Project "Identifying barriers in promoting European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance at institutional level" (IBAR)

National study: WP5 Quality Assurance System

The Netherlands

Authors: D. Westerheijden, E. Epping, L. Leisyte
Center for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS)
Universiteit Twente
P. O. Box 217, 7500 AE Enschede
The Netherlands

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Higher Education
Policy Studies

1 Case Study A: Specialised University

University A is a relatively small, specialised university. It aims at world excellence in the area of specialization.

1.1 Is there an institutional quality assurance policy in place? If not, why?

1.1.1 Does the policy at national level prescribe the creation of internal quality assurance system? Is the institutional QA policy a separate policy?

In the 2007-2010 Strategic Plan, quality assurance is set to develop into 'integral monitoring'.In the 2010-2014 Strategic Plan quality of research and teaching is identified as a focus which needs to be increased and is one of the five key points in the plan.

The institution reports for types of evaluation – first year BSc evaluation, 2) the graduates of BSc evaluation, 3) the MSc graduates evaluation and 4) course evaluation. Their study programmes are accredited and evaluated on a regular basis following the national regulation. Currently under the new accreditation system of 2011 of the NVAO, the university decided to undertake an institutional quality assurance assessment. To achieve this the institution started a project of critical reflection in 2011, where programme directors have to discuss with the Chair Groups. As the university report suggests 'because of the accreditation it was felt essential to revisit the intended learning outcomes of the study programmes'.

Quality assurance manuals or regulations were not available on the internet site in 2011, but they were available in printed form.

1.2 How does the policy involve the organization of the quality assurance system? If yes, please describe. Who is the person responsible?

The University Board has delegated the responsibility for the quality of studies to the Board of the Institute of Education. The Board of the institute is responsible for content, quality and finances of study programmes.The Board consists of students and professors in equal numbers. The Institute's Board is chaired by the Rector of the university.The university-wide Student Council does not have a separate sub-committee for quality assurance or evaluation.

1.3 How does the policy involve the responsibilities of departments, faculties and other organizational units?

This university is specialized with only a limited number of study programmes and departments. Every study programme has a programme committee, education quality committee and a programme director. Every programme should have a fieldwork advisory committee following the new accreditation framework. Some programmes have such committees, but now they are introduced more systematically. The programme committee, consisting of equal numbers of students and faculty staff, is responsible for the content and quality of the programme, though in a formal sense subject to approval of the Institute of Education's Board.The study quality committee reports to the study programme committee.

1.4 How does the policy address the involvement of students? If not, why?

Students are equally represented in the Board of the Education Institute, the key body responsible for quality of education. They are also equally represented in the study programme committees.

1.5 How does the policy involve specification of the relationship between teaching and research?

Teaching and the quality of study programmes is a separate domain in the university policy. Its quality is assured via a separate Institute. However, in the yearly evaluation of academic staff, it is important that they are well evaluated on both accounts –teaching and research. This shows that university policy is geared towards a close relationship between these two activities. In its policy documents and the current Strategic plan (2000-2014) the university strongly supports the link between the two and advocates that both of them are very important to deliver quality education.

1.6 What are the ways of policy implementation, monitoring and revision? Is the implementation mainly top-down or bottom-up? Is it monitored continuously or sporadically (e.g. as part of an external evaluation)?

The implementation is mainly top-down. It is continuously monitored via student evaluations, yearly evaluations of academic staff performance, external quality assurance visitations as well as accreditation procedures.

1.7 How does the policy involve the statement regarding the collaboration with the secondary education sector? Are there any activities directed to schools and pupils and aimed to enhance quality of secondary education?   Please give examples of activities.

The university works with the secondary schools sector in the region. They organized information campaigns. In addition, it aims to attract larger numbers of international students, especially from the EU countries.

2 Case Study B: Specialised UAS

Case B is in its own words, 'the largest ... University of Applied Science' in its area of knowledge in the Netherlands. Merged from smaller higher education institutions since the 1980s, it operates in different locations. Institution B offers Bachelor, Master and Postgraduate programmes which focus on one specific area of knowledge.

