:** A working group of the IUA Quality Committee of the IUA consisting of the officers responsible for the quality assurance procedures in each of the Irish Universities. The Group works together towards harmonisation of the procedures in each of the universities and towards development of policies for improvement of the procedures in support of the work of the IUA Quality Committee.

**IUQB:** Irish Universities Quality Board. IUQB is a national agency originally established by the Irish Universities to oversee the quality assurance measures in the Irish Universities and to assist the universities in development of their internal quality culture. The Universities have given authority (belonging to the Universities by law) for conduct of external reviews of the effectiveness of the quality assurance procedures within the universities.

**President:** Chief Officer of the University, equivalent to Rector or Vice-Chancellor in other systems.

**QA:** Quality Assurance

**QI:** Quality Improvement

**Quality Promotion Committee (QPC):** A committee appointed by the Governing Body to oversee the quality of all activities of the University. It is chaired by the President and has authority delegated to it from the Governing Body to make decisions with respect to internal quality reviews.

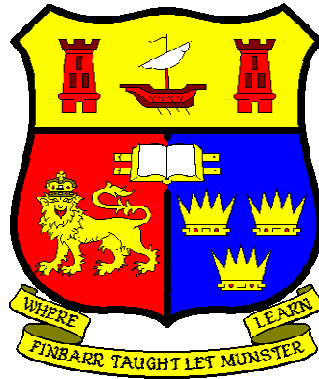
**Quality Promotion Unit (QPU):** A Unit set up by UCC to oversee and facilitate the implementation of the policies of the university in relation to quality assurance and to conduct reviews of academic departments, academic programmes and all activities of the University.

**UCC:** University College Cork, also known as National University of Ireland Cork.

## Quality in Irish Universities

### UCC: A Case Study

Dr. Norma Ryan  
Director of Quality Promotion



University College Cork  
National University of Ireland Cork

### Mission Statement for the University

University College Cork is committed to fostering a community of scholarship that values independence of thought and critical enquiry, and enables students and staff to fulfill their full potential. In an environment of excellence in teaching, learning and research, the University's central roles are to create, preserve and communicate knowledge, and to enhance intellectual, cultural, social and economic life locally, nationally and internationally.

### The Vision

That the University:

- Provide outstanding education in undergraduate and selected professional and graduate areas;
- Produce research, scholarship and creative work of an excellence that is recognised internationally, nationally, and locally;
- Provide an equitable and fair environment, focussed on learning, for both students and staff;
- Provide a high quality of undergraduate student experience;
- Build on and enhance a strong tradition of community and professional service.

In order to assist in the achievement of its mission and vision for the future the University has established procedures for quality improvement and quality assurance. Underlying these is a set of principles that inform the University's approach. Clear understanding and acceptance of these principles by all staff is essential if the quality improvement/quality assurance system is to work effectively.

#### 1. Principles

- 1.1 We aim to assure the quality of the total student experience.



The focus of our quality improvement/quality assurance procedures is not just on maintaining the academic output standard of our courses (although this is a vital element if we are to meet the needs of our students). We aim to assure the quality of the students' experience while they are studying at the University. We recognise that all areas of the University's operation affect (directly or indirectly) the quality of that experience and ultimately may have an impact on student achievement.

**1.2** All members of staff are responsible for quality.

Quality is the responsibility of every member of staff of UCC. Everybody has a contribution to make. In order for this approach to be successful, there must be clear lines of responsibility and accountability for each area of operation and adequate support to enable the staff to achieve their quality objectives.

**1.3** We aim to improve quality whenever possible.

Within the constraints of resources available, we aim to provide the best possible student experience and to foster quality improvement at all levels.

**1.4** We are committed to the principle of external peer involvement in assuring quality.

We recognise that one important factor in assuring quality involves constant re-examination of our own approach against those of our peers. In this way we can assure ourselves that we are maintaining appropriate standards and also demonstrate accountability to external bodies for the use of public funds.

We are committed to the involvement of external peers in our quality improvement/quality assurance procedures. (In this context 'peer' is broadly defined to incorporate academic staff, practitioners and future employers.)

**1.5** We take into account the views of our students.

We recognise that students can make a valuable contribution to the assurance and assessment of quality within the university. We are therefore committed to seeking the views of our students and using the feedback that we gain to improve the quality of their experience.

## **2. Strategy for Implementation of Quality Improvement/Quality Assurance Procedures in UCC**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In common with many universities world-wide, Irish universities have engaged in a process of formalisation of quality improvement and quality assurance (QI/QA) procedures. In January 1994 CHIU (Conference of Heads of Irish Universities), hereinafter referred to as IUA (Irish Universities Association) sponsored a seminar on QI/QA that was attended by representatives from all seven Irish universities. In 1995 the IUA institutions established the Inter University Quality Steering Committee (IUQSC) and initiated a Pilot Programme on QI/QA, informed by practice and experience in Europe and the USA.

Benefiting from the experience gained in the Pilot Programme all the Irish Universities put in place QI/QA systems that are in accord with international best practice. In each institution the emphasis is on ownership of the process by the people involved and on efforts to ensure that the process is an effective catalyst for quality improvement.

Section 35 of the Universities Act 1997 assigned responsibility for procedures to improve the quality of education and related services provided by the universities to the governing authority of each institution, and established the legislative framework under which the universities' QI/QA processes now operate. The procedures must include a periodic evaluation of each department, unit, faculty and of any service provided by the university. The evaluation must be made by employees of the university and by persons, other than employees, who are competent to make national and international comparisons on the quality of teaching and research and the provision of other services at university level. The evaluation process must include assessment by students and all others availing of the teaching, research and other services provided by the university.

There is a requirement in the legislation that the findings arising out of the application of the procedures evaluating the quality must be published in such form as the Governing Authority in each institution thinks fit. Commencing in 2002, the Governing Body in UCC has approved the publication of the Review Reports, following their approval by the Governing Body. Since then Governing Body has delegated authority to the Quality Promotion Committee for approval of publication of the review reports.

