

## IEP supporting quality culture

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# A TWENTY-YEAR CONTRIBUTION TO INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

EUA'S INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION PROGRAMME



**IEP**

EUA-Institutional Evaluation Programme

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# **A TWENTY-YEAR CONTRIBUTION TO INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE**

**EUA'S INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION PROGRAMME**

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# Foreword

By Lothar Zechlin<sup>1</sup>

From the perspective of traditional European universities, 20 years might not be a long period of time. From the perspective of a 20-year old institution, it is an era covering a lifetime and, yet, the future is open with extremely exciting promises! The latter is valid for the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP); we are celebrating 20 years of its existence.

In 1994, when the first evaluations were performed at the universities of Gothenburg, Utrecht and Porto, it was a somewhat unfamiliar exercise, originated by a number of former rectors who wanted to share their experiences and thus contribute to quality development among more self-confident and less state-governed universities. Today, quality policy has become a vast field encompassing the whole European Higher Education Area in which formative evaluation is only one approach apart from accreditation, reviews, audits and others. The question of how future trends will develop within the spectrum between standardisation and quantitative assessment on the one side, and qualitative evaluation and organisational learning on the other, is open. However, this is not only a question of how to identify these trends but rather how to influence them. IEP will be part of this process based on its deep conviction that universities should rely on themselves and strengthen their self-steering capacity.

Conviction is one thing and its transfer into concrete practice, another. We need to continuously adapt the methodology of IEP to changing environments. With this purpose in mind, the present publication marks 20 years of IEP operations and provides the reader with a reflection on the nature of IEP, its specificity and profile, and an assessment on how it has contributed to quality improvement and responded to individual institutions' needs. It is written from different perspectives and includes an overview of the nature of IEP, experiences by evaluated institutions and testimonies of IEP pool members. It also provides an analysis of IEP reports and outcomes of the evaluations and reflections on the changes in the Programme, while concluding with reflections on what lies ahead. With such a pluralistic approach it aims to stimulate the discussion of all members and stakeholders of IEP bearing in mind that their expertise is the core capital of our Programme.

Today we are celebrating the success of IEP, and this publication will hopefully contribute to being able to look back in 20 years' time with pride to what has been achieved by IEP.

I would like to express our gratitude to all authors who worked on this publication. It would not have seen the light of day without their contribution.

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<sup>1</sup> Former President, Hamburg School of Economics and Politics, Germany; former Rector, University of Graz, Austria; Founding Rector, University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany; and Chair, IEP Steering Committee

# Part 1: IEP in context

## An inspiring time: 1987–1994

By Hans van Ginkel<sup>1</sup>

The years just before and after 1990 were challenging and inspiring. During that period, the fundamental changes in the geopolitical landscape of Europe, often summarised as the “Fall of the Wall” in Berlin, opened up many new perspectives, challenges and opportunities. The position and condition of the universities also changed fundamentally. Suddenly, international cooperation as well as staff and student mobility, became far more important and feasible.

The opening up of the European university landscape and the impact of the rapidly developing globalisation made it very clear that the European universities would soon have to cope with worldwide competition. A “Copernican change” was going to take place. Soon, national education systems and authorities would no longer be able to guarantee the quality – nor the global acceptance thereof – for each of the universities. It would rather be the other way around, as was already the case, for instance, in the USA: it would be the ranking positions of the individual universities that from now on would indicate the quality of the national systems. At the same time both in Brussels as well as the different national capitals the calls for quality assurance and accreditation systems were becoming increasingly louder and more urgent.

The universities in (continental) Europe, however, were not at all ready or prepared for such systems and, overall, had a strong preference for the traditional internal quality processes. Therefore, in 1991, the European Association of Universities (CRE) decided to focus more on the quality issue in its activities. In 1993 the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) was officially introduced. In 1994, after extensive preparations, the first pilot projects for the envisaged institutional evaluations took place in Gothenburg, Porto and Utrecht. At that time there were two major reasons for starting the programme: the first was to build expertise and prepare (ultimately) the member institutions for the future of assessments, accreditations and rankings that we were convinced would come. With hindsight, we can now say: rightly so! The second was to help member institutions in the former socialist countries in their efforts (and argumentation) to attain the scope and standards of the “true” university as indicated in the Magna Charta Universitatum.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Former Rector and Honorary Professor, Utrecht University, the Netherlands, initiator and first chair of IEP

<sup>2</sup> The Magna Charta Universitatum (1988), initiated by the University of Bologna, is a document signed by 755 universities from 80 countries, to celebrate university traditions and encourage bonds amongst European universities, but it also serves as a universal inspiration and is open to universities throughout the world.

Some choices had to be made in the development and implementation of the programme. These choices were related to the specific conditions in Europe, but also to the feasibility of the programme. We had to keep in mind that universities in different countries do have to work under different national legal and financial rules and regulations. The system therefore had to be very flexible and take into account this diversity. We also had to keep in mind that in continental Europe, in particular, education systems are public and this also includes higher education. Ministers of (Higher) Education under such conditions have three major tasks: 1) to provide study programmes so that the younger generations can find sufficient opportunities to study; 2) to guarantee access to them; and 3) to ensure the quality of these programmes. With the still growing numbers of future students it is therefore not likely that any study programme can really be closed down. After all it is cheaper and more feasible to improve a weak programme than to invent completely new programmes. An evaluation on the study-programme level would also lead to large overheads and an overload of work. We therefore did not see this as feasible or even a wise thing to do.

We therefore thought that it would also be better to apply the subsidiarity principle of the EU in the quality assessments in universities. This explains the choice for institutional evaluations. After all, when a university functions well, it is the university leadership, be it the rector, president or board of directors, who will be responsible for the quality of all the programmes. The institutional evaluation should rather focus on the capacity of the institution to develop and implement its strategies, in particular its capacity for change to continuously improve. Striving for excellence and constantly trying to work in better and often novel ways, is central to being a "true" university. This explains why we decided upon the model of one self-evaluation and two site visits, as well as the opportunity to request a third site visit after a few years, so as to ensure that the strategies for further improvement are well in place and under way. Today, after 20 years of experimentation and implementation, the apparent success of IEP indicates that we are on the right track.



# Part 1: IEP in context

## ABC of the Programme

By Alicja Bochajczuk<sup>1</sup>

The aim of this introductory chapter is to present the overall philosophy and methodology of the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) in a compact form as well as to serve as an overview of the Programme history, evaluation process and methodology. It provides an overview of type and scope of IEP evaluations and some data on the number of evaluations conducted so far.

### What is IEP?

IEP is an independent membership service of the European University Association (EUA) offering institutional evaluations to higher education institutions in Europe and worldwide. As mentioned by Professor van Ginkel in this publication, it was launched in 1993 by the European Association of Universities (CRE), one of two associations that merged to create EUA in 2001.

Since then, the European higher education landscape has undergone considerable changes: the Bologna Process has contributed to the rise of quality assurance in the policy discourse leading to the introduction of external quality assurance agencies in practically all countries in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Following the Berlin Communiqué in 2003 and the adoption of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), higher education institutions (HEIs) have strengthened their internal quality assurance systems.

Nowadays, EUA represents about 850 members located in 47 countries in Europe and beyond. These are individual universities and national rectors' conferences. EUA's main aims are to be the voice of universities in European policy discussions and to offer its members a range of activities in order to strengthen their leadership and management capacity. The Institutional Evaluation Programme is central to this objective, in line with the mission of the association to strengthen Europe's universities.

### Main features of IEP

The mission of IEP is to support HEIs and systems in developing their capacity for change through the process of institutional evaluation. IEP evaluations focus on HEIs' strategic planning and internal quality management, by examining the institutions as a whole and approaching them in the context of their specific goals and objectives.

IEP supports the HEIs by providing recommendations on institutional structures, policies, processes and culture, in order to enable them to achieve their three-fold mission: teaching and learning, research, and service to society.

The main characteristics of the IEP approach are:

- IEP is a voluntary process for the participating institutions; it is independent from governments and does not replace the role of national quality assurance agencies, its evaluations do not lead to any summative judgement or accreditation, nor are they geared towards ranking or comparing institutions.
- IEP applies a context-driven approach to its evaluations; mission-driven evaluations do not use externally imposed criteria, but evaluate the institutions taking into account their external and internal context.
- IEP evaluations are improvement-oriented, resulting in evaluation reports identifying good practices and providing recommendations for improvement. Thus, the rationale for an institution to register for an IEP evaluation should be to improve its quality.
- IEP emphasises an inclusive self-evaluation process and institutional self-knowledge for improved internal governance and management as well as for external accountability purposes.
- IEP does not impose consequences or require actions resulting from the evaluation. It is always up to the university to examine IEP recommendations and to make the decision on whether to implement them and how to do that.
- IEP is a European evaluation programme based on peer-review, with teams that represent the European higher education landscape and its diversity, offering their experiences to the service of the institution under evaluation.

The Programme is overseen by an independent Steering Committee, which has responsibility for the development, operation and monitoring of IEP. It is currently composed of eight members chosen among the IEP pool members. The daily running of activities is carried out by the IEP secretariat.

IEP is a full member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and is listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), a register of trustworthy quality assurance agencies operating in Europe. IEP was the first quality assurance body created with a broad European-wide mandate to be listed in EQAR and to be an ENQA member.

## IEP evaluation process

IEP evaluations are guided by four key questions which are based on a “fitness for purpose” approach: *What is the institution trying to do? How is the institution trying to do it? How does the institution know it works? How does the institution change in order to improve?* These seemingly simple but fundamental questions are meant to encourage institutions to prepare a critical self-analysis during the self-evaluation phase and guide the work of IEP teams.

# Part 1: IEP in context

## ***What is the institution trying to do?***

*How does it define its mission and objectives? Why does it opt for these? Are the choices justified and valid?*

## ***How is the institution trying to do it?***

*What are the decision-making processes? Are they transparent and consistent? How are authority and responsibilities distributed across the university? Are the processes, structures, responsibilities, and criteria chosen to fit for both defining valid objectives and for conceptualising and implementing suitable operations and tools, e.g. curricula or research programmes, etc.?*

## ***How does the institution know it works?***

*What kind of feedback system is in place to ensure that set objectives are met and to identify new challenges which require setting new objectives?*

## ***How does the institution change in order to improve?***

*What is the capacity of the university to change, both in view of shortcomings in reaching set objectives and in setting new objectives? Is it proactive or reactive?*

The four questions serve as a catalyst for many institutions which encounter challenges in answering them: the set of questions may become the point of departure for policies and a new approach to institutional development.

The evaluation process consists of the following steps:

- IEP establishes an evaluation team for each participating institution.
- The institution conducts a self-evaluation, which results in a self-evaluation report that serves as a background document for the work of IEP and is submitted to the evaluation team before the visits.
- The IEP team undertakes a first visit to become acquainted with the university and its environment to gain understanding of national and institutional opportunities and constraints.
- The IEP team carries out a second visit to deepen the team's knowledge of the institution and to formulate and confirm its findings. The visit ends with the presentation of an oral report that the evaluation team presents to the university leadership, the university community, and often also to a range of external stakeholders.
- An evaluation report is prepared by the team, highlighting good practices identified and providing recommendations for improvement. The reports are published on the IEP website.
- The institution is strongly advised to send a progress report on how IEP recommendations were addressed and to undergo a follow-up evaluation one to three years after the initial evaluation. The follow-up evaluations identify the impact that the initial evaluation has had on the institution's development, investigate the experiences gained from changes implemented after the initial evaluation and give further impetus for change.