2.1 Is there an institutional quality assurance policy in place? If not, why?

Institution B's strategic plan explicitly identifies the focus on education as one of the five strategic priorities for the years to come. Emphasis is thereby placed on quality regarding the combination of education and professional practice, and the improvement and further development of student facilities (i.e.: e-learning strategies, distance learning). Institution B has an institutional quality assurance policy, setting norms and standards for the three locations. In line with national policies, there is an explicit policy for internal quality assurance of education, manifested in a document from 2005, to be replaced by a new one in summer 2012. The new policy intends to streamline the module evaluations and includes also student services and ICT facilities in those. The policy might be available via the intranet, but is not available via the public website.

The quality policy follows the distinct planning and control cycle, identifying four different steps: plan-do-check-act. The cycle is applied at the directorate level, the study/academy level and the programme level. The backbone of institution B's internal monitoring of quality,are student questionnaires: the National Student Questionnaire (NSE, in Dutch) and the module and course evaluations which students are asked to fill in every quarter. The strategic plan is also a visible result of the quality cycle - planning/control cycle.

Due to the merger and the varying structures of the programmes at the different locations, the institutional quality policy is not optimally implemented yet. For instance the questions asked in the evaluations are not the same at all locations, and the examination rules (being instruments to assure quality) are not fully integrated/ merged between the different locations.

2.2 How does the policy involve the organization of the quality assurance system? If yes, please describe. Who is the person responsible?

Internal quality assurance within Institution B is supported by a quality team reporting to the directorate. The team comprises of three people from each location, someone from the service centre and a chairman. The team develops the institutional quality assurance policy which is displayed in the education policy. The academy director is responsible for educational affairs within the academy and hence also for assuring quality at the programme

level. The director is supported by a person within the academy, who is in charge of coordinating quality. The quality coordinator evaluates and analyses the student evaluations and brings them to discussion in the programme committee. Within every study programme the lecturers need to write an improvement plan based on the results of the student evaluations. The reports of this are also available via the Intranet. The quality cycle involves thereby persons at different levels.

2.3 How does the policy involve the responsibilities of departments, faculties and other organizational units?

The quality cycle institution B adopts is applicable and used for three levels within the organisation: the directorate level, the study/academy level and the programme level. All three levels have their own distinct role in the cycle. The academies are the units primarily responsible for education, and thus also for quality assurance. Furthermore the programme committee is a platform where quality related issues are discussed, for instance the results of student evaluations.Within a course of a year the PDCA cycle (plan-do-check-act) is undergone, expressed by year plans and strategic plans. The periods for undergoing the PDCA cycle vary, however. At the institution level, strategic plans are issued for instance every four years, whereas the academy/programme levels have annual plans.

2.4 How does the policy address the involvement of students? If not, why?

Major instruments in the internal monitoring of quality are student evaluations: at the institutional level, trust is put into the National Student Questionnaire (NSE, in Dutch) and at the programme level, the students are asked to evaluate courses. The results of these evaluations at the programme level are discussed among a panel of students and are subsequently discussed at different levels: programme committees, team leaders etc. If needed an improvement plan is written to be accepted by the manager. Evaluation results lead to improvement activities immediately, says the institution's annual report.

Students are represented in decision making bodies, where quality issues are discussed as well (i.e.: the academy committee and the participation council) (see also WP 8).

2.5 How does the policy involve specification of the relationship between teaching and research?

In UAS's, education is the main task. Applied research (to use an old-fashioned term) is of growing importance, but still secondary to education.The strategic plan of institution B stresses that the combination of education and professional practice shall be further development by involving the lecturers in applied sciences and also by including the research centres. The research centres are corner stones of institution B, and their involvement shall be formalised in the future by means of strengthening the connection to education/teaching.

Furthermore, they will be included in the quality system and strategic plans will be developed enabling a conscious management.

2.6 What are the ways of policy implementation, monitoring and revision? Is the implementation mainly top-down or bottom-up? Is it monitored continuously or sporadically (e.g. as part of an external evaluation)?

The PDCA cycle includes moments in the year where the different levels talk to each other: the directorate talks to the academy directorate and the academy directorate to the study programme directors, allowing feedback opportunities at the different levels and can thus be considered a bottom-up process.The student evaluations from the backbone for further actions and are discussed within the academy committee, indicating a bottom-up process. However, the quality standards that institution B should meet are prescribed in a top-down manner.

2.7 How does the policy involve the statement regarding the collaboration with the secondary education sector? Are there any activities directed to schools and pupils and aimed to enhance quality of secondary education? Please give examples of activities.

