QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM AT THE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT
Quality Assurance methods are becoming increasingly well known as systems applicable in business, commerce and industry. In modified form, concepts such as Total Quality Management and the principles associated with the internationally recognized ISO9000 can be applied to Higher Education. Quality management systems may be broadly utilized in universities in order to ensure the quality and standards of education. This paper delay with the possibility to implement the quality management system to the university on the example of STU in Bratislava.
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1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of quality can be difficult to define but is becoming increasingly quantified and applied in the commercial world and industry. The international ISO9000 and fundamental principles of Total Quality management (TQM) are now well known. Quality is a concept that is vital to modern competitiveness whether in industry or academia. The 'hall mark' of quality means that a product meets the standards and requirements of the consumer. In education this may mean the student as customer or, for example, it may relate to the requirements for publication and recognition in an academic discipline, or the fulfillment of a research contract. Meeting those standards is what is necessary. Quality does not necessarily imply a flawless product or service, nor the most expensive or labor intensive. It should however be cost effective, provide value for money and operate as expected. Fitness for purpose is a key element, as users should be able to count on the product to do or provide what they need, and recognition of market demands clearly also important (as recognized by writers such a Juran, Deming and Crosby). Quality products should be produced, defined by quality of design, conforming to set standards, satisfactory performance, lack of breakdown and ease of maintenance. These are fundamental principles that may be applied to education. By careful monitoring and review, error may be either prevented or more easily detected and corrected. Real analysis is needed as a precursor to decision making and there is a need to think things through and consider all eventualities.

2. SITUATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA

2.1. Quality and Standards in Higher Education - principles and definitions

Quality: easy to recognize, difficult to define or measure

Quality of student experience: what is done/provided to ensure that students are enabled to achieve learning outcomes, and standards

Standards: predetermined, explicit levels of achievement to be reached (to justify the award)

Quality Assurance: planned and systematic mechanisms to ensure that given requirements are met; ensuring responsibilities are properly discharged.

There is necessary before the start of quality management system implementation to put (and of course to answer) several question, as follows:

- What are you trying to do?
- Why are you trying to do it?
- How are you doing it?
- Why are you doing it that way?
- Why is that the best way of doing it?
- How do you know it works?
- How do you improve it?

The main quality management processes in continuity with the educational activities at the university or in higher education in general are:

Validation, monitoring and review
- Involvement of external academics and examiners (benchmarking)
- Student feedback
- Staff feedback
- Stakeholders (for example, industry)
- Teaching, learning and assessment methods
- Learning infrastructure (resources, facilities)

2.2. National/external systems and validation

Evaluation of the quality assurance of the education at the university can provide more official (and unofficial as well) institutions/bodies:

Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)
Professional and Statutory Bodies (PSB's); accreditation
National and international views
Institutional audit (quality management systems and structures)
Subject focused reviews (curriculum, teaching, learning, assessment, progression, support, resources, quality management)

Validation (approval) of programmes include:
- Rationale and demand: aims, objectives, philosophy
- Resources, staffing
- Programme/course/module/unit structure and content
- Admission and progression criteria; regulations
- Teaching and learning methods
- Outcomes, assessment strategies and methods
- Generic and special skills; dissertations etc

- Student support (academic and personal – also for disabilities, equal opportunities etc)
- QA arrangements (approval event, external dimension, future monitoring, examiners etc.)
- Annual monitoring (programme, courses, units. Consider and evaluate the past year – not just data but interpretation of data, in terms of: aims and outcomes, curricula , assessment, teaching & learning, student progression, learning resources, enhancement)
- Self critical evaluation (reflect, detect, correct)
- *Evidence* of quality and standards
- Statistical information; data (use of)
- Use of feedback from stakeholders (responses)
- Students and student support
- External dimension (examiners); dealing with needs and requirements
- Recommendations and action plans - 'closing the loop' (for the past) and 'actions for the future')