## IEP pool and teams

As mentioned above, the evaluation methodology is based on a peer-review approach. Over the years IEP has succeeded in building a highly qualified European pool of peers, and developed a strong academic base for the Programme.

IEP evaluation teams consist of experienced and knowledgeable higher education leaders, a student and one higher education administrator or researcher as team coordinator. All teams are truly European: they are typically composed of five members, none of whom come from the country where the evaluated HEI is located, and none of whom come from the same country as another team member.

Team members are nominated by the IEP Steering Committee with a view to providing each participating institution with an appropriate mix of knowledge, skills, objectivity and international perspective. In addition, the Programme strives to ensure a balanced pool in terms of geographical distribution, gender and experience.

The stability and diversity of the IEP pool is considered to be one of IEP's key assets. In its quest to maintain and underpin the high quality performance of the pool, IEP organises an annual seminar for the pool members that focuses on emerging trends in European higher education as well as stimulating team dynamics.

## Type and scope of IEP evaluations

At the time of writing, in summer 2014, around 380 evaluations and follow-up evaluations in 45 countries have been conducted by IEP. Besides Europe, institutions from Africa, Japan, Latin America and the Middle East have participated in the Programme, praising its flexibility and responsiveness to the different contexts and their specific challenges.

IEP was initially conceived as a tool for universities, and in the course of two decades it has been applied successfully in a variety of institutional contexts, including public and private institutions, fine arts and performing arts institutions, polytechnic colleges, and military and police training establishments.

Number of IEP evaluations between 1994 and 2014	
Full IEP evaluations	334
Follow-up evaluations	48
Total	382

Geographical distribution of IEP evaluations – countries with the highest number of evaluations	
Romania	77
Portugal	52
Turkey	38
Slovakia	28
Spain	19

Institutional evaluations on request of individual institutions form the core of IEP activities. However, IEP has a record of successful coordinated evaluations and predicts further development in this area. Coordinated evaluations, sometimes also called system reviews, are typically initiated at the joint request of institutions and public authorities, and involve all or most higher education institutions in a given country or region. Funders have included national authorities and intergovernmental bodies such as the Council of Europe, the European Commission, and the World Bank.

# Part 1: IEP in context

In coordinated evaluations each institution receives its own IEP evaluation report; whenever it is appropriate, IEP also produces a system-wide analysis that highlights shared issues and challenges and facilitates a fruitful dialogue among all key actors and stakeholders, including governments. Coordinated evaluations constitute about one third of the evaluations carried out by IEP in the past 20 years.

## IEP coordinated evaluations

Serbia (2001-2002)

Macedonia (2002-2005)

Bosnia and Herzegovina (2003-2004)

Ireland (2003-2004)

Catalonia (2004-2005)

Slovakia (2006-2007)

Portugal (2006-2010)

Turkey (2007-2008)

Romania (2012-2014)

Montenegro (2013-2014)

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# IEP: Balancing core values and change<sup>1</sup>

By Tia Loukkola<sup>2</sup> and Andrée Sursock<sup>3</sup>

## Introduction

At the time of the launch of the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) in the mid-1990s, only four member states of the European Union had a process for evaluating higher education institutions: Denmark, France, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The IEP philosophy was conceived as an improvement-oriented evaluation, similar to these four pioneering national quality assurance processes. Since then, these national systems have had a rather complex history, full of twists and turns, that took them – variously – from evaluation to accreditation; from assigning ratings to subjects or study programmes to abandoning such a process; from the evaluation of subjects or programmes to the evaluation of institutions, and back to subjects or programmes (Sursock, 2011). By contrast, IEP has remained true to its initial improvement philosophy and its focus on the institution as a whole.

IEP adopted a fitness-for-purpose approach, which has proven to be highly suited to an instrument designed to evaluate very diverse institutions across the European continent and was in keeping with the prevailing evaluation philosophy of the mid-1990s in Western Europe. Later on, accreditation approaches based on externally defined criteria swept in from Eastern Europe (Westerheijden, 2001) and put pressure on western European quality assurance agencies to change. Some transformed into accreditation agencies. This transformation led to greater emphasis being placed on accountability at the expense of improvement-led quality assurance. Those agencies that were committed to a fitness-for-purpose approach, including IEP, began to refer to “fitness for (and of) purpose”. In this perspective, the objectives of an institution could not simply be taken for granted and as starting points of the evaluation; these objectives could be evaluated and criticised if, for instance, they were found to be unrealistic by the external panel. This change was a small compromise to the IEP approach that has consistently been mission-driven.

IEP's main objective has been to support the strategic development of autonomous universities. As such, IEP was ahead of its times in continental Europe where, by and large, the university sector has traditionally been governed centrally by national authorities. The reforms that enlarged the scope of institutional autonomy in Europe occurred mostly at the turn of the 21st century, in other words after the launch of IEP. These reforms contained an underlying emphasis on the strategic capacity and the responsibilities of institutions in monitoring the quality of their activities. It is worth noting that, starting in 2003, the stress on the institutional responsibility for quality assurance became a leitmotiv of the Bologna Process. Thus, in effect, IEP was ahead of its time in insisting to develop autonomous, strategic and strong institutions that took responsibility for their quality assurance.

This chapter analyses the process of change and examines the extent to which IEP has remained faithful to its initial core values, while adapting to the changing context in which it operates. In doing so, it distinguishes between internal and external change drivers. The conclusion highlights the range of factors that have contributed to its capacity to balance core values with the requirements to change.

<sup>1</sup> An adapted version of “Das Institutional Evaluation Programme: Zwischen Grundwerten und Wandel” by Loukkola, T., and Sursock, A. (*Handbuch Qualität in Studium und Lehre, F 9.1, RAABE, Germany*)

<sup>2</sup> Director of the Institutional Development unit, European University Association, Director of EUA's Institutional Evaluation Programme

<sup>3</sup> Senior Adviser, European University Association, former Deputy Secretary General of EUA responsible for developing EUA's quality assurance policy positions and activities, including IEP

# Part 1: IEP in context

## Internal change drivers: IEP's internally organised reviews

The practice of organising a review of IEP's own process was established at the initial launch of the Programme. The pilot phase involving three institutions was evaluated immediately afterwards. This first review was followed by several external and internal evaluation exercises as well as by a quickly established tradition for the Programme's Steering Committee to serve as a key internal monitoring agent and to use the regular annual training of evaluators (the annual seminar) as a forum for obtaining feedback and discussing possible improvements.

Over the years, these initiatives have helped to improve the IEP Guidelines, the evaluators' skills, the general approach to the evaluations and the evaluation reports; they have also contributed to the development of policies, such as the Charter of Conduct for pool members.

These efforts were recognised by an external review conducted in 2002 that stated:

From the beginning, it (IEP) developed a strong academic base for the programme and established a tradition of internal review of its operation and findings, evidenced in programme papers and guideline revision and in the contribution of the annual induction meetings to quality improvement of the programme. (Nilsson *et al.*, 2002, p. 11)

Thus, the IEP Steering Committee and the secretariat have a long established tradition to continuously monitor and revise the policies and activities of the Programme as a result of the internally organised reviews.

## External change drivers: the European quality assurance framework

Aside from these internally driven changes, IEP has also responded to external change drivers, particularly when the European quality assurance framework (i.e. ESG and EQAR) was introduced. Specifically, the adoption of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) in 2005, the strengthening of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) membership criteria, the external reviews of agencies and the creation of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) launched a process of self-reflection and a series of changes among quality assurance agencies, including IEP.

In 2006 the IEP Steering Committee decided that IEP should undergo an external review in order to maintain its status as a full member of ENQA and to be listed on EQAR. The ESG had been adopted the previous year and ENQA had changed its statute and required that ENQA members demonstrated compliance with the ESG through an external review. The establishment of EQAR, which also uses the ESG as the set of criteria for inclusion in the Register, was also foreseen in 2005, following the Bergen Communiqué that was issued at the conclusion of the Bologna ministerial meeting.

At the time, however, a number of these externally driven changes were seen by some IEP founding members as a threat to the core philosophy of the Programme. Following the decision of principle to aim at compliance with the ESG, the IEP Steering Committee considered IEP core processes in the

light of each of the standards. It concluded that some changes were indeed needed – and the Steering Committee's discussion focused on how to implement them while remaining true to the IEP philosophy and methodology – but other changes were rejected.

Before launching into the discussion of the changes introduced, it would be useful to discuss the three changes that were ultimately rejected in order to safeguard IEP's core philosophy and scope of activities:

- ESG standard 2.3 refers to the need for basing quality assurance on explicit, predefined criteria, which should be applied consistently. The Steering Committee considered that the principle of mission-led evaluations was important given the diversity of national contexts in which IEP works. The Steering Committee interpreted standard 2.3 to mean that there is a requirement for a consistent and pre-defined approach to the evaluations, and that this is indeed provided in two ways: 1) by the four questions (cf. ABC of the Programme in this publication) which frame the IEP evaluations and provide fit-for-purpose criteria; and 2) by the requirement to address a number of set topics in the evaluation reports. IEP does not believe that criteria are identical with drafting and implementing check lists, at least not in the case of institutional evaluations geared towards safeguarding the specificities of each institutional profile, while fostering the institutional capacity for autonomous improvement. External review panels in 2009 and 2014 have been in accord with this interpretation.
- Despite the ENQA panel's recommendation in 2009 (ENQA, 2009) to expand the profiles of the IEP evaluators beyond the rectors and vice-rectors, the principles guiding their recruitment have remained the same apart from the change concerning students (as discussed below). The Steering Committee strongly believed that the characteristics of the pool were fit for purpose and served the goals of IEP and that, more importantly, this characteristic set IEP apart from other external quality assurance providers.
- IEP has also kept to its principle of offering evaluations upon request, even in the case of coordinated evaluations. Even when these evaluations are funded by governments, each institution must express its interest in being evaluated and, indeed, some have chosen not to take part in the evaluations.

## The explicit consideration of Part 1 of the ESG

The first set of changes related to ESG standard 2.1 require quality assurance agencies to examine how institutions have implemented internal quality assurance processes as defined in ESG Part 1 (cf. ENQA, 2005). As was noted above, since its inception, the IEP has focused on the strategic capacity of institutions. As a concrete example, IEP examines the monitoring of activities in teaching and learning (e.g. which senior person and committees are in charge of overseeing the quality, how it is done, etc.). This leads to questions regarding the development and approval of new study programmes, student support services, etc., and their impact – for instance, on student retention. Thus, the evaluations consider how institutions monitor their activities in order to ensure that they reach their strategic objectives. This aspect is central to the third in the set of four key questions that outline the IEP evaluations: "How does the institution know it works?"

Therefore, and paradoxically, the requirement to make the ESG explicit in the IEP Guidelines and methodology was not initially seen as important by the IEP Steering Committee. The IEP Guidelines were amended to mention the ESG but without detailing them. However, the 2009 ENQA review (ENQA, 2009) resulted in a recommendation to make the ESG more explicit and, as a response, IEP took steps in that direction by taking the following actions:



# Part 1: IEP in context

- The introductory text of the Guidelines for institutions emphasises that IEP evaluations address the ESG, but as part of the larger framework of quality management, particularly because IEP is not solely focused on teaching and learning, as are the ESG (IEP, 2014). In addition, in line with IEP's approach, the evaluation teams do not check the compliance with each standard in detail. Instead, they examine the appropriateness of all quality management processes at the level of the institution, including the areas covered by ESG Part 1.
- The full text of the ESG is now in an annex to the Guidelines for institutions and the institutions are encouraged to consider the ESG Part 1 in their self-evaluation process.
- Sessions have been organised in the regular trainings of IEP pool members to draw the attention of the IEP teams to the more explicit focus on the ESG.
- Quality management and quality culture constitute a mandatory chapter in the IEP reports.