The quality policy of institution B does not formally involve collaboration with the secondary sector. At one of the locations, evaluation talks with students coming from the secondary schools are in place to see how the transition from secondary school to university level worked out. The results of this are considered valuable to see where the students stand but also for making information/presentations at school more tailor made (see also WP 6). The ambition is to stretch this out to the other locations.

In the future it is anticipated to streamline the entrance of students to the institution (see also WP6) and have intake interviews. The interviews are meant for the students to discover whether they made the right choice and for the institution to better manage the drop-out rates. Study advisors are also available to consult prospective students.

3 Case Study C: Comprehensive University

Case C is a large, comprehensive research university with extensive history spanning centuries.

3.1 Is there an institutional quality assurance policy in place? If not, why?

In the university's strategic plan 2007-2011, 'diversity and excellence' belong to the strategic priorities, and the quality policy is mentioned as an important element of strategy there, too. Following national policies, there are different, explicit policies for internal quality assurance of education and research. In the strategic plan 2011-2015, the University states ambitious goals regarding the quality of its undergraduate education, with as performance indicators student satisfaction, and positions in national rankings largely based on student satisfaction questionnaires; quality assurance is apparently seen as a supporting process and is not mentioned separately in this respect.

The quality assurance of research is steered by the SEP (Cooperative Evaluation Protocol, see § Chyba: zdroj odkazu nenalezen).Regarding the quality assurance of research, the latest internal document stating the policy dates from August 2010.

Regarding the quality assurance of education, the University's quality manual is available on the university's intranet, in Dutch only.

Monitoring and review of programmes is at least instigated by the six-year accreditation interval and the continuous quality monitoring that is needed to fulfil the NVAO's requirements. If other programme reviews take place, this is not known through the website.

3.2 How does the policy involve the organization of the quality assurance system? If yes, please describe. Who is the person responsible?

Quality assurance is integrated into the education policy of the university with main tasks for the director of each study programme (may be the same person as the vice-dean for education of a faculty). Moreover, internal quality assurance is supported through a specialized office, the Education Centre, which stretches the gamut from administrative assistance for the running of study programmes to scientific research on quality of education (in higher education but also in secondary education).

Which information systems are available for internal quality assurance, is not known externally. It is to be expected that regular course evaluations by students are gathered in a database, as are student progress data in the form of degree awards and course-examination results.

3.3 How does the policy involve the responsibilities of departments, faculties and other organizational units?

Faculties are the units primarily responsible for the operation of education (by law). This means that quality assurance of education is part of the responsibility of the person in charge of each individual study programme, i.e. the programme director, who may be the same person as the vice-dean for education.

3.4 How does the policy address the involvement of students? If not, why?

The WHW requires students' opinions to be taken into consideration when making a self-evaluation, but it does not prescribe the organisation performing the self-evaluation. In the Case C University, responsibility for evaluations lies with the Programme Committee, in which 50% of seats are for students. The Programme Committee may appoint a special evaluation committee, in which students must be represented. Students are always full members of committees and councils.

Evaluation results are reported to the authorities of the study programme concerned, i.e. the Programme Committee and/or the Faculty Council. In both, students make up a sizeable part of the seats.

Student representatives are elected annually, in the Faculty Council by general elections among all students of the Faculty. In Programme Committees, student representatives are co-opted in consultation with the student union of the faculty.

3.5 How does the policy involve specification of the relationship between teaching and research?

The relationship between education and research is not mentioned explicitly in the Quality Manual, nor on web pages on education, except where the Research Master programmes are mentioned.[1]

The University annually awards an excellent teaching award.

Staff development is part of the HRM and is mentioned in the Quality Manual.

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[1]'Research master' programmes are postgraduate study programmes explicitly accredited with this status, of 120 EC, whereas most master programmes are 60 EC (especially in the fields where research master programems are most often found, e.g. social sciences and humanities). Research master programmes are meant to prepare for research-related jobs in higher education and research institutions but also in the business world, e.g. industrial laboratories.

3.6 What are the ways of policy implementation, monitoring and revision? Is the implementation mainly top-down or bottom-up? Is it monitored continuously or sporadically (e.g. as part of an external evaluation)?