In 1998 the Governing Body in UCC approved the establishment of a Quality Promotion Committee of the Governing Body. The President of UCC chairs this committee and members are drawn from the academic, administrative and support service communities (for membership details and Terms of Reference for the Committee see the Quality Promotion Unit web site at <http://www.ucc.ie/quality>). Described below is a summary of the procedures for implementation of QI/QA procedures in UCC that have been approved by the Quality Promotion Committee and the Governing Body.

In 1999 the Quality Promotion Unit was established with the remit to facilitate the implementation of the policies of the Governing Body and the University with respect to quality assurance and quality improvement. Full details of all procedures and guidelines for quality reviews may be found at <http://www.ucc.ie/quality>.

In 2003 the Irish Universities published A Framework for Quality in Irish Universities. This publication sets out the principles and guidelines under which the QI/QA system in Irish Universities operates to date. These principles and guidelines were agreed to by all the Irish Universities.

In 2003 the Irish Universities established the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB). Membership of the IUQB includes representatives of internal and external stakeholders of the university as well as experts in quality in third level university education. The Board was established in February 2003 and was announced at the Inaugural Conference of the IUQB which was held at UCC. Since then it has been established as an independent company with a majority of members of the Board from outside the Irish university sector. Full details of the IUQB may be found at <http://www.iuqb.ie>.

## **2.2 Methodology for Quality Reviews**

The components of the methodology are:

- Self-assessment
- Review
- Report by the Review Group incorporating recommendations for quality improvement.
- On-going quality improvement.

Departments/units/directors of academic programmes together with a small group of colleagues from UCC and other Universities and/or other external bodies as appropriate carry out the review. The review is of departments/units/academic programmes and not of individuals. When a review has been completed a report emerges which does not identify individuals by name, and is confidential to the department/unit/academic programme course team, the Director of the Quality Promotion Unit, the Quality Promotion Committee, Head of College, Dean(s) if appropriate, and the members of the University Management Group of the University, until the approval of the report for publication by the Quality Promotion Committee of the University. As required under the Universities Act 1997 the Governing Body also publishes a report on the Quality Reviews and the findings. This report is made publicly available. The reports are published on the web site of the Quality Promotion Unit.

### **2.3 Self-Assessment**

A co-ordinating committee of the department/unit/academic programme course team prepares a Self-Assessment Report. The purpose of this report is to provide a succinct, but comprehensive statement of the department's/unit's activities and, in the case of an academic department, will include an analysis of its teaching, learning and research. The department/unit is asked to focus on identification of its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis) and to suggest appropriate remedies where necessary. Benchmarking of the department's/unit's activities is an essential component of the Self-Assessment Report. Some of the data for the Self-Assessment Report is collected in the form of questionnaires completed by staff, students, graduates and employers. The Quality Promotion Unit, if requested by the department/unit, provides assistance in the conduct of the survey.

As the primary goal is Quality Improvement the formulation of strategies and recommendations for improving the work of the department/unit must be highlighted in the Self-Assessment.

The Quality Promotion Unit provides detailed guidelines for the format of the Self-Assessment Report. The guidelines have been approved by the Quality Promotion Committee and the Governing Body of UCC. The guidelines emphasise the goal of quality improvement and the necessity to bring forward strategies and recommendations for how improvement can be effected. The guidelines indicate the information that should be supplied in addition to the recommendations for improvement. This information includes an analysis of the students' assessment of the services provided, of the teaching of academic departments, a summary of the staff profile of the department, the workloads of staff, and, in particular for the academic staff of a department, a breakdown of the distribution of effort between teaching responsibilities and research. All academic staff, including all research staff, are required to submit a brief summary of their research activity, including publications for the past five years, number of postgraduate students supervised, number of postgraduate students supervised with degrees conferred, research income, etc.

### **2.4 Timescale**

The Governing Body of UCC decided that, for the first cycle of quality reviews, all academic departments and administration and support services units will be reviewed over a six year period commencing in 2000/01. The schedule of reviews for the six-year period is published on the Quality Promotion Unit web site at <http://www.ucc.ie/quality>. The second cycle of reviews will commence in 2007/08, following on the external review of the effectiveness of the procedures conducted by the European University Association in 2005, and an internal review of the effectiveness of the procedures which is currently underway in UCC.

Detailed timetables of the review process are prepared by the Director of the Quality Promotion Unit and approved by the Quality Promotion Committee.

## **2.5 Questionnaires**

It is important to get views of staff, students, graduates, employers and other stakeholders. A collection of questionnaires has been compiled by the Quality Promotion Unit and are available to all academic departments and administration and support services units. The collection is not definitive and is intended as help only. Individual departments/units may have special requirements and these are discussed with the Director of Quality Promotion as early as possible. Software for the conduct of surveys of staff and students has been acquired by the Quality Promotion Unit and access to the software may be gained by application to the Quality Promotion Unit.

## **2.6 Peer Review**

The Quality Promotion Committee appoints the Review Group who will conduct a review of the department/unit. The Quality Promotion Committee appoints the members according to procedures approved by the Governing Body. The Chair of the Peer Review Group is selected from among the members of the Group by the Group itself when it convenes in UCC for the site visit. Departments/units are invited to submit nominations for the external members of the Group. However the final selection and appointment of reviewers is made by the Quality Promotion Committee, who seeks the advice of an external expert before final selection. The Quality Promotion Committee reserves the right to appoint members other than those nominated by the department/unit.