2.3. Self evaluation is key
Appropriateness of academic standards set (*how do you know it is at the right standard/level*?)
Effectiveness of the curriculum (*how does the curriculum deliver the intended outcomes*?)
Effectiveness of assessment in measuring attainment of intended outcomes (*how is assessment used to ensure that students know their subject*?)
Extent to which standards and outcomes are achieved by students?
Quality of the learning opportunities provided?
Enhancement in this area means:
- Improvement: doing something better
- Development: doing something new or differently (and doing it well – how do you know?)
- Identification of areas of good practice
- Supporting areas of emerging good practice
- Good practice for some is normal for others? Things do not always work everywhere
- Supporting/enhancing quality of student experience (identification of resource needs)

Where next?
1. Retain academic freedom while maintaining quality and standards
2. Systems efficient, effective and streamlined, not bureaucratic
3. SK and European systems
4. Bologna declaration (1999)*; Prague (2001);Berlin (2003); Bergen Norway (May 2005)
5. Transferable credit and student mobility
6. About doing things properly to achieve aims/ends; about caring about what you are doing
7. Bringing together of information - with discussion of ideas by subject teams (according to the guidance and template)
8. Short self evaluation by teaching team (reflect, detect, correct)
9. Relate to data; supported by information
10. Action plan (and review of last year's plan)
11. Summarised by department
12. Summarised by faculty/university

*The Bologna Process: Towards the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)www.bologna-berlin2003.de/en/basic/index.htm
Berlin and Bergen Summits on Higher Education (Conference of European Ministers in charge of HE)
- adopt system of easily readable and comparable degrees
- adopt a system with two main cycles (undergraduate/graduate)
- establish a system of credits (such as ECTS)
- promote mobility by overcoming obstacles
- promote European co-operation in quality assurance
- promote European dimensions in higher education

3. CONCLUSIONS: ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

As the main benefits and advantages we can expect:
- Confidence in quality and standards
- Enhancing reputation nationally and internationally (Bologna)
- Enabling students to succeed
- Mechanisms not chance (things do go wrong)
- Discussions and comparisons - exchange of good practice
- Quality enhancement (better not different)
- To build quality in – not to inspect it out   (like wearing a seatbelt!)

Quality Assurance systems, as applied in SK and other (f.e.UK) universities may appear complex, but are they effective? Implementation can be achieved by threats (withdrawal of funding) or promises (additional funding), but more important than this is the overarching aim to promote ownership of the systems amongst staff, which can be achieved by highlighting the benefits of such a system. Benefits can be to promote and increase confidence in quality and standards and to enhance reputation both nationally and internationally. The reputation of the national higher education system may be improved in the international marketplace as an external point of reference is provided on the quality and standards of programmes with a common national framework for judgments. Quality assurance can offer systematic means of detecting and responding to issues, and for the identification of areas of strength and weakness. It requires subject groups and institutions to think critically about their educational provision and to identify matters for improvement. It is acknowledged that healthy competition and comparison always leads to improvement but can also assist in motivating departments and faculties and helping them to working together and identify and exchange good practice. The secret of good management is to avoid bad management and quality enhancement will be a natural outcome as the institutional reputation is enhanced. .

On the other hand, disadvantages can include overelaborate systems that are too demanding where simple procedures are needed with clear outcomes. Problems are often easier to find than solutions, and paperwork can sometimes use forests. Rigour is needed but without rigor mortis. So it is important to provide clear guidance and assistance, based on experience and practice, and to motivate staff to contemplate what they are doing and seek their own improvement. On a wider front, good systems can provide stability at times of continual change and development and, on a national scale, can foster confidence in a country's education as a whole, avoiding the scenario where an individual area may let down the whole. The concept of a national curriculum is abhorrent and academic freedom must be

maintained at the same time as standards are guaranteed and maintained. Provision should be equivalent, not identical, a concept especially relevant in academia, where the free spirit and nurturing of different approaches, original thought, creativity and even genius have as long a tradition as the subjects themselves.

4. REFERENCES

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