The explicit rendering of the ESG Part 1 has been done within the methodology and philosophy of IEP and in 2014 the external review panel was able to conclude that these measures have also had an impact on the contents of the evaluations (ENQA, 2014).

Today, the chapter in the evaluation reports that focuses on internal quality assurance is typically more developed than in the past. This may be attributed to the changes explained above, but it is certainly also the result of institutional developments in this area. Thus, an EUA study has shown that the bulk of European higher education institutions have started developing their internal quality assurance in line with the ESG Part 1 after 2005 (Loukkola and Zhang, 2010, p. 21). Therefore, the IEP teams have more evidence to consider than they did several years ago when student questionnaires were virtually the single explicit practice in internal quality assurance to be found in institutions. Of course, there were many ways in which institutions ensured quality but these were not identified at the time as quality assurance.

## The publication of the evaluation reports

Up until 2008, IEP encouraged institutions to make their evaluation reports public but this was not a requirement. Since the start of the Programme, the IEP teams have always stressed that, in order to ensure that the evaluation reports would be an effective lever for change, it would be useful to disseminate them and discuss them within the institutions and with the external stakeholders. Therefore, apart from a handful of exceptions, mostly at the early stages of IEP, all reports were public but were not always published. In other words, IEP would make them available to anyone who asked but the actual publication, if any, was done by the institutions. This practice did not change with the advent of the Internet that enabled the possibility of posting reports online. This was not a deliberate policy but simply the continuation of the practice that the publication was the responsibility of the institutions which had been evaluated.

Today, in line with the ESG, standard 2.5, IEP is responsible for the publication of all the reports. This change was discussed more intensely within the Programme than the first one. The IEP evaluators were concerned that this would alter their relationship with the institutions that were being evaluated. The teams traditionally refer to themselves as "critical friends"; they feared that if the IEP reports were written for a wider public, the institutions would be less open with the teams.

In fact, the publication of the reports has not changed the relationship with the institutions for two main reasons:

- Firstly, as opposed to the mid-1990s, when most institutions in Europe were unfamiliar with external quality assurance, by the time this change was implemented it was rare that an institution had not been touched directly by national quality assurance procedures and had not seen the publication of its evaluation reports. The fact that the IEP reports were published did not alter the spirit in which the evaluations were conducted.
- Secondly, the tone and contents of the reports were not changed by this requirement because – as noted earlier – the teams encouraged the institutions to publish the reports anyway. In other words, the reports had always been written with a larger audience in mind and not just the institutional leadership.

In summary, the publication of the reports turned an informal practice into a formal policy without altering the spirit of the evaluations.

This being said, the fact that the reports are systematically published by IEP on its website has also resulted in more attention being paid to their consistency. This point, which was raised in the 2009 ENQA review, had been the topic of internal discussions ever since IEP was engaged to conduct coordinated evaluations across national systems. Typically, the individual evaluation reports are analysed and synthesised in a transversal report that identify shared challenges and highlight common recommendations. In order to carry out this task successfully, it is important that the evaluation reports address the same topics across the system. Thus, the coordinated evaluations have led to greater emphasis on consistency.

## The inclusion of students in IEP

The third major change introduced as a result of the ESG was the inclusion of students in IEP teams. While the idea of student participation in the external review panels is not specifically mentioned in any standard of the ESG, by 2008 it was evident that it had become a *sine qua non* condition for ENQA membership and for inclusion in EQAR.

This was the most debated of all the changes because it touched upon a core aspect of IEP – the peer review. From the beginning, the IEP teams included three (former or current) rectors and vice-rectors. The team chairs are always rectors and are selected after they have acquired significant IEP experience. The inclusion of rectors ensures a true peer-to-peer exchange with the leadership of the participating university and an effective focus on the strategic development of the institution. The fourth person on the team has traditionally been a senior higher education administrator or researcher who serves as the team coordinator with specific responsibilities to organise the visits and write the evaluation report under the supervision of the team chair.

The IEP governance has also been in the hands of peers: the Steering Committee, composed of representatives of the IEP pool of evaluators, makes all decisions regarding the Programme's policies and activities.

Therefore, whether in the composition of the teams or the governance of the Programme, the peer-to-peer aspect was one of the core constituents of IEP's identity and signature. When the notion of including students in the teams was discussed, some Steering Committee members opposed it on the grounds that students could not contribute to the strategic discussions that were at the heart of the IEP process.

The chapter by Kažoka and Zhang in this publication discusses the process of introducing student

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participation in IEP and results of a study conducted by IEP in 2013 in further detail. All in all, the study confirmed that the inclusion of students into the Programme has taken place smoothly and that students have been incorporated into the teams as regular team members. The main benefit of their involvement was to enrich the discussion of topics that would have been addressed anyway.

An important factor was the view held to include students in the IEP teams would extend the notion of peers to embrace a key constituency of institutions – the students – at the same time as sending out a signal to the evaluated institutions about the importance of considering students as full members of the university community and the importance of students' involvement in the institution's governance.

## Impact on the governance and the management of IEP

Perhaps the two areas most affected by the ESG and the associated agency reviews were the governance and management of IEP.

The Programme has had a Steering Committee in charge of all its activities and has been functioning in a very independent manner from EUA. However, in order to demonstrate compliance with ESG 3.6 on the independence of the agencies, the boundaries between the governance of IEP and that of EUA were made even more explicit, formal and transparent. The mandate of the IEP Steering Committee was revised to reflect this.

With ESG 3.8 on the need for agencies to have accountability procedures, the IEP Steering Committee has also invested greater efforts in systematising the governance procedures and making them more transparent. Following the recommendation arising from the 2009 ENQA review to introduce a more formal and regular review of IEP activities, the Steering Committee initiated the practice of adopting an Annual Report (the first one focused on the year 2009). Moreover, the Steering Committee decided to complete its internal "Plan-Do-Check-Act" cycle with a Work Programme that has now been adopted on a yearly basis. Also, specific policy documents have been adopted in recent years with the aim of documenting procedures that were previously not so explicitly defined on how IEP is governed and how the IEP pool is managed.

On the management side, efforts to comply with the ESG resulted in greater formalisation of procedures and stress on the professionalism of the IEP secretariat: an internal quality manual was drawn up to formalise practice within the secretariat, and particular attention has been paid to staff development, financial management and internal data management.

In addition, as mentioned, greater attention is now paid to the consistency across the evaluation reports. Therefore, while the evaluation teams continue to have the responsibility for their findings and conclusions, the IEP secretariat has taken an increasingly active role during the finalisation of the evaluation reports through language editing and providing the teams with feedback on how the reports are understood by an external person. With this procedure, the Programme aims to achieve a balance between the need to address both the institution being evaluated and a wider audience.

These changes in the governance and management of IEP are in line with the goals of the ESG that promote improved accountability and transparency as well as the professionalism of the quality assurance agencies.

## Concluding remarks

Any quality assurance provider needs to examine continuously its processes and to use the self-evaluation and external reviews as opportunities to improve. This has been the case for IEP as well. The changes introduced in order to comply with the ESG have led to other changes that were not necessarily required by the ESG as such, but stemmed from related discussions. Thus, the IEP's experience demonstrates the validity of the observations made in an ENQA study that indicated the utility of the ESG as a tool for improving quality assurance agencies (ENQA, 2011) and setting as the aim of the next round of external evaluation to promote the quality enhancement of the agencies (ENQA, 2012).

In conclusion, it is interesting to go back to the concerns that were expressed when IEP started the process of adjusting to the ESG. These concerns were captured in an article that is important to quote at some length:

Although agreeing that 'quality improvement depends on much more than the limited area of quality assurance' (Westerheijden *et al.*, 2007, p. 308), we are convinced, from the reports analysed and the work done by other authors (Hofmann, 2005; Williams, 1999; Nilsson *et al.*, 2002), that the IEP can constitute a useful approach towards the universities' quality improvement. The main emphasis of IEP is not accountability to public authorities or society. The IEP was designed to uphold and respect institutional autonomy, its main objectives being quality improvement and helping institutions to deal with external changing conditions and new European trends. New themes have progressively been incorporated in the follow-up reports, such as the implementation of the Bologna Process and more recently the compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).

However, despite its apparent success, the IEP has recently decided to adapt its grounding philosophy and its operational mechanisms to comply with the rules imposed by the ESG. It remains to be seen how much the IEP will damage its most important characteristics and grounding philosophy by adapting to the eventual victory of accreditation and accountability over quality enhancement. (Tavares *et al.*, 2010)

With the passage of time, it is now possible to confirm that the expected damage to the core values has not occurred. In a recent article by Romanian academics (Nagy *et al.*, 2013) whose institution had been evaluated by IEP in 2012, the authors compare the national accreditation provided by ARACIS, the Romanian quality assurance agency, to the IEP evaluation. In the process they identify the main benefits of IEP. They state that:

On one hand, the ARACIS evaluation certified that the university fulfils all the quality standards, conferring public credibility. This is important information for the prospective students interested in enrolling into the institution, parents, or the employers who are hiring our graduates. Also, through the transparent information we complied with the public demand for governmental accountability (Meyers, 1981). On the other hand, the IEP evaluation contributed by bringing the insightful philosophy and triggered internal improvement [...] and] is focused on the institutional aims and strategy and allows more freedom in deciding the paths.

The authors conclude that

[...] both types of evaluations bring benefits for the evaluated institution, especially if we consider the different perspectives through which they approach the evaluation process. In this way, the institution is helped to achieve a set of standards, but it is also propelled in setting its own objectives, strategic aims and quality indicators.

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What are the factors that have allowed IEP to retain its basic philosophy and approach while adapting to changing contexts? These factors include its autonomy from governments that allows it to determine its own path (cf. Hopbach in this publication) and a flexible methodology that can adapt to a variety of institutions. In addition, as a programme committed to strategic change, IEP is a learning organisation. Its learning capacity is strengthened by the continuity in the governance of the Programme through the Steering Committee; the regular reviews since the pilot phase, whether internally or externally organised; the smooth transition between the three consecutive executive heads of the Programme; the stability of the pool of evaluators and the mandatory annual seminars for evaluators, which result in a great commitment to the IEP philosophy and buy-in as revealed by the yearly surveys of the evaluators. As important, the fact that IEP is based in a university association allows the Programme to keep abreast of the changing higher education landscape. All these aspects contribute to ensuring that the IEP remains current while upholding its original vision.

With the constant change in the European higher education and quality assurance landscape the challenge for IEP is to remain relevant to the higher education institutions. The philosophical principle of IEP provides a good basis for this; IEP has always focused on supporting the participating institutions in adapting to new circumstances and promoting their capacity to change, but as an external quality assurance provider it needs to continue to demonstrate its own capacity to change.