The Review Group typically consists of not less than five members, including three members external to UCC and a representative of employers/professional bodies. There must be at least one expert drawn from the international community. The Review Group will study the Self-Assessment Report and then visit the department/unit. The aims of the two- to three-day site visit are to clarify and verify details of the Self-Assessment Report, to view the facilities and to allow members of the department/unit and students/users of the service to meet with the Peer Review Group. Before leaving the campus the Review Group complete the first draft of the report and make an exit presentation to all members of the department/unit. The Review Report is prepared by the peer reviewers in accordance with the guidelines for preparation of the report provided by the Quality Promotion Unit. Reviewers are asked to comment on all the recommendations for improvement that a department/unit may make and, in addition, the report may include recommendations for quality improvement from the peer reviewers. The reviewers are requested to submit the report within one month of the site visit. Following verification of the factual content a copy of the report will be sent to the chair of the departmental co-ordinating committee, the Head of Department/Unit, the UCC Quality Promotion Committee, and Head of College/Vice-President/budgetary head, as appropriate. The final Report is published on the University web site following its consideration by the Quality Promotion Committee. The Quality Promotion Committee prepares a report on the review that is submitted to the Governing Body for approval. The Governing Body, in accordance with the provisions of section 35 of the Universities Act 1997, publishes a report on the findings of the review.

The site visit is central to the review process and is carefully planned. Close liaison is required between the departmental/unit co-ordinating committee and the Quality Promotion Unit in planning the visit.

The majority of site visits take place during the teaching periods of the academic year. Membership of the Review Group is decided approximately six months before the site visit is planned and the dates for the site visit fixed. The Quality Promotion Unit carries out all contact with the internal cognate members and external experts, including arrangements for their stay in Cork and makes all logistical arrangements for the review site visit.

The detailed structure and timetabling of the site visit is organised by the Chair of the departmental/unit co-ordinating committee in consultation with the Quality Promotion Unit. The Quality Promotion Unit arranges the logistics of the site visit.

## **2.7 Follow Up**

Discussion takes place between the Head of Department/Unit, the Director of the Quality Promotion Unit and the Head of College/College Officer, as appropriate, with a view to

- Implementing the recommendations contained in the peer review report.
- Ensuring continual quality improvement.
- Reviewing the self-assessment procedures.

A Quality Improvement Plan is agreed between the Head of Department/Unit and the Head of College/Vice-President to whom the department/unit reports. The plan details the actions to be taken by the department/unit within specified times and lists those actions that should be taken by the University. Those recommendations which need additional funding resources are considered in the light of College and University policy, having regard to the resources available to the University at the time (see sub-section 3 of section 35 of the Universities Act 1997) and the strategic plan of the University.

Approximately one year to eighteen months following on the completion of the review the department/unit is asked to report to the Quality Promotion Committee on the implementation and actions taken on the recommendations for improvement that were both endorsed and made by the Review Group and endorsed by the Quality Promotion Committee. A report on this Follow-Up Review is made to the Governing Body as a part of the Annual Report of the Quality Promotion Committee.

**Quality Assurance in Finnish Universities**  
**A Case Study: University of Turku**

Riitta Pyykkö  
Professor  
Member of FINHEEC

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**The Finnish QA system (I)**

- universities and polytechnics by law responsible for the quality of their work
- evaluation policy based on a development and improvement approach (< HE system quite stable; "a society of mutual trust")
- steering system highlights the role of evaluation in HE development
- three-year performance agreements on quantitative and qualitative targets between the Ministry of Education and each university
- a national QA agency: the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC, 1995 - )

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**The Finnish QA system (II)**

The Finnish system included most aims and objectives set in the Berlin communiqué in 2003, **except accreditation, certification, or any other clearly demonstrable system of QA >**

- the national committee proposed a system in which the HEIs develop QA systems covering all their operations; the systems will be regularly evaluated by the FINHEEC
- **audit** model (*Audit manual 2005-2007*, in line with SGQA)

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## University of Turku

- a multidisciplinary scientific university (Humanities, Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Medicine, Law, Social Sciences, Education)
- founded in 1920
- total enrolment of students 18 000
- main language of instruction Finnish; each faculty offers study opportunities also in English
- (by law) a three-fold mission: 1) degree-oriented and other education, 2) research, 3) interaction with society

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## QA in the University of Turku before Berlin 2003 (I)

- *plan – do – check – act* cycle forms the basis of the QA work
- several national and international evaluations during the last 10 years (including self-assessment, external evaluation team visits, published reports + follow-up procedure)
- a well functioning (national) system of QA for research (the Academy of Finland, other external funding, annual data on research activities, peer review)

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## QA in the University of Turku before Berlin 2003 (II)

- faculties responsible for the quality of degrees
- feedback about teaching and learning gathered regularly
- merits for pedagogical skills important when filling teaching posts (although research merits carry more weight)
- participation in several national and international networks exploited for benchmarking
- a national statistical database (1981 - )

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### **QA in the University of Turku before Berlin 2003 (III)**

- a clear and transparent system of decision making (student participation for already 30 years)
- resource allocation from state budget based on performance agreements (the Ministry – universities)
- annual performance negotiations at the University level (Rector – faculties); same kind of process between the Dean and the schools
- in the negotiations also feedback concerning the previous year's performance

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### **Organisation of QA work (I)**

**BUT: A need to make the working processes more transparent and to develop more awareness on quality matters**

- the Rector (Vice-rector), Deans and Heads of the schools responsible
- a follow-up group at the university level
- task forces at the faculty and school levels
- students take part at every level
- contact persons, responsible for the practical implementation (schools, subjects, other units)

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### **Organisation of QA work (II)**

- systematic training for the personnel, esp. for the contact persons; students also participate
- special QA sites on the intranet
- faculties can organise the work from their own starting points
- all activities and processes will be described by the end of the year 2006
- focus in 2007: building an institutional quality culture; development of feedback and analyse mechanisms

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### **Successes and challenges (I)**

- evaluation culture based on a development and improvement approach < education, as other fields in society, steered by information, not by control
- evaluations based on a dialogue between the FINHEEC and HEIs
- a strong emphasis on the role and responsibility of HEIs
- a system nationally credible, but internationally ?