Quality assurance of education is regularly recurring. Course evaluations need not take place annually in all courses; once in three years is the recommended minimum.

Monitoring of education quality is the responsibility of Programme Committees; that might be called a bottom-up process.

3.7 How does the policy involve the statement regarding the collaboration with the secondary education sector? Are there any activities directed to schools and pupils and aimed to enhance quality of secondary education? Please give examples of activities.

The current policies on improving access and study choice as well as the demand for new students in the hard science disciplines inspired institutional wide as well as individual faculty policies and activities to promote university education in the secondary school sector. The university student affairs office is regularly organizing information days for prospective students, liaise with local schools in particular in specific disciplines. The study advisors are available to consult prospective students and the information is readily available on the website.

4 Case Study D: Comprehensive UAS

Case D is a university of applied science located in two different campuses. Its educational offer ranging across many areas of knowledge, focusing (like all UAS's) on undergraduate programmes.

4.1 Is there an institutional quality assurance policy in place? If not, why?

Case D has an explicit quality assurance policy, elaborated into a central policy, with instruments integrated into documentation and monitoring system. It is implemented at the different schools/faculties separately.

Institution D follows a distinct quality cycle (planning & control) aiming for continuous improvement. Thereby four steps shall be applied within all process of the institution: plan-do-check-act.The cycle is applied at the central level, the academy level and the programme level. At the central level the cycle covers 4 years, whereas for the academy level and programme level, the cycle should be undergone in one year.

4.2 How does the policy involve the organization of the quality assurance system? If yes, please describe. Who is the person responsible?

There is a central quality office, as part of the Governing Board's staff and quality officers in each of the schools. The director of each school is the main responsible for quality of education in his/her school and thus also for assuring quality of the programmes. Main actors also include internal auditors, who are trained to make audits at three-year intervals of educational quality in other schools of the Case D UAS.

4.3 How does the policy involve the responsibilities of departments, faculties and other organizational units?

The quality cycle of institution D is applicable at different levels. Next to the central level the academy level and programme level have an essential role. Whereas the central level prescribes quality norms and standards, it is the academies that are in charge of assuring quality. More specific the academy director is responsible that a certain level of quality is reached (this is reported back to the central level). Quality itself is considered to be a bottom-up process as the teachers, the structures and the things happening in the classroom are determining how quality is perceived. Consequently the departments have an essential role when assuring quality.

There is frequent interaction between the central quality office and the quality officers within the academies, enabling to discuss issues arising and exchange best practices. This is because, next to quality norms, the academies have autonomy in some aspects, like how to evaluate the curriculum.

4.4 How does the policy address the involvement of students? If not, why?

The quality assurance policy involves students in different ways. First, the students are enquired in differentsatisfaction survey at the national and academy level, considered to be an essential element to check/monitor the educational quality.The results of the evaluations serve as input for the regularly meetings with the academy director and the management board and for the annual appraisal talks with docents. Second, students are represented in different decision-making bodies, were quality issues are discussed (i.e.: academy council and the participation council) (see also WP 8).

4.5 How does the policy involve specification of the relationship between teaching and research?

In UAS's, education is the main task. Applied research is of growing importance, but still secondary to education.

4.6 What are the ways of policy implementation, monitoring and revision? Is the implementation mainly top-down or bottom-up? Is it monitored continuously or sporadically (e.g. as part of an external evaluation)?

As mentioned, responsibilities are with the decentralised managers; the central office maintains compatibility of instruments and information across the whole institution. In addition, the institution has an annual cycle including aspects of planning, carrying out, check progress and act/improve on the issues which came up. This cycle is valid at all levels within institution D: central level, academy level and programme level. Within this cycle the three levels act both top-down and bottom-up. Issues and results at the programme level are brought to the academy level, and from the academy level to the institutional level, in the form of institutionalised meetings.

The system has many continuous aspects, and includes major audits at regular intervals, in between the external quality assurance evaluations.

4.7 How does the policy involve the statement regarding the collaboration with the secondary education sector? Are there any activities directed to schools and pupils and aimed to enhance quality of secondary education? Please give examples of activities.

There is no information that the internal quality assurance policy contains collaboration with the secondary education sector, or is part of the planning & control cycle. Still, the institution is cooperating in many ways with local/regional secondary education institutions, in order to better prepare pupils for a study at institution D (see WP 6).

References

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