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# Part 1: IEP in context

## Five years of student participation in IEP<sup>1</sup>

By Asnate Kažoka<sup>2</sup> and Thérèse Zhang<sup>3</sup>

Student participation in quality assurance processes has been acknowledged in Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) since 2005. Three types of student involvement in quality assurance can be identified: at institutional, external, and quality assurance agencies' governance levels (Galán Palomares, 2012). At institutional level, internal quality assurance processes within higher education institutions (HEIs) increasingly involve students. At external level, students may be consulted for providing information during reviews, or serve as members in external programme or institutional review panels. Finally, students may also be involved in the governance of quality assurance agencies.

This chapter examines the practice of involving students as part of the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) evaluators' pool, where students have been present as peer team members for all evaluations since 2009. It will also look at the collaboration between IEP and the European Students' Union (ESU) as an example of effectively organising student participation.

For the purpose of this chapter, student participation in IEP was examined through the results of two surveys conducted among all past and present IEP student evaluators, and among a selection of members from the IEP pool members. The survey for students collected 29 answers,<sup>4</sup> and the survey for pool members collected 36 answers.<sup>5</sup> In order to complement data obtained through these surveys, 19 phone interviews were conducted between July 2013 and March 2014: ten with students, four with other IEP pool members, and five<sup>6</sup> with institutions that had their last IEP evaluation between 2009 and 2012.

The following sections will briefly describe how student participation was introduced in IEP; discuss how students are involved in practice and feedback on the existing practice; propose an assessment of impact based on feedback collected from students, other pool members and institutions evaluated; and finally reflect on lessons learnt so far.

### The introduction of student participation

As student participation in quality assurance was increasingly discussed at European level, notably in the framework of the E4 Group,<sup>7</sup> the IEP Steering Committee (SC) started considering including students in the IEP evaluation teams in 2005-2006. Mixed opinions were expressed in the SC at that time: there were

<sup>1</sup> An adapted version of "Students as external evaluators in peer-review based EQA: Five years of student participation in the Institutional Evaluation Programme" (presented at the European Quality Assurance Forum 2013 and published in the post-forum publication: *Working together to take quality forward. A selection of papers from the 8<sup>th</sup> European Quality Assurance Forum*, EUA, Brussels)

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<sup>4</sup> Out of 71 invited to respond.

<sup>5</sup> Out of 55 invited to respond. Two thirds of them participated in evaluations where no student was involved, thus being able to compare experiences (with and without student team members).

<sup>6</sup> Interviews were conducted with the liaison person at the time of the last IEP evaluation. All the institutions interviewed were evaluated by IEP at least twice; four of them had at least one evaluation without any student on the team.

<sup>7</sup> Since 2001, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the European Students' Union (ESU), the European University Association (EUA) and the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) have been meeting regularly as the E4 Group to discuss how to develop a European dimension for quality assurance further.

concerns related to students' lack of experience in university management, possibly challenging the usual team dynamics, as well as positive feelings about students bringing a complementary perspective.

Eventually, eight students participated in IEP evaluations during a pilot phase (2006-2008). The practice was monitored and assessed by the SC, and found positive enough to be extended to all IEP evaluations as from 2008-2009.

All students during the pilot phase were selected through ESU. Although the IEP SC first reserved the right to recruit student members also through other means, in 2008 it decided that students would be recruited, in the first instance through ESU, which had since the beginning considered that participation in IEP would be beneficial for the students' understanding of quality education.

## Students as evaluators in IEP: how it works in practice

In 2009, IEP and ESU signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that defined the procedures related to student participation in IEP. In addition, both organisations agreed to appoint contact persons for maintaining active communication and organise a feedback meeting every year.

In 2013, a total of 71 students had participated in IEP evaluations, and 125 IEP evaluations had taken place with the participation of one student in the team (out of a total of 336 IEP evaluations carried out throughout 19 years of existence).

### **Student recruitment**

Every year ESU launches a call for pre-selecting students, and nominates students for the upcoming round of evaluations, following criteria provided by IEP and agreed by ESU. The IEP SC selects the students participating in the upcoming round from these nominations. Current criteria for nomination include: be a student; be active on a national level or on university governance bodies; and have the appropriate language skills in English. The nominations should also be balanced in terms of discipline and geographic origins. Any adjustment to the criteria is discussed between ESU and IEP.

As demands for students in external evaluations (other than IEP) have risen, ESU nowadays organises a pre-selection in the broader context of recruitment for an ESU QA student expert pool, with students who are knowledgeable about quality assurance, receive regular training, and provide inputs for all quality assurance-related matters where ESU is involved, including serving as trainers at national level and participating in external evaluations. ESU recruits students through a call sent to national student unions (NUS) but open to all students through the ESU website.

About two thirds of all students who responded to the survey participated in two to four IEP evaluations. While, in the first years, each student typically participated in one evaluation, since 2011 students tend to participate in several consecutive evaluation rounds, and can be considered as already knowledgeable about the evaluation process and IEP methodology when starting a new evaluation.

The recruitment process for participating in IEP appeared clear to 76% of the student respondents to the survey, but to some students it did not necessarily mean that it was transparent. Students' opinions are mixed regarding the purpose of the recruitment process: some would have preferred a fully open process enabling more non-ESU students to participate, whereas others think it is important that the NUS decide who should participate; some believe that students should be selected based on their CV and motivation



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in quality assurance only, whereas others see the process as deciding on who should “represent students in the evaluations”.

## **Training**

ESU nominates students for IEP evaluations after having ensured a sufficient level of training. This training is organised annually for all members of the ESU student expert pool. It is carried out by ESU Executive Committee members and experienced members of the ESU student expert pool. Participants are introduced to various quality assurance approaches throughout the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), through a briefing on the latest quality assurance policy developments and the importance of the ESG, and a role play for students to take the role of external review panel members. The training also includes adjustable modules to address the different levels of knowledge among participants and adopting the right attitude as an evaluator.

After this ESU training, students selected to take part in IEP evaluations participate in the IEP annual training seminar, which is a prerequisite for participating in evaluation teams. Every year, a special session is organised for newcomers participating in IEP for the first time. This session is designed to address all newcomers, based on the idea that students are equal members – although most of the time it is attended by a majority of students, as IEP does not necessarily recruit non-student pool members every year.

When students began to participate in IEP, in 2005-2006, some team coordinators or chairs offered mentoring, on an individual basis, by giving advice on how to behave as an evaluator, and showing availability for answering any questions. The practice gradually stopped because it was seen as increasingly unnecessary. However, the pilot phase showed that specific needs could be addressed, such as an overview on governance and funding, and briefing on behaving as an external evaluator. The newcomers' session during the IEP seminar covers these issues, but there has been some feedback indicating that this training would be too short and content too packed. Whether students would need more or specific training is still debated. Some students would like to have special foci on unfamiliar issues such as governance, or specific skills that students could master less easily (how to ask questions, how to move from data examination to recommendations – all issues which non-student newcomers could also benefit from learning about). Other students would prefer the training to be kept the same for all newcomers, out of the principle of not flagging out students as “weaker” newcomers.

Despite mixed opinions on possible improvement, almost all students who answered the survey were satisfied with the training and information provided at the IEP annual seminar, and with the complementarity of training opportunities between IEP and the ESU QA student expert pool.

## **Participation in the evaluations**

Once all students participating in an evaluation round are confirmed, IEP decides the composition of evaluation teams.

76% of students who answered the survey were satisfied with the institutions they were assigned to. Besides, 90% of students felt that, thanks to flexibility shown by HEIs, the teams and the IEP secretariat in scheduling the visits, it was not a problem to cope with IEP, including travelling for visits, and their other commitments. The most cited challenges, by both students and non-student pool members, are: adopting the right attitude and tone as an evaluator; conducting the exercise in English; participating in the drafting phase of the final evaluation report;<sup>8</sup> and reaching a proper level of preparation before the visits.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Only 60% of student respondents to the survey think that student contribution had an influence on the preparation and drafting of the final evaluation reports.

<sup>9</sup> In understanding the country background, challenges related to topics such as governance, and in getting prepared as a team.

In general, students took their job very seriously and felt committed towards the IEP philosophy and methodology. They unanimously agreed that IEP provided learning opportunities, such as working with people from different backgrounds, benefit from their experiences, and sharpening their understanding of quality assurance and the institutional world beyond theoretical knowledge. Many interviewed students pointed out that, compared to other experiences they had, the IEP experience allowed them to become acquainted with a different approach of quality assurance and how an external evaluation can be conducted with a strong focus on quality culture and enhancement. Students also felt that team dynamics allowed them to better grasp issues at stake within the institution as well as to form their own view, which was felt as useful for their own experience, back in their home institution. Finally, some students stated that, through IEP, they have learnt to further understand the complexity of the EHEA, and how the EHEA has brought people from various systems together, through a common language on higher education. This trans-national dimension was felt as enriching for their own experience.

### ***Student participation in the management of the Programme***

Since 2009, the IEP SC has included a student member, appointed by the SC based on an ESU proposal of three student candidates. Candidates must be part of the pool at the time of the appointment or have been part of the pool the year before, and must be enrolled as a student in a European university during his/her term. The student is appointed for a two-year term.

Two students have participated in the IEP SC so far. Both felt welcome when they started their mandate, although they would have liked to receive more information on the history of IEP and ongoing debates before starting. They also felt that they acted and contributed as any other SC member, and that the student in the SC represents the student view within the IEP pool, not ESU as such.

## **Impact of the practice: feedback from the field**

### ***Impact within the evaluated institutions***

A majority of evaluated institutions and non-student pool members believe that student participation in IEP does make a difference for the evaluated institution, but responses differ when asked why. Some consider that the team becomes closer to the students' views and students within the evaluated institution can identify themselves with someone in the team, and feel more open during interviews – thus making the IEP process a “real” peer-review including all constituencies of an HEI. Others felt that the general atmosphere was made less formal by the presence of the students. Interestingly, three out of five interviewed institutions related student participation as external evaluators to an opportunity for enhancing student participation in their own governance structures, and student participation in the institution's life at large. All evaluated institutions understood that by including a student, IEP also communicates its belief that students should be full and active members of a university community.

In terms of influence on the content of the evaluation, opinions are mixed. Institutions mostly felt that there could have been an impact, if there were areas in which, for various reasons, students at the institution had concerns and could not formulate them in an appropriate way. Apart from this, the evaluated institutions could not really define a specific impact from the student's presence.

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## *Impact on team dynamics*

As demonstrated by the survey and interviews, students were satisfied with their role as a team member within the team: they felt welcome and felt the team acted in a collegial way. This is mutual: other pool members feel that students fit in just as well as any other team member. However, several interviewees thought that some students felt the need to “over-prove” themselves, and show that they do have experience in quality assurance and are able to address the task, more than a new non-student team member would do. Students also expressed their feeling of bearing a responsibility because their performance in IEP teams could influence student participation in international review panels at large. They felt that, although they do not represent ESU in evaluation teams, they had a responsibility towards ESU as the structure that trained and nominated them.

All pool members acknowledged that team dynamics vary depending on each evaluation, individual attitudes, and the composition of the team. However, the role of the chair, and to a lesser extent the coordinator, was constantly underlined by all as fundamental for the quality and dynamics of team work during the evaluation. Also, students were very much aware that their role in the team mostly depends on themselves and how they would contribute. Other pool members noticed that most students they met in their teams were well prepared. A few of them also pointed out the difference between students with a policy agenda and others, who could relate more easily to the students met in the institution.