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### **Successes and challenges (II)**

- too many reforms going on at the national and institutional level
- nevertheless, members of the University are starting to see the benefits of quality work
- new forms of cooperation between the staff members; horizontal communication increasing
- challenges for 2007: strengthening of a genuine quality culture, keeping the system transparent and flexible, leaving space for individual creativity

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### **Web sites**

- **University of Turku**  
<http://www.utu.fi/>
- **Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council**  
<http://www.kka.fi/>
- **Ministry of Education**  
<http://www.minedu.fi/>

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**Bologna Promoters' Training Seminar on Quality Assurance in Europe  
22-23 November 2006, Munich**

**INSTITUTIONAL EXPERIENCES WITH INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL  
QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESSES  
University of Turku, Finland**

**Riitta Pyykkö**

**Glossary**

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

**Quality** can be defined in many ways, for instance, quality as exception, as perfection, as fitness for purpose, as value for money, and as a transformative factor. In the auditing of QA systems, quality refers to the appropriateness (fitness for purpose) of quality assurance methods, processes and systems in relation to stated objectives or aims.

**Quality assurance** refers to the procedures, processes and systems that safeguard and improve the quality of an HEI, its education and other activities. The Finnish term *laatutyö* (quality work) often means the same as quality assurance, but it is sometimes also used to refer to the development of QA systems.

**Quality assurance system** is, in Finland, based on a concept that has become established in European quality evaluation. The concept includes both quality management and quality enhancement.

**Quality culture** includes both measures geared to improve quality and individual and collective commitment to maintaining and improving quality.

**Self-evaluation** means that a unit or an organisation appraises its own activities, their prerequisites and outcomes. Self-evaluation is a way of collecting information on the evaluation target and a tool for HEIs to improve their activities.

**Stakeholders** are groups or organisations with vested interests in the matter. The stakeholders of a Finnish HEI are its staff, the students' parents and other taxpayers, employers, the Government, society, trade unions, and higher education graduates.

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**European debates and the Finnish national QA system**

The second Bologna follow-up meeting of European Ministers of Education in Berlin 2003 set the quality assurance of higher education as one of the priorities in the development of the European Higher Education Area. The Finnish response to the aims and objectives set in the Berlin communiqué was deliberated by a committee on quality assurance representing HEIs, their students, the Ministry of Education and the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC). The committee discovered that, as regards different components of quality assurance set out in the communiqué, the Finnish system includes: a division of responsibilities between various bodies and institutions; the evaluation of HEIs and degree programmes; student participation; and participation in international co-operation. On the other hand, Finland had not used accreditation as such, certification, or any other clearly demonstrable system of QA.

In Finland, universities and polytechnics have traditionally been responsible for the quality of their work. By law, the institutions must evaluate their education, research and other activities and their effectiveness. They shall also take part in external evaluation of their activities. According to law, they must also publish the findings of the evaluations they undertake.

The Finnish evaluation policy is based on a development and improvement approach. The Finnish Higher Education system is quite stable: all universities (20) are government-run institutions, and even the youngest of them are over 30 years old. Polytechnics (30) were established 10-15 years ago. Finland has a national higher education and innovation policy, and there is almost no corruption in the country. The country can be defined as a society of mutual trust. One important tool in the steering and management of higher education are the performance agreements between the Ministry of Education and each university. These agreements determine quantitative and qualitative targets, the resources needed to achieve these targets, the monitoring and evaluation of outcome, and further development of operations. Performance agreements are prepared for a three-year period.

The steering system highlights the role of evaluation in higher education development. The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council is an independent expert body, which assists universities, polytechnics, and the Ministry of Education in matters relating to evaluation. Its duties and policies are governed by the Decree on the Higher Education Evaluation Council from 1995, and it consists of 12 members, appointed by the Ministry of education for a four-year period. Members represent universities, polytechnics, students and employers. The FINHEEC organizes audits of quality work, and institutional, program, and thematic evaluations, and it is responsible for evaluating the quality of education and institutional performance (research is evaluated in Finland by the Finnish Academy). FINHEEC is a member of ENQA.

Thus, the national committee proposed a system in which the HEIs develop QA systems covering all their operations. These systems will be regularly evaluated by the FINHEEC. The report of the committee was sent on an extensive consultation round to universities and polytechnics and to major stakeholders in education and higher education policy. The comments showed that the HEIs and other stakeholders were in favour of the proposals, which they found feasible.

In spring 2004, FINHEEC set up a taskforce to plan auditing and write an audit manual setting out the aims and objects of audits, as well as the methods, evaluation criteria, principles of signing up for audits, and follow-up procedures. The members of the taskforce were representatives of HEIs, students, employers, and the FINHEEC Secretariat. FINHEEC arranged several seminars to introduce the audit model to higher education institutions and other interested parties and to collect their feedback on it. In spring 2005, FINHEEC piloted the audit methods and criteria. The audit model is presented in a manual, which will be effective until the end of 2007 (Audits of Quality Assurance Systems of Finnish Higher Education Institutions. Audit Manual for 2005-2007, [http://www.kka.fi/pdf/julkaisut/KKA\\_406.pdf](http://www.kka.fi/pdf/julkaisut/KKA_406.pdf)). The planning of the model was informed by the ENQA Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA.

The main responsibility for quality assurance will also rest with the HEIs in the future. Each institution determines independently the objectives, organisation, principles, methods and development of its own system, but the system must cover all its activities. The aim of FINHEEC is not to harmonise the diverse quality assurance systems according to any particular predetermined model. On the other hand, interaction between institutions is useful, and quality assurance and comparison are the core of growing international interaction between HEIs.

### **University of Turku**

University of Turku is a multidisciplinary scientific university, which offers an academic education and research-based instruction in six faculties: Humanities, Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Medicine, Law, Social Sciences and Education. It was founded in 1920, and is now Finland's second largest university with the total enrolment of students about 18 000. Each year about 1000 international students study at the university, most of them in English-language programmes. Even though the main language of instruction is Finnish, each faculty offers study opportunities in English to both non-degree and degree students.