## *Impact on the IEP evaluation process*

Whilst the IEP policy is that students should be regarded as any other regular team member, there are, among non-student pool members, two different ways of envisaging their contribution in the evaluation process. On the one hand, students are considered as good contributors for addressing specific student-related issues and/or interviewing students: 97% of non-student pool members agreed that having a student in the team was an asset for this purpose. About 85% of students believed that their participation has influenced the way to address student-specific issues, and interviewing students during the visits. Also, non-student pool members noticed a tendency for the students to focus on these, especially if they are pushed into that role.

On the other hand, some non-student pool members also believe that students should provide input for all areas, not only for teaching and learning or student welfare. However, in the current situation, non-student pool members do not necessarily see the presence of a student as an asset in discussing non-student specific issues or interviewing other university representatives.<sup>10</sup> Students were also less convinced by their own contribution for addressing non-student specific issues or interviewing other representatives during the visit: only 65% of them believe that students did contribute to these matters, and some of them were surprised to be encouraged to contribute to these issues. Further encouragement and support may then be needed for fostering their participation in areas such as governance, funding or research.

This difference in interpretation of the student's role, which can be found among students as well as other pool members, may lead to confusion to what should be expected from the student member of a team. Some students expressed that they felt insecure about their role, or how they should relate to the other team members.

<sup>10</sup> Half of the non-student pool members believe it was helpful, a third of them answered maybe it was, and the rest that it was not useful.

Nevertheless, the benefits of student participation were clear to both students and other pool members: providing a new and complementary insight or perspective into topics that would have been addressed anyway. A few students commented in this regard that they were positively surprised by how much other team members knew about student-related issues. Finally, many pool members believe that student participation most probably did not change the IEP core philosophy or methodology, but it has contributed in improving IEP in general, and is a strength of IEP.

## Lessons learnt and food for thought: ways forward

The inclusion of students as evaluators should undoubtedly be related to students being recognised and valued as active university community members. Student participation as a way to enhance students' active role in internal quality assurance and governance of HEIs appears as the most noticeable impact of the practice. For students who participated in evaluations, further appreciating the diversity of quality assurance approaches and higher education systems throughout the EHEA can only be useful for them to contribute in building up a European dimension for higher education, in their future endeavours.

For the future, improving the students and their team-mates' understanding of what the student's role should be, would contribute to improving conditions of student participation. This would involve clarifying whether, and how students are expected to contribute in areas where they would not tend to be active, and encouraging them to ask questions in these areas if needed. Clear communication between IEP and ESU about the expectations towards the recruitment process and the participation of students, and the role of the chair in terms of team dynamics are crucial for clarifying this point at the beginning of an evaluation process.

In addition, support for student participation could be reinforced, through further emphasis on the training provided both by ESU and IEP. Thorough preparatory meetings where the team discusses the structure of the visit, the distribution of roles, and the objectives and expectations from each meeting, even if they seem obvious to more experienced team members, would also help gaining more confidence for the upcoming process.

Finally, as one student put it, participation in IEP, a service of the EUA, has contributed to a better mutual understanding between EUA and ESU regarding student participation in quality assurance, and increasing student participation in higher education processes in general.

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# Part 1: IEP in context

## Institutional evaluations: Developments and future perspectives

By Achim Hopbach<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Over the last 20 years, institutional evaluations, have witnessed interesting and varied developments as one of the predominant approaches to external quality assurance in European higher education. They were introduced to national quality assurance systems and replaced again. They were valued as a more appropriate approach for well-developed higher education systems with “mature” higher education institutions and thus were deemed to be the future model. At the same time they were disparaged as a “light” touch, actually meaning too light to have an impact on quality in teaching and learning which is why they were deemed to be a failure. This admittedly exaggerated comparison gives just one example of many highly controversial discussions and dynamic developments in the field of quality assurance since the early 1990s.

It is obvious that, in terms of external quality assurance, the situation in Europe has changed significantly during this time. Discussions on past and current developments of institutional evaluations, as one pillar of external quality assurance in higher education, and trying to identify its future perspectives, are particularly interesting with the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) as the reference point as it seems surprisingly stable.

This chapter discusses developments of institutional evaluations and tries to shed light on reasons for likely future developments. In doing so the chapter discusses the assumption that it is surprising that, in its first 20 years, IEP has not undergone major or even fundamental changes (cf. Loukkola & Sursock in this publication). In its conclusion, the article finally tries to show why this development of IEP actually cannot be surprising at all.

### Dynamic European quality assurance: From the “accreditation trail” to the “audit-drift”?

The European Association of Universities (CRE) started IEP in 1994 which marked a decisive point in the development of external quality assurance in Europe. The European Commission launched the project “Quality Assessment in the Field of Higher Education”, the so-called European Pilot Projects which developed and tested a methodology for evaluation teaching and learning (European Commission, 1995). This project paved the way for two important developments. Firstly, in methodological terms, the development and implementation of the so-called “Four Stage Model”: self-evaluation, peer review, a published report and follow-up as the main steps of an external quality assurance procedure became the predominant structure for the various approaches to external quality assurance, whether it be programme accreditation or quality audits. Secondly, and of greater interest for this article in terms of subject matter, many national external quality assurance systems followed the example of the European pilot projects and focused on the programme level. This was especially true where the development of an external quality assurance system coincided with the start of the Bologna Process and the introduction of the new Bachelor/Master

structure. Therefore, the focus of interest was on the new study programmes rather than the institutions. The most obvious example is Germany as the largest higher education system that opted for programme accreditation when compulsory external quality assurance was introduced in 1999.

In parallel with this, a development regarding the main purpose of external quality assurance emerged in the 1990s, which partly also strengthened the programme focus and which was known as “the accreditation trail from east to west”. Accreditation of programmes and institutions was a key instrument for regulating higher education, in particular where the systems were opened up for private providers. Hence the control dimension of external quality assurance dominated this approach. The most obvious cases were the transition countries in Eastern Europe such as Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, and the Baltic countries. Although not all Western European countries integrated accreditation approaches to their national quality assurance systems this approach spread, for example, to Germany, and in particular the Netherlands, one of the forerunners in external quality assurance that switched from programme evaluation to accreditation.

Hence the first ten years after the European pilot projects were characterised by a growing focus on the programme level in some existing national quality assurance systems in Europe, but in particular in the emerging ones. But this did not prevent other approaches to external quality assurance from emerging. The UK moved from programme reviews to institutional approaches and the Nordic countries preferred mixed approaches or institutional approaches. The picture was therefore not clear (Hopbach, 2012, pp. 268-271).

A major milestone in the development of external quality assurance in European higher education is without doubt the adoption of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) in 2005 (ENQA, 2009), approximately ten years after the European pilot projects. The implementation of the ESG by the higher education institutions and agencies gave momentum to the development of quality assurance in the emerging European Higher Education Area (EHEA). In addition, the already visible process of convergence of external quality assurance procedures intensified (ENQA, 2005). Five years later, when the EHEA was officially launched in 2010, external quality assurance had been implemented in all Bologna signatory countries, to various degrees and in various ways (Westerheijden, 2010, p.30). With regard to external quality assurance procedures as such, it could be said that they are by far and large designed and conducted in accordance with ESG Part 2 (ENQA, 2011, pp. 26-34).

For the development of institutional evaluations, the ESG were of particular relevance, not least because of Standard 2.1 that points to the core role of internal quality assurance. The Standard states: “external quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes...” The guideline attached to these standard points to the expected benefit of the higher education institutions from such an approach:

The standards for internal quality assurance contained in Part I provide a valuable basis for the external quality assessment process. It is important that the institutions’ own internal policies and procedures are carefully evaluated in the course of external procedures, to determine the extent to which the standards are being met. If higher education institutions are to be able to demonstrate the effectiveness of their own internal quality assurance processes, and if those processes properly assure quality and standards, then external processes might be less intensive than otherwise. (ENQA, 2009, p. 20)

Was this, after ten years of predominance of programme-oriented procedures the signal to move to the institutional level, and also from accreditation to evaluation? There are good reasons for expecting a move towards institutional approaches that take into account or even focus primarily on the effectiveness of internal quality assurance mechanisms, such as institutional audits or quality audits (Loukkola, 2012, p. 304).

# Part 1: IEP in context

Indeed, two eminent examples might be considered as giving evidence for such a trend. Germany and the Netherlands recently introduced institutional audit-like processes into the national quality assurance and accreditation systems. Both cases are interesting not least because these countries were the first to introduce programme accreditation at an early stage in Western Europe. Many experts and practitioners in the field expressed that expectation, including the author (Williams, 2009, p. 16).

However, in 2008 a survey by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) revealed that no single trend was visible. On the one hand external quality assurance at programme level was still the most wide-spread approach, although it was also true that most of the agencies were not confined to only one procedure. In addition, almost all agencies had recently modified their approaches or were on the verge of doing so. But even in such a highly dynamic situation there was no clear direction that was followed by the majority of countries (ENQA, 2008).

Therefore, although the instruments of external quality assurance have not changed fundamentally in 20 years, it would be a misconception to assume that developments moved slowly. On the contrary, one of the most particular features of external quality assurance in European higher education is its dynamism with fundamental changes in many European higher education systems since the mid-nineties, and in particular since 2003 when quality assurance became prominent on the agenda of the Bologna Process. This meant that, although the ESG hinted at development-oriented procedures, at institutional level no such trend can be identified.

Another phenomenon will be mentioned, one that has only emerged during the last four or five years and is relevant for the development of institutional evaluations. Maybe the most interesting and controversial new approach derives from the momentum that the concept of learning outcomes gave to the Bologna Process. The more important learning outcomes became for the design of programmes and for teaching and assessment methods, the more dominant they became in the discussions on external quality assurance.

This shift of focus occurred and still does occur in a variety of ways in many higher education systems in the EHEA. In the UK "student at the centre" became the motto of quality assurance as a consequence of a discussion about the standards in UK higher education and the effectiveness of the UK Quality Assurance Agency. During heated debates in 2010 even a return to programme reviews seemed to be possible (Brown, 2010; Department of Business, Innovations and Skills 2011, pp. 66-73). In 2011, an even more radical approach was introduced in Sweden where the achievement of learning outcomes was taken as proxy for the quality of a programme (HSV, 2011).

This had a significant impact on the discussion about methodologies: What is the subject matter of an external quality assurance procedure or tool? What is to be reviewed in order to evaluate, or in this case measure whether the graduates' knowledge skills and competencies meet the expectations set out by the HEIs? It is obvious that the answer is not in the strategic capacity of the HEIs or their institutional strategies and policies. It is obvious that institutional evaluations would not be deemed as the most appropriate approach to take into account learning outcomes.

Although Sweden might be an extreme case, the achievement of the intended learning outcomes as a proxy for the quality of a programme is one of the greatest current challenges for external quality assurance. In most of the higher education systems current discussions are about how to translate student-centred learning into external quality assurance, about the role of achieved learning outcomes in the quality assurance systems. Due to the focus of the Bologna Process on teaching and learning it could be interpreted that the achievement of learning outcomes is deemed to be a proxy for the quality of an HEI. It is still too early to make an assumption on how far this development will go.

In conclusion, if the ESG were a signal to move to enhancement-oriented approaches to quality assurance at institutional level, it remains unheard. In any event, no trend towards audits or institutional evaluations can be identified. On the other hand, despite the challenges to institutional evaluations, namely the accountability-driven spread of the accreditation approach and the discussion about learning outcomes, institutional evaluations have not disappeared from the European quality assurance landscape.