Under Finnish legislation, the mission of universities is three-fold: 1) degree-oriented and other education, 2) research and 3) interaction with and impact on society and contribution to regional development. High-standard, multi- and interdisciplinary research forms the basis of the University's activities. The research done at the University is free and depends on the scholar. The University also profiles itself through recognised areas of strength. The broadest of these with the most disciplines involved is the biosciences. Other recognised areas of strength are the research of processes related to the interaction of culture and society, mathematical research, research of learning and education, and astronomy and space research. Strongly developing and possible areas of strength in the future, are the study of interdisciplinary social innovations, research related to materials research and information technology.

A close connection between scientific research and education is the starting point of the education. The goal is that students will adopt an academic way of thinking, which emphasises aiming at creating something new, at a critical approach and at ethical responsibility. The University participates in the development of academic education as part of national and international networks. The curricula, teaching arrangements and support services for students are developed both centrally and by the faculty.

The basic starting point of the University's societal and regional impact is the exploitation of research and education. In addition to supporting the transfer of innovations to practical applications, the University aims at more effective impact by giving information on academically and socially significant research results and innovations, and by exploiting them in expert services and education. The University actively participates in the development of Southwest Finland by interacting with regional actors. Collaboration with other universities and polytechnics has intensified, and new forms of activities to structure collaboration are being sought.

## **Basic principles of the quality assurance system of the University of Turku**

Assessment and peer review have traditionally been a part of the academic community. Research, instruction and learning are assessed using many criteria. In addition to these traditional quality control mechanisms, the University is now establishing a quality assurance system covering all its activities, which is in line with both the national Finnish QA system and the European Standards and Guidelines.

The PDCA-cycle (plan – do – check – act) forms the basis of the quality work at the University. During the last ten years, the University has participated in several national and international evaluations. The university, as a part of the Finnish HE system, has a well functioning system of QA for research, the faculties are responsible for the quality of degrees, the University has had a clear and transparent system of decision making including student participation for 30 years, and data for the national database is collected systematically every year.

The Finnish national database (KOTA) is maintained by the Ministry of education and offers statistical data on universities and fields of education from 1981 onwards. This data is also used for allocation resources both from the Ministry on Education to the universities and, inside the universities, to the faculties. Data is collected every year on the following topics: number of applicants, number of admitted, new students, students, student mobility, degrees, graduate placement, median graduation times, teachers, other staff, annual accounts, expenditure by performance areas, university premises, teacher and researcher visits, scientific publications etc.

As was mentioned above, resource allocation from the Ministry of Education to Finnish universities is based on performance agreements. In the same way, the University sets target outcomes for the faculties for a three-year period, and they are reviewed and confirmed every year. The Rector's office carries on annual performance negotiations with every faculty, and at the faculty level, the same kind of process is carried on between the Dean and the schools. In the performance negotiations, the universities (correspondingly, faculties and schools) are also given feedback concerning the previous year's performance.

As a result of an analysis of the QA system of the University it was mentioned that the problem is a certain invisibility in working processes. In order to improve them, it is necessary to make the processes more transparent and to develop more awareness on quality matters. Thus, the curricula, teaching arrangements and support services for students are now developed through the descriptions of activities, the feed-back gathered, and national and international assessments, the goal being a high quality of instruction, studying and learning.

## **Main structures and bodies, their roles and responsibilities**

The highest decision-making organ of the University is the Board. The rector directs the activities and processes of the University and resolves any issues concerning its general management. At the faculty level, decisions are made by the Faculty Council and the Dean, and at the level of schools, by the School Council and the Head of the school. In the QA system as well, the Rector (Vice-rector), Deans and Heads of the schools are responsible for the work. At the university level there is a follow-up group, chaired by the vice-rector responsible for QA, and at the faculty and school levels task forces responsible for the organisation of quality work. Students take part in quality work at every level. Every faculty and school has a contact person, responsible for the practical implementation of the recommendations prepared by the follow-up group and given by the Rector.

The University organises systematic training for the personnel, especially for the QA contact persons, and the training has been open for everybody interested in quality issues. Students have also participated in the training. There are special QA sites on the University intranet where all decisions, instructions and other material on QA are published. The students also have access to the intranet.

The faculties have organised the quality work from their own starting points: some have given the schools a tight schedule with several intermediate targets, while the others act more freely. The main target for the University as a whole is to have all activities and processes described by the end of the year 2006. Training and wide participation of the members of the University (including students) in the QA system development process is one guarantee of common involvement in quality work. In 2007, involvement issues and building an institutional quality culture will be the main focus of the QA work.

### **Assessment of quality**

During the last ten years, the University of Turku has participated in several evaluations. They include thematic (e.g. student guidance, teacher training) or programme evaluations (subject areas), and the university as a whole has been evaluated from the point of view of its external impact. These kinds of evaluations go on every year in the Finnish HE system. The methods used in these evaluations are defined at the beginning of every project, but they follow a basic pattern, which includes the self-evaluation report of the institutions under review, external evaluation team visits and a review report, which is always published. Usually there is also a follow-up procedure three to four years after the evaluation..

The assessment of curricula and the length and breath of studies is a part of the University's normal activities. Feedback about teaching and learning, as well as teaching arrangements, is gathered from the students regularly both in separate courses and after completing the degree as a whole. In order to take into account the new requirements that working life sets for academic professionalism, the recruitment services gather information from the alumni. These reports also give the University information about the rate and quality of employment of the alumni.

Merits for giving high-quality instruction, acquired pedagogical education and skills (teaching portfolio) are important factors when filling the University's teaching posts and when defining the income level of the person. Every employee has an annual development discussion with his/her superior. Pedagogic education and guidance have been increased and developed both centrally and by the faculties. Every year the University together with the Students' Union awards a Teacher of the Year prize, and similar prizes are also given in some faculties.

The University also participates in several national and international networks. At the moment, for example, participation in task forces of the Coimbra group and the Baltic Sea Region Universities Network is also being exploited for benchmarking the quality of teaching and research. Peer review emblematic of higher education institutions is widely used in assessment of the quality of research.

The quality of research is assessed annually when the schools and individual researchers deliver data on research activities (publications, national and international scientific cooperation, etc.). Publications are classified in different standard groups, and the data is published. External funding (from the Academy of Finland and other resources) is one criterion for assessing the quality of research.

The University continues to develop a transparent steering system that is based on target-setting, results and annual negotiations. The information produced for the KOTA database functions as the basis for the follow-up. During the development of the QA system the University will also create new feedback and information mechanisms to be able to analyse the achievement of more complex goals.

### **Looking back and forward at quality development in Finland and at the University of Turku**

The Finnish evaluation culture is based on a development and improvement approach. The principles of FINHEEC are widely accepted in the HEIs of the country. FINHEEC is an


independent expert body; the best available Finnish and foreign experts are used in evaluations; the evaluation groups are independently responsible for the content of the evaluation reports; institutions can influence the selection of targets, methods and focus of evaluation; aims, methods and results are public information. The evaluations are based on dialogue and are regarded as a forum where different views and experiences are exchanged. The main aim is to provide institutions and educational policy-makers with tools to understand and improve their actions.

On the other hand, this strong emphasis on the role and responsibility of HEIs themselves for the quality of their activities creates a challenge in international cooperation. What is highly credible nationally might not be so internationally, especially when cooperating with countries with stronger control mechanisms. The fact that in Finland education (as other fields in society) is mostly steered by information, not by control, and the reasons why this is possible, should be communicated clearly.

At the national and institutional level, the greatest challenge has been timing: there have been too many reforms going on at the same time. Finland has recently adopted new degree structures (from August the 1st 2005 onwards), and during the same process renewed the curricula (and partly also the pedagogical approach), the universities are introducing a new salary system, and there are other major structural changes planned in the HE sector. Looking back at the training of the staff at the University, a slight misplacement of emphasis in the contents of the training there can also be seen.

In spite of the partly negative beginning, the members of the University are now starting to see the benefits of quality work. The processes are becoming more transparent, there is less hassle in the everyday work, and both students and staff feel better "legally protected". New forms of cooperation between the members of the staff can also be seen when the knowledge, and at the same time the appreciation, of colleague's work is increasing. Horizontal communication between schools and faculties has increased significantly. This can be seen as one of the major successes of the QA work.

In the future, the main challenges are to strengthen the genuine quality culture, keep the system transparent and flexible, and leave space for individual creativity. Quality thinking should be a natural part of everyday activities. The organisation of the QA system should be light, and the system should be sensitive to feedback from the members of the community.



**Case study**  
**Quality Assurance**  
**at HOWEST**

Hogeschool West-Vlaanderen | University College of West Flanders  
 Ghent University Association

Lucien Bollaert | education & research officer

**Bologna Promoters' QA Training seminar**  
**München | 22-23 November 2006**

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**QA at HOWEST**  
**contents**

1. QA in Flanders
2. the institution HOWEST
3. HOWEST QA system
4. culture or checklist ?
5. internal and external
6. future developments
7. conclusions

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**QA at HOWEST**  
**1. QA in Flanders**

- 1980's : inspection by the state
- 1990's : peer-reviewing panel organized by inspection  
 possible follow-up with tips for improvement
- 2000 : self-assessment report per programme  
 set themes, facts and figures  
 peer-reviewing panel organized by Council of  
 Flemish University Colleges (VLHORA)  
 public report  
 stress on quality improvement (tips)

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**QA at HOWEST**  
**1. QA in Flanders**



- 2004 - 05 : + accreditation by NVAO based on public report (+ other info)
- set of NVAO subjects & aspects (aims (Dublin descriptors) programme, staff, infrastructure & services, QA, output)
- self-assessment report (description, SWOT & facts & figures of same subjects & aspects organized by VLHORA & VLIR)
- (declared) independent peer-reviewing & site visit on same subjects & aspects
- public report with scores per subject (sufficient/insufficient) & per aspect (excellent, good, sufficient, insufficient), possible tips and comparative chapter
- stress on accountability & official recognition

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**QA at HOWEST**  
**1. QA in Flanders**



<p><b>internal QA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>aimed at improving quality and quality culture</li> <li>ownership of HEI (subsidiarity)</li> <li>focused on own mission &amp; goals</li> <li>both on programme &amp; institutional level</li> <li>incorporating input, process and output</li> </ul>	<p><b>external QA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>aimed at quality enhancement &amp; accountability</li> <li>expert/peer review</li> <li>based on self-assessment &amp; site visit</li> <li>against indicators agreed at least on (inter)national level</li> <li>focused on programme, but institutional aspects come in (HRM, finances, etc)</li> <li>(declared) independent</li> <li>all stakeholders</li> <li>ending in public report</li> </ul>	<p><b>accreditation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>links QA with consequences for recognition of degrees</li> <li>based on public report (+ info)</li> <li>reaching threshold quality and generic, European Ba &amp; Ma descriptors</li> <li>by (inter)national, independent accreditation body (NVAO)</li> </ul>
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**QA at HOWEST**  
**2. the institution**



- 1995 : merger of 6 institutions, now 5 departments covering the whole province of West Flanders (Kortrijk, Bruges, Ostend)
- architecture, business, health care, industrial sciences, teacher training, social work
- 1995 : 2800 students | 2006 : 4250 students
- 22 professional Bachelors (180 ECTS)  
7 academic Bachelors & Masters (60 ECTS), postgraduates

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**QA at HOWEST**  
**3. HOWEST QA**