## Quality assurance-politics and the quality assurance-pendulum

If it is true that the ESG had and still have a major impact on the development of external quality assurance in Europe, and if it is equally true that the ESG promote an enhancement-driven approach to external quality assurance at institutional level, then the question becomes pertinent why institutional evaluations have not become the role model for external quality assurance.

One important reason which must first be mentioned, also in order to treat ESG fairly, is that the ESG do not prescribe any particular quality assurance procedure and the ESG are vague and even contradictory to some extent. They clearly state that "It is not the intention that these standards and guidelines should dictate practice or be interpreted as prescriptive or unchangeable." In addition, regarding the purpose of external quality assurance, the ESG do not explicitly prefer the developmental approach to the accountability approach:

Quality assurance can be undertaken by external agencies for a number of purposes, including:

- safeguarding of national academic standards for higher education;
- accreditation of programmes and/or institutions;
- user protection;
- public provision of independently-verified information (quantitative and qualitative) about programmes or institutions;
- improvement and enhancement of quality. (ENQA, 2009, pp. 13, 15)

Based on the above it is not surprising that there was no single approach to translate the ESG into national policies.

Another important reason is the implementation of policies at national level which show that national political agendas had a significant impact. "Being a child of the Bologna process, the ESG did not escape the European implementation dilemma. ... The implementation of the ESG thus depends on 1) the way the ESG cope with the national quality assurance policies and the priorities of its main actors, 2) the way the ESG fit into the legal setting in place ..." (Serrano-Velarde & Hopbach, 2007, p. 37). It must therefore be taken into account that the decisions about the set-up of external quality assurance systems and the design of external quality assurance procedures are negotiated in the political arena, and thus are rarely based, mainly or even entirely, on academic expertise. Based on the fact that quality in higher education is a relative concept and the fact that within the Bologna Process stakeholders play a crucial role, the development of external quality assurance is highly dependent on the actual power of certain stakeholder groups to push through their specific interests.



# Part 1: IEP in context

Although the definitions and concepts of quality assurance seem to become vague and sometimes even arbitrary, in the political discussions many positions can still be located within the old – and as it seems never-ending – struggle about enhancement or accountability as the main purposes of quality assurance. The past ten to fifteen years show that the decision on whether institutional level or programme level, enhancement-driven evaluation or accountability-driven accreditation, swings like a pendulum, depending on the actual power of certain stakeholders to push their ideas through:

An ideal type of development could look as follows: Due to (assumed or really existing) quality deficiencies programme accreditation is introduced into a national higher education system. After a couple of years this approach is being criticised for being too burdensome and expensive and for not supporting institutional learning processes in the higher education institutions. As a consequence it is replaced by an institutional approach, maybe an institutional audit, in order to strengthen the enhancement purpose and in order to give a lighter touch. Again, after a couple of years especially students and public authorities criticise this approach for not giving enough information on the actual quality of certain programmes. Hence a move to programme oriented approaches, maybe even accreditation-like is introduced. (Hopbach, 2012, pp. 277-281)

In particular the recent discussions about the meaning of achieved learning outcomes for “the” quality of a programme or an institution, and consequently the role learning outcomes should play in quality assurance, give evidence about the core role political discussions among stakeholders play for developing quality assurance further.

In addition “the traditional twin purpose accountability/quality enhancement expanded to a wider array of additional or even alternative other purposes such as policy evaluation, transparency etc.” The problem was that this discussion is rather disconnected from the discussion about the design of the procedure (Hopbach, 2014, pp. 223-229).

In conclusion it must be emphasised that the different purposes of institutional evaluations and approaches such as programme accreditation have to be taken into account. It is true that these approaches cannot be considered as alternative tools that serve the same purpose and the same interests. Hence, it cannot be a surprise that these approaches co-exist. Based on this it is not unexpected that IEP's approach has not changed fundamentally since it was launched, simply because one important factor did not apply. The political discussions were not the external drivers of change because IEP is voluntary and initiated by the institutions with the purpose of giving advice regarding institutional strategies and policies. Being outside the political discussions on aims and purposes of external quality assurance, not being affected by political, but instead of academic decisions on the choice and design of external quality assurance approaches, procedures like IEP were and are able to safeguard the alignment of purposes and design.

## Perspectives

What will be the future of institutional evaluations? Will they be replaced by procedures that focus on testing of graduates? Will they flourish as main strategic tools for development of higher education institutions?

There are good reasons for answering this question with “neither”. One reason is that some of the most important framework conditions for the development of institutional evaluations will not change.

The current revision of the ESG will not result in fundamentally new Standards and Guidelines. The core values and concepts of quality assurance in the EHEA remain the same: Quality assurance is still about

“activities within the continuous improvement cycle (i.e. assurance and enhancement activities)” (ENQA, ESU, EUA, EURASHE, EI, BUSINESSEUROPE, EQAR, 2014, p. 6), it is not about testing graduates. The broad applicability to various approaches to external quality assurance also remains the same.

The political characteristic of discussions on quality assurance is here to stay, and so is the “quality assurance pendulum”. There is no reason to expect that the different concepts of quality in higher education, or the different foci of stakeholders will grow similar to the level of identity. The very simple reason for this is the fact that many of the various concepts of quality in higher education, as well as various expectations from external quality assurance and purposes of external quality assurance procedures are valid.

Institutional evaluations are therefore likely to remain a pillar of external quality assurance as long as higher education institutions are interested in learning from peers on how to develop the institution further, how to focus strategies and strengthen the capacity of strategic planning and management. The question is rather in which context institutional evaluations will be placed in the future: as mandatory procedures in the national external quality assurance system or as voluntary endeavours driven by the higher education institutions themselves? The latter is easy. The first option is far more difficult and subject to the above mentioned political discussions.

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# Part 2: IEP in action

## Thematic areas of IEP evaluations

By Diana Dias,<sup>1</sup> Sónia Cardoso,<sup>2</sup> Maria J. Rosa<sup>3</sup> and Alberto Amaral<sup>4</sup>

### Introduction

In this chapter Institutional Evaluation Programme's (IEP) intended impacts on higher education institutions (HEIs) are discussed by analysing a set of IEP evaluation reports of universities. We assume that the recommendations indicate the areas where the Programme intends to produce change in order to improve quality.

The chapter starts with a brief review of different studies analysing the IEP impact on higher education (HE). It continues by presenting the methodology followed for the empirical analysis of the IEP reports. This allowed for the identification of different areas within HEIs where, according to our assumption, IEP is trying to create an impact. Some of the areas reflect the evaluation criteria established in the Programme guidelines, while others are new, reflecting new developments in HE. We conclude that the main areas where IEP seeks to have an impact by promoting change are strategic management; governance and management; quality culture; teaching and learning; research; internationalisation; relation with society; and funding.

### IEP and its impact on higher education – a review of different studies

Different reflections on IEP have already been made and published elsewhere (see Amaral *et al.*, 2008), including some in which the Programme's impact from different perspectives is discussed (Cardoso *et al.*, 2011; Dias *et al.*, 2014; Hofmann, 2005; Nilsson *et al.*, 2002; Rosa *et al.*, 2011; Tavares *et al.*, 2010). These fall into three main groups, namely, impact in terms of quality improvement; development of an internal quality culture; and promotion of a certain model of university within the European Higher Education Area.

In 1999, Peter Williams analysed a sample of nine institutional evaluation reports produced between 1994 and 1998. Although Williams presented an overall positive view of the reports considering they “should provide an invaluable starting point for internal consideration of the topics discussed” (Williams, 1999, p. 2), he also made several criticisms of the reports. A revision was proposed of the reports' structure to make them clearer and more fluent, to ensure the key recommendations were clear and unambiguous, as well as realistic and achievable, and addressed only to the institution being evaluated.

In 2002, IEP was evaluated externally for the period 1994-2001. The report (Nilsson *et al.*, 2002) concluded that the impact on the academic staff was low and participation in the process was limited. However, the Programme could be useful for the university's central leadership, namely the rector, as it could support movement to a more corporate concept of the university and help implement strategic planning, provided

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the evaluator's analysis was consistent with the ideas of the central administration. Overall, the report considered there was evidence that IEP had positively impacted central administrations, an effect more difficult to detect at the lower levels of the organisation.

In 2005, Hofmann made an analysis of a sample of 60 IEP evaluation reports. According to Hofmann (2005), evaluation reports detailed the evaluation team's findings and conclusions on the university's capacity to improve its performance and the internal quality processes and mechanisms. Recommendations were a central part of the external reports, being as interesting as the problems identified by the reviewers. Based on these, universities could implement changes in order to improve their quality.

In 2010, 22 follow-up reports were analysed to assess the relevance of IEP for improving universities' quality (Tavares *et al.*, 2010). The analysis showed that IEP could be a tool for quality improvement as evaluations generally gave a precise account of problems faced by each university, identifying their strong and weak points, opportunities and threats, and presenting clear recommendations and suggestions for improvement. However, to what extent IEP would be effective strongly depended on the university's will to analyse, discuss and use its results internally. The paper also referred to the apparent adoption of a model of governance and organisation consistent with the spread of new public management and neo-liberal policies across Europe.

Later on, 21 other IEP evaluation reports were analysed, with a focus on the recommendations made by the evaluation teams, to discuss how far IEP was contributing to spread market forces in European HE and promoting a certain idea of the university (Cardoso *et al.*, 2011). The major conclusion was the presence of a market's logic and a rhetoric influence endorsing a new university model, closer to Northern European higher education dynamics. Furthermore, the authors concluded that the IEP was playing a role in promoting Clark's (1998) "entrepreneurial" university.

The same 21 IEP evaluation reports served as the basis for a study aiming to identify a set of best practices contributing to HEIs' effective quality management and to support mutual learning among institutions, as suggested by Nilsson *et al.* (2002) (Rosa *et al.*, 2011). Based on the analysis of the strengths identified by the evaluation teams, the authors suggested that IEP was indeed promoting a set of practices that could be considered as references of what a university should do in order to have an effective internal quality culture that supported its strategy for research, teaching and services to society. Furthermore, it concluded that IEP was potentially contributing to convergence towards a more uniform European HE model.

In 2014, a sample of 30 IEP evaluation reports (the 21 referred to in the former paragraph plus 9 more) was analysed (Dias *et al.*, 2014) to determine how far the Programme promoted the development of an internal quality culture among European HEIs. The analysis of the reports' strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats and recommendations regarding the quality culture theme has confirmed that the evaluation teams analysed the "good practices" used in the evaluated institutions to promote the "good principles" defined by the European University Association (EUA) (2005, p. 10) for the implementation of an institutional quality culture. Therefore, the IEP reports were presumably very useful for an institution willing to implement an internal quality culture.

In the remainder of this paper the results of a global analysis are presented of the last 30 IEP evaluation reports to find out the areas of HEIs that are mostly addressed in the reports, assuming they are the ones where the Programme intends to produce an impact.

# Part 2: IEP in action

## Methodology

The 30 IEP evaluation reports were selected from a set of 114, based on different criteria in order to build a representative sample, capable of empirically validating the results. Most of the universities (18) in the sample were relatively young institutions (founded after the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century), six were founded in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, while six others were older (three of which were founded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, one in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and two in the 13<sup>th</sup> century). Universities were evenly distributed across geographic regions (11 from Central and Eastern Europe, eight from the United Kingdom and Northern Europe, and 11 from Southern Europe) and were of different sizes (the smallest one with around 1200 students and the biggest one with 65,000 students). Finally, the universities' IEP reports were concluded at different times (the oldest dates from 2000 and the most recent from 2008).

The 30 reports were subject to content analysis, using adequate software (MaxQDA 7). This allowed for the identification of the set of themes most frequently referred to in the recommendations proposed by the evaluators for each university, which we assumed to be the main areas where the Programme intended to produce change so as to improve quality. These more frequently addressed themes were: strategic management; governance and management; quality culture; teaching and learning; research; relation with society; internationalisation; and funding.

## The intended impact of IEP evaluations

According to IEP its evaluations are tailored to the institution's specific profile and geared towards improving its capacity to reach its strategic goals. The fact that all 30 IEP reports included recommendations in terms of *strategic management* and capacity for change was coherent with IEP's stated objective of helping institutions to reach their strategic goals. Most of these recommendations concerned the compatibility of the universities' strategic objectives with the institutional mission, which might need adaptations of the mission statement to reinforce that compatibility. The need to change the mission statement to promote the institutional identity was also mentioned. Some recommendations also referred to the need to improve or reformulate strategic planning support documents and promote the institution's ability to cope with change, reforms and new challenges. Other more specific recommendations suggested improvements in information systems and in the efficiency of analysis of performance indicators for strategic planning.

Another area where IEP seemed to be seeking to induce changes was on HEIs' *governance and management*. Recommendations at this level were identified in all 30 reports, the majority being related to power distribution and the governance bodies' level of centralisation/decentralisation. Other recommendations concerned inefficient structural choices, reflected both in the existence of too many institutional structures, or the insufficient representativeness of such structures; the need to improve both the university's internal communication and the relationship between faculty and central administration; changing the university's mission statements; promoting the institutional identity; and improving the working conditions (including wages) of both academics and researchers.

The implementation of a *quality culture* was a theme also often addressed in IEP reports (29 out of 30) indicating its importance for the Programme. At this level, IEP evaluators made three major recommendations: the adoption of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) that, as a Bologna Process requirement, are "an attempt to achieve the correct balance between external and internal quality assurance"; the building, by HEIs, of "a Quality culture based on international experience, and best practice"; and the development and consolidation of quality management systems while promoting institutional awareness, engagement and interest on quality assurance mechanisms.

The students and academic staff participation in quality assurance mechanisms and dissemination of IEP results were also important issues in the recommendations made under this subject.

IEP teams often addressed *teaching and learning* (28 reports). In general, the recommendations emphasised the need for reinforcing HEIs' role as student-centred institutions in line with the Bologna Process, underlining interactive teaching and "learning-oriented" and project-oriented options. This could be achieved through more focused efforts in moving from a teaching paradigm to a learning paradigm, and supplementing traditional lectures with more innovative learning processes or pedagogical methods such as case studies or project work. Another important issue within the recommendations was the need for curricula revisions in line with European standards. At this level attention was called to the need to take into account the European model by fully implementing the modularisation of all study programmes and by giving importance to learning outcomes. Finally, some recommendations were also made on the improvement of support services to students and academic staff, namely academic and administrative services, as well as services that helped teachers enhance their pedagogic skills and teaching performance.

*Research* was another theme often targeted by IEP reports (25 out of 30). While the majority of the recommendations referred to the need to prioritise research, there were others, more specific, which suggested ways of proceeding to that prioritisation, namely by including research objectives in the university strategic plan, reinforcing research staff and creating adequate support structures. Another recurrent recommendation emphasised the importance of universities to establish research collaborations with different stakeholders, both within and outside the institution. The increase of international links was also suggested as a way to obtain additional financial resources. Finally, recommendations were made regarding the need to hire additional researchers to create a critical research mass so as to be successful with competitive research.

*Internationalisation* was also frequently addressed by evaluators (25 IEP reports). Recommendations tended to highlight the need for universities to develop a clear international co-operation policy. This policy could include issues related to credit transfer and recognition, curricular reform, discipline-based networks or associations, international research co-operation, institutional partnerships across borders, international work placements, learning across borders, as well as student and staff mobility. Other more general recommendations strongly emphasised the importance of defining a strategic plan to promote internationalisation, namely through effective information and image management. The internationalisation policy was seen as crucial especially for research and teaching. The main recommendations at this level related to the need to establish international collaboration through academics' participation in international networks, benchmarking exercises and conferences. This was seen as enabling an international network of contacts that was useful not only for staff and student mobility purposes, but also for mutual research endeavours, international publication, and other academic exchanges, such as participation in PhD or Masters' thesis committees of foreign universities.

Another relevant theme addressed in IEP reports (21 out of 30) referred to the universities' *relation with society*. The majority of recommendations in this context were rather generic and related to universities' cooperation with external stakeholders, which would produce added value in different areas, such as life-long learning, innovation and competitiveness, knowledge transfer and employability. Nevertheless, several recommendations addressed more specific issues such as the promotion of activities/services to the community or the cooperation with alumni, prospective students, the labour market and the "local industry". An IEP evaluation team suggested implementing mechanisms to encourage faculty cooperation with industry, such as tax exemptions, reduced overheads, and decrease in teaching workload, in exchange for funds brought to the university. Although the dominance of market conditions and commercialisation of research were usually regarded as dangers and challenges to the university, competition was seen as stimulating HEIs to play their third mission role while preserving the academic values.

## Part 2: IEP in action

Twenty IEP reports identified recommendations in *funding*. One of the crucial challenges for the majority of HEIs evaluated was to increase and diversify their funding base. Evaluators regarded as very positive the fact that the State decided to provide incentives to facilitate outside investment in universities, creating better opportunities for donations and suggested that institutions should contact their alumni. Another kind of recommendation was related to the need for universities to revise the internal budget allocation in order to promote efficiency. Furthermore universities should create funds to support new initiatives that would contribute to their development.

It is also interesting to note that new themes were progressively introduced in the IEP reports, for example, the Bologna Process. In the more recent reports the adoption of the Bologna Process was recognised as a great promoter of internationalisation, and general recommendations further suggested that the international cooperation or networking with related faculties in other countries should not be restricted to the vicinity of each university but should be extended to a wider European area. European partnerships were highly encouraged, both those already existing as well as new ones to be established, in order to exchange experiences in the process of constructing the European Area of Higher Education. Some recommendations related to the importance of creating an infrastructure consistent with a high European profile, by following the ESG and the EUA recommendations on good practices in quality assurance, giving priority to European relations, or by making adaptations of national policies to the European standards. In other words, IEP evaluation teams recommended that more efforts should be put into the promotion of Europeanisation, in order to launch comparable and compatible educational systems in the European Higher Education Area. Moreover, Europe should be the reference for all universities.

### Concluding remarks

The aim of this chapter was to discuss the areas of the universities' functioning where the IEP seems to be trying to have an impact. Based on the analysis of a set of IEP reports and namely of the themes targeted in recommendations made by the evaluators, it can be assumed that those areas are: strategic management; governance and management; quality culture; teaching and learning; research; internationalisation; relation with society; and funding.

Some of these areas were also identified in other studies as those being influenced or shaped by the Programme. That is specifically the case of governance and management (see Nilsson *et al.*, 2002; Cardoso *et al.*, 2011; and Tavares *et al.*, 2010) and of quality culture (see Nilsson *et al.*, 2002; Hofmann, 2005; and Dias *et al.*, 2014).

Furthermore, the recommendations identified for these different areas tried to help HEIs improving the way they answer the four questions that form the Programme's criteria. Regarding *what the institution is trying to do* (norms and values, mission and goals), evaluators emphasised HEIs' need to promote their institutional identity, define their strategic objectives in line with the institutional mission, including research and internationalisation objectives.

On *how is the institution trying to do it* (governance and activities), suggestions were given concerning the way HEIs were governed and managed, including their organisational structure, power distribution, internal communication systems and academic staff management. As for the activities developed within HEIs, recommendations were made to align teaching and learning with the Bologna Process requirements (move to a learning-centred paradigm), to increase the research international focus and to establish closer links and cooperation with external stakeholders.

Improving the way HEIs answer to *how does the institution know it works* (quality assessment practices), was achieved through recommendations on the adoption of the ESG, the development of a quality culture and the implementation of internal quality management systems.

Finally, better answers to *how does the institution change in order to improve* (strategic management and capacity to change), implied that HEIs implemented a truly strategic management approach that promoted their capacity for change in response to internal goals and external factors.

IEP indeed seems to be accomplishing its goal of enlightening the most relevant issues for universities' quality improvement and ultimately serving as a tool to promote effective changes and improvements in HEIs' governance and management systems and activities.

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# Part 2: IEP in action

## IEP supporting quality culture

By Henrik Toft Jensen<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

The debate on quality in teaching and learning and efforts on raising the awareness of its importance at universities has been an important development in higher education since the 1980s. Who has the responsibility for quality assurance? Does it lie with the universities or the governments and national agencies?

When internal quality systems are discussed, it is important to stress the involvement of the whole university community. Furthermore, quality systems should be kept simple and robust, and they should leave space for new initiatives and creativity. As quality work has many faces, the main dilemma remaining is about how to promote a shared understanding of quality and engage academic staff without burdening them with bureaucratic processes.

IEP teams look at these internal quality monitoring processes as a means to an end and to promote quality. They also seek to assess the extent to which these processes build up a quality culture in an institution. This chapter will discuss lessons learned from the IEP evaluations in which I was involved as chair.

### IEP and institutional responsibility for quality assurance

In the 1980s and 1990s governments wanted to exert pressure on universities so as to ensure they provided value for money. As a result of this approach, national agencies were created to evaluate education programmes at universities. Later, in 2000, the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) was established to promote European cooperation in this field. These developments generated a great deal of discussions in Europe on who had the responsibility for quality, whether it was the universities or the agencies.

The initiative of the European Association of Universities (CRE) to launch the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) aimed to demonstrate that universities themselves take care of the quality of education and teaching. At the same time the activities of IEP supported universities in their quality development.

In this context, universities were defined as autonomous entities responsible for their quality provisions. But, it was important to make this visible. Universities had to develop a methodology to prove that quality concerns were part of their agendas. At the same time they had to make sure that there were open communication channels between the students and the teachers, as well as between staff, students and the leadership of the university. The ambition of IEP was to help institutions secure these developments and support the university leadership in the quality management of their institutions.

There are multiple examples showing that the IEP methodology can be used for this purpose in different institutional contexts. IEP teams' recommendations and the evaluation process as such form a simple and robust set-up where internal processes and communication are the focal point but without fixed standards and externally imposed criteria that are common to many accreditation activities. IEP offers improvement-oriented evaluations and provides the institutions with advice on quality development. The evaluations do not result in decisions that are either "passed" or "not passed".

## From quality monitoring and assurance to quality culture and creativity

Control is sometimes necessary in universities to ensure that quality efforts are addressed at all levels of the institution. Interest in and awareness of quality assurance is important in teaching and learning, in research and in administration at universities. Quality assurance should be an integrated part of daily processes, but, on the other hand, it is the development of quality culture that is the strongest guarantee for continuous and effective quality processes in universities. This is the reason why it is important to try to move from monitoring to assurance and further to quality culture, but also allowing for creativity. The IEP evaluation teams are aware of this and always seek for evolving quality assurance processes and innovative use of quality assurance tools, which are a means to an end to promote quality culture at the university.