- 1997-98 : QA launch using PROSE (EFQM)
- PDCA-cycle (questionnaires, consensus meetings improvement goals & actions)
- structure throughout the whole institution
- interdepartmental issues : HRM, strategic and operational policy, student counselling, internationalisation, (inter)departmental SWOT
- yearly indicators : students' questionnaires (education, evaluation, final paper, placement & services) pass rate
- 2004-2005 : qualitative participation (commission, staff, students) and 8-year PDCA after report
- 2005-2006 : central offices & programme teams (yearly PDCA)

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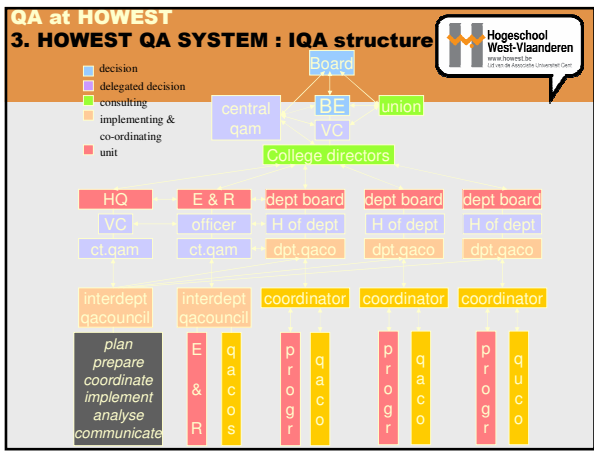
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**QA at HOWEST**  
**4. culture or checklist ?**



- 1997 : strategic plan
- 1999 : mission statement finalized  
*quality education & training*  
*practice-oriented & internationalisation*  
*skills*  
*research & networking*  
*student- & staff participation*  
*flexible organisation*
- 2000 : PDCA-cycle (documents)
- 2003 : education development plan
- 2004-2005 : BaMa, modular & competence-oriented programmes in 2 semesters
- 2005 : 8-year PDCA-cycle along accreditations
- 2007 : qualitative participation & yearly PDCA

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**QA at HOWEST**  
**5. internal and external**



- 2004-2005 : accreditation
- more oriented towards external QA
- more emphasis on accountability than on Q improvement
- QA taken more seriously
- more bureaucracy (documents that prove)
- closer cooperation between institutional level and programme level (EO, CO & teams)
- culture AND QA system & control
- internal focus/choice on Q improvement
- external control on accountability

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**QA at HOWEST**  
**6. future developments**



- European dimension is present in all processes (competences as learning outcomes, ECTS, QA, managerial reforms)
- QA is everybody's responsibility (culture)
- QA is professionalized (system)
- PDCA is and should remain the meeting point
- top-down & bottom-up
- measured facts & figures PLUS qualitative participation (all stakeholders!)
- subsidiarity = empowerment
- Ghent University Association

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**QA at HOWEST**  
**7. conclusions**



- Q is a mission statement  
Q(A) is a strategic option  
QA system & control is an operational necessity in which should be invested
- shared by all stakeholders (management, staff, students, external representatives)
- no quality without quality culture
- no external QA without internal
- [www.howest.be](http://www.howest.be)
- [www.prose.be](http://www.prose.be)

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**GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>ECTS</b>	European Credit Transfer (and accumulation) System
<b>EFQM</b>	European Foundation for Quality Management
<b>HOWEST</b>	Hogeschool West-Vlaanderen University College of West Flanders
<b>HRM</b>	Human Resource Management
<b>NVAO</b>	Nederlands-Vlaamse accreditatie organisatie Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organization
<b>PDCA</b>	Plan, Do, Check, Act: A general methodological cycle in QA aimed at constant quality improvement developed by W. Edwards Deming
<b>PROSE</b>	Partners & tools in quality management for non-profit sector
<b>QA</b>	Quality Assurance
<b>SWOT</b>	technique for understanding your Strengths and Weaknesses, and for looking at the Opportunities and Threats you face
<b>VLHORA</b>	Vlaamse Hogescholenraad Flemish Council of University Colleges
<b>VLIR</b>	Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad Flemish Council of Universities

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Quality Assurance at HOWEST  
Hogeschool West-Vlaanderen | University College of West Flanders  
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**1. Introduction**

This case study will shortly deal with the development and current organization of quality assurance (QA) in Flanders. Starting with the presentation of the internal QA at the University College of West Flanders (HOWEST) the delicate balance between culture or checklist and internal and external QA will be reflected on. Finally some future developments will be formulated and conclusions will be drawn.

**2. Quality Assurance in Flanders**

As in most countries the quality of non-university higher education in Flanders was formerly done by a specific inspection of the state. During the 90's though the inspection itself organized a peer-reviewing panel that visited the site for 2 days and produced a report with tips for improvement, which was not public. A follow-up meeting with the inspection on improvement was sometimes organized the following year.

After the first important restructuring of higher education in 1995 QA at university colleges was changed by decree from 2000 onwards. The institutions remained responsible for their internal QA, but the external QA was co-ordinated by the Flemish Council of University Colleges (VLHORA). VLHORA organized peer-reviewing panels that based themselves on a self-assessment report and a site visit. The institution had to produce this self-assessment report along set themes and with obliged facts and figures e.g. on staff, pass rate, etc. The panel then wrote a public report with the emphasis on quality improvement and without any sanction.

With the implementation of the Bachelor-Master structure in 2004-2005 the accreditation per programme was introduced. The Flemish government immediately chose for a co-operation with the Netherlands in a joint Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organization (NVAO). The NVAO itself worked out, in consultation with the councils of universities and university colleges, a new set of themes. These themes are the aims of the programme, written in the decree itself and inspired by the Dublin descriptors, description of the programme, staff, infrastructure and services, internal QA and finally the output or results. The institutions also have the possibility to add a particular quality feature of which they think they distinguish themselves. Underlying aspects refine the themes. The theme 'programme' is e.g. refined into aspects such as the relationship between aims and contents, form and contents, professional and academic orientation, coherence and evaluation.

These themes and aspects were transformed into a new manual by VLIR and VHLORA on how to write a self-assessment report for the peer-reviewing panels organized by them. Each institution should describe and SWOT the themes and aspects and add facts and figures. The panels, which should be declared independent by an administrative commission, then visit the site and produce a public report in which themes are scored "sufficient" or "insufficient" and aspects are scored on a 4-level scale from excellent to insufficient. The public report can also contain tips for improvement and a comparative chapter in which all similar programmes are compared.

Based on this public report, possibly added with some other information, the NVAO takes an accreditation decision. A programme is supposed to have no insufficients on the level of the themes. No accreditation means an immediate stop of the programme, unless the institution lodges an appeal or offers an improvement plan that is accepted by the Flemish government.

The consequences of this expansion of the external QA with accreditation will be dealt with later, but it is already clear that more emphasis is put on accountability and official recognition than on quality improvement.

### **3. Internal quality assurance system at HOWEST**

HOWEST started in 1995 by merging 6 institutions. Now there are 5 departments covering the whole province of West Flanders. They are located in Kortrijk, Bruges and Ostend. Howest offers programmes in the fields of architecture, business, health care, industrial sciences (engineers), teacher training and social work. In 1995, 2800 students were enrolled, today 4250. Since the implementation of the Bachelor-Master structure it offers 22 professional Bachelors (180 ECTS) and 7 academic Bachelors and Masters (60 ECTS) in engineering studies. A range of short postgraduate studies are organized every year.

The internal QA system was launched in 1997-1998, using PROSE inspired by EFQM. From the start a structure throughout the whole institution was set up: both on the level of the board as well as on the level of the programmes. They meet each other interdepartmentally through the institution Education and Research Officer, who preside the bi-monthly meetings of the departmental quality coordinators and is member of both the board and the directors' college.

This structure manages the PDCA-cycle, starting with the results of the questionnaires on topics of which all stakeholders are inquired. They then meet in a consensus meeting in which good and weaker items are identified, goals for improvement are formulated and actions with responsables and deadlines are set out.

Interdepartmental issues that have already been dealt with are HRM, strategic and operational policy, internationalisation and yearly student counselling. All this ended up in departmental SWOTs in which interdepartmental actions were developed.

The yearly indicators that are considered are the results of the students' questionnaires on education, evaluation, final paper, placement and services, the questionnaires on student counselling and the pass rate. Since 2004-2005 programme teams that are writing their self-assessment reports also go through questionnaires on education and evaluation and organize consensus meetings in order to make a SWOT and formulate their improvement goals. In the same year qualitative participation was introduced on the topic of QA with the staff, students and external, social stakeholders. After the peer-reviewing a PDCA-cycle of 8 years to the next accreditation was structured. This year we are also introducing a yearly PDCA-cycle on the results of the yearly questionnaires.

### **4. Checklists or culture?**

The method of consensus meetings, qualitative participation and yearly PDCA-cycle on the level of the programme teams were introduced because after some years QA was more and more looked upon as only a matter of the quality coordinators using their tools. Right from the start the institution proclaimed that quality is a matter of all personnel and students. Therefore QA cannot be separated from vision, strategy, mission and structural and managerial reforms. If QA is only limited to tools, documents, questionnaires and quality coordinators it is and will be very hard to improve the quality of the institution, its programmes, its results and as such its development and recruitment. Actions that were important in the development of the quality culture were the making of its strategic plan, the mission statement, the methodology of consensus meetings and PDCA-cycles and the Bachelor-Master reforms that changed all programmes to modular and competence-orientated learning outcomes organized in 2 semesters a year.

### **5. Internal and external**

It must be said that since the introduction of accreditation in 2004-2005 QA is more focused on external QA. This results in more bureaucracy and paper work in order to prove what is written in the self-assessment reports. As such the necessary balance between internal and external or between culture and system tends to be in advantage of the latter. On the other hand QA is clearly taken more seriously thanks to accreditation and its financial and legal consequences.

In order to rebalance both essential elements it seems there is a need of closer cooperation between the institutional level, facilitating QA in all its aspects, and the programme level. It is essential that managerial level and all personnel involved in the key processes of education, research and services not only meet each other, but understand each other and cooperate with the same aim.

In QA the ultimate aim can only be quality enhancement. This can only be obtained on the basis of quality culture supported by a QA system and control. The external control with accreditation on the other hand will always be focused on accountability. This is a necessary part of QA. Yet institutions or studies should not worry about external QA if the internal quality culture and system are well-developed and taken seriously. This should also involve investment in quality and QA.

## **6. Future developments**

It can only be observed that the European dimension is present in all processes in higher education. The introduction of ECTS as a cumulative system, the orientation towards learning outcomes formulated in terms of competences, the managerial reforms (sometimes under the pressure of lack of resources), the qualifications and last but not least QA are only some examples of how deep Europe interferes in the higher education institutions.

As far as QA is concerned the dialectics between culture and system should never be forgotten. Those two parts should be in balance and strengthen each other. Their meeting point is the cycle of PDCA, through which quality should always be improved. Therefore QA is a matter of all stakeholders, while its system and tools should be professionalized. The PDCA-cycle should also be the meeting place of top-down and bottom-up. Measured facts and figures should go together with qualitative participation. The principles of subsidiarity, which the institutions emphasize so often, should mean an empowerment of QA instead of an academic reaction against control by society.

The same principles should be maintained in the Flemish formation of Association, bringing together and bridging universities and university colleges.

## **7. Conclusions**

Let me finish with some obvious conclusions. Without quality, both as a mission statement and as a strategic option, higher education institutions, just like any other organization, will not survive. A professional QA system and control is thus an operational necessity in which should be invested. But no system will work without a quality culture that should be shared by all stakeholders. If quality culture and QA strengthen each other the internal QA should not fear, but be in balance with external QA. The latter will then re-inforce and validate the former.