When discussing the way in which the quality work at universities could be organised, it is important to understand that quality culture is much more than measuring activities and results; it is a way of engaging all members of the university community in quality awareness. In this regard staff should be involved in discussions concerning research and teaching and the leadership should simultaneously promote a non-bureaucratic way to deal with quality assurance. An open dialogue and exchange of experiences is important. However, this requires that the leadership be aware of the quality processes, and they should also promote interesting initiatives for staff development. Andrée Sursock points out the conditions of a good quality culture:

The institutional culture stresses democracy and debate and values the voice of students and staff equally; the definition of academic professional roles emphasises good teaching rather than only academic expertise and research strength, and quality assurance processes are grounded in academic values. (Sursock, 2011)

The main feature of a good quality culture is for the whole university community to be engaged and aware of their collective responsibility for quality culture; it cannot be put aside and kept in a quality office. The IEP teams look for these features when we evaluate universities. During IEP evaluations the IEP teams meet, on average, 150-250 representatives from the students, academic staff, leaders, stakeholders and administrative staff in order to be able to examine the level of involvement of the community as a whole. This is a good point of departure for understanding the quality culture of the university.

A variety of tools are used in the quality assurance processes, for example, simple student questionnaires, collegial supervision, concise annual reports, etc. These tools need to be changed and developed when they become uninspiring routines. The quality culture needs ideas, experiments and creativity; both new and more traditional ways of communication between teachers and students should be embraced.

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As Oliver Vettori states:

“it is, generally spoken, the interplay of the manifest and formal quality assurance processes and the latent and informal values and assumptions that lie at the heart of enhancing an institutional quality culture.” (Vettori, 2010).

All these processes are observed and analysed by the IEP teams when they examine the institutional culture.

### How to make the most of external evaluations

Universities can benefit from external evaluations, as they often open up new possibilities. However, all evaluations and accreditations require time and money, both from the universities and the agencies involved in the process. If there are several evaluations and accreditations every year, there is an obvious solution for universities to facilitate the work and reduce costs by concentrating and centralising the activities related to these processes at the university, and by recycling self-evaluation reports. If this is the case, there is a risk that the external evaluation is not used as an opportunity to learn and is instead simply reduced to a bureaucratic exercise. It is therefore important to limit the number of evaluations and accreditations to which universities are subjected, and to focus attention on areas where the universities could benefit most from an external evaluation.

As mentioned above, an external evaluation can be an inspiring exercise, depending on the context and how it is approached. There are some important questions to which the answers should be known before the evaluation exercise takes place (Rector of Bergen University, Sigbrit Framke, at a Nordic rectors' meeting in the 1990s):

- 1) Why is this evaluation done?
- 2) What is evaluated?
- 3) Who is initiating the evaluation?
- 4) Who is doing the evaluation?
- 5) How is the evaluation carried out?

In addition to these five points it is also important to specify the type of evaluation:

- 1) Is the evaluation oriented to measuring the product of the efforts at the university: graduate students, Master and PhD candidates?
- 2) Is the evaluation oriented in the direction of the process with the aim to create a good foundation for the development work at the university?
- 3) Is the evaluation a quality audit or a programme evaluation?

If the evaluations are development-oriented and use the mission of the university as the point of departure – as is the case of IEP – the university can benefit quite substantially from the evaluation and the recommendations from the evaluation team. Especially when the staff of the university has trust in the evaluation team as well as the organisation behind the team. This stops “window dressing” and instead leads to an honest and open presentation of the institution, which is a better basis on which the evaluation team can work.

## Is “officiating” or “officiated” quality culture possible

Those in charge of teaching are engaged in the creation of good teaching practices, but the process of documenting their activities could be an irritating burden. As many professors cannot see the benefit of long and detailed quality assurance reports which are the results of quality processes, they can often be in favour of a division of labour between themselves as teachers and specialists and quality measurement and report writing. In other words, a division of labour between teaching and quality assurance is accepted. Teaching staff tends to be in favour of leaving the more formal parts of quality assurance to quality officers, also in view of the fact that they are familiar with the language of quality assurance which can be quite specialised and understood only by a specific group of administrators. This is demonstrated by the fact that many agencies have a special dictionary on their homepage explaining and translating the quality language to a more well-known academic language (see the home page of the European Students' Union and ENQA).

University leaderships can therefore be very tempted to ask specialists to carry out quality assurance exercises centrally by setting up an office or unit to specifically undertake this task. This can lead to leaving the full responsibility of managing quality to the staff of such units. This in turn allows rectors to answer questions concerning quality assurance by inviting evaluating teams to simply visit their quality units in order to learn about their work, since it is they who monitor the quality work at faculty and departmental level and use the 70 parameters in reporting. This is what I call “officiating” quality assurance, i.e. moving it to an office away from the academic community. In these cases, typically, the unit in question would also be in charge of parts of the reporting related to external evaluations and accreditations. These are often successful since they are well-trained in producing such reports, but potentially they can also be to the detriment of full institutional involvement in quality assurance, and thus quality culture.

The IEP approach to evaluation investigates the level of centralisation of quality assurance. This approach to quality assurance is possible, but it can be costly in the long run because there is an obvious danger of creating an isolated “special life” of the administration of quality assurance which is far from teaching and research. Everything would be correct in reports, and monitoring of the quality assurance would be completed in time, but importantly the connection to and impact on teaching practice would be low.

On the other hand, support from a specialist who understands the instruments and procedures could be beneficial for the teaching staff and increase the quality of teaching and learning at the university. The support should be inspiring, linked to and in dialogue with the teacher's daily practice. It should not be a separate activity isolated from the teaching practice.

For example, in the quality work at universities one of the present crucial challenges – that has also been of concern to IEP teams for some years now – is to tackle the issue of defining the intended learning outcomes and measuring the achieved ones. Teachers have to plan their teaching in a way whereby they should relate their expertise and the curriculum to the expected outcome for the students. It is an important part of quality culture and assurance, and teaching staff should be offered the necessary support to adapt to this way of working. They can work together with quality assurance specialists, helping to ensure that learning outcomes are relevant and that they work in practice and not just on paper. It is crucially important to achieve the correct balance between the specialised knowledge of a centralised quality assurance office and the involvement of the teaching staff. This is an integral part of fostering a good quality culture, and ensuring the involvement of the whole institution.

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## Getting balance right in quality assurance

In summary, quality assurance, culture and development are all important parts of university life and should be conducted with the full involvement of the leadership, staff and students. A key aspect of IEP is precisely the emphasis on the importance of internal quality monitoring. The Programme was created to support this and offer universities the opportunity to benefit from the inspiration of an external group of peers.

An example that illustrates an approach that is in line with IEP can be found in Denmark. In the “Strategy for quality assurance of Roskilde University” (2009) it is stated:

securing the quality of education at Roskilde University would be based on the following two principles:

- 1) The current quality work has to be as close to the educational process as possible.
- 2) The work has to be anchored in the existing organization.

Quality assurance and culture are here seen as an integral part of the activities and structures of the university, and not isolated in a specific office or other special entity in the central administration.

However, while universities should avoid having many complicated reporting systems, they also need to secure good data management and have access to key data such as the number and progress of students. They should also not undergo too many external evaluations which may, at worst, prohibit possibilities for discussion, use and implementation of recommendations from one evaluation before they move on to prepare for the next one. But it is nonetheless occasionally a good idea to call for an external evaluation in order to gain fresh inspiration and acquire an outside perspective on the activities and structures at the university. It is also often important to obtain an international point of view.

IEP offers this possibility, by carrying out an external review through international teams of peers. Their supportive approach aims to help institutions develop a suitable approach on how to use specialised quality expertise that ensures quality processes are carried out efficiently and effectively, and at the same time involve the whole institution in these processes in order to support a shared responsibility and foster a strong quality culture.

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# Evaluating arts universities

By Georg Schulz<sup>1</sup>

When an evaluation of an arts university is initiated, it is highly likely that the institution will emphasise its unique and distinctive qualities. While this is true with regard to the identity and autonomy of a university, often the underlying reason for this claim to distinctiveness is the fear of being rated unfairly because of inappropriate criteria.

Arts universities are undoubtedly distinctive, as can be perceived simply by observing just some of the differences compared to scientific universities. Starting with art itself, subjectivity, individuality and originality have been regarded as prime attributes since the age of the Enlightenment while objectivity has been saved for science. Differences are also evident within the design and provision of arts education itself, where no real massification has occurred. In music, for example, one-on-one tuition of one hour per week (or even more) for each individual student is still in place; admission to full-time study after an entrance examination for gifted students of almost any age and academic standing is commonly possible; assessment of the individual student's artistic development using quasi-professional situations, allied with continuous expectations for excellence of the student's work, is the norm, as is a strong quality culture regarding works of art.

However, where evaluation is based on quality concepts, such as compliance with minimum standards or reaching certain thresholds, there is a danger that the above mentioned features, although indispensable for arts universities, are interpreted as a sign of inefficiency and result in recommendations to rationalise the processes.

With regard to formalised standards appropriate for music and other arts, the frameworks developed respectively by the Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen (AEC) and the European League of Institutes of the Arts (ELIA) reflect a deep understanding of the specifics of these disciplines, and contribute very effectively to quality enhancement in arts universities.

In its evaluations of arts universities the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) has opted for another approach: while focusing on the mission of the institution and the capacity for change, the institution's view on its distinctiveness becomes an integral element of the context-driven evaluation procedure. For arts universities this approach has additional benefits. Attaching importance to the development of an appropriate institutional mission encourages arts universities to reconsider thoroughly their institutional positioning in relation to the society, to the country higher education system and to the increasingly interdependent global sector, all aspects which Janet Ritterman assessed as among the most demanding challenges for specialist arts institutions (Ritterman, 2010, pp. 30-43). Furthermore, by placing emphasis on the implementation of the institution's mission and the creation of efficient mechanisms to assess continually if the objectives are being met, IEP supports arts universities in establishing tailor-made quality management, a challenge that should not be underestimated.

IEP fosters the effectiveness of strategic management and the development of an internal quality culture. This supports the academic leaders of the evaluated arts universities in their endeavour to embed and transpose the highly developed quality culture of the artistic profession into an inspired and shared quality culture for an arts university, something that is so important for the sustainability of these institutions.

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<sup>1</sup> Former Rector of University of Music and Performing Arts Graz, Austria, IEP pool member

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## IEP at University of Aveiro<sup>1</sup>

By Manuel António Assunção<sup>2</sup>

The continuous promotion of a sound internal quality culture features highly in the overall development strategy of the University of Aveiro (UA). In this vein, UA participated in the second round of the European Association of Universities (CRE) Audits (the forerunner of IEP), a follow-up on this audit and, more recently, in 2007 by the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) itself. By that time, a major renewal of the Portuguese higher education legal framework was being carried out by the government, based on system reviews performed by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), and which included legislation on governance and organisation of higher education institutions. This included, amongst others, the decree on diplomas and the creation of the national agency for accreditation (A3ES).

In all evaluations, UA was seeking an external view on its strategic options, which would reflect a wide array of international expertise based upon different regulatory, funding and institutional settings, in order to identify policy tendencies and to learn from best practices.

The 2007 IEP recommendations, were comprehensive, have been revisited many times, and are still relevant for today's discussions at institutional or even at national level. The range and magnitude of decisions that were discussed at the time had a significant strategic impact on the selection of health as a strategic domain and the subsequent creation of a course in medicine, on the definition of a policy for institutional alliances and on increased university-region cooperation. Moreover, the specific value of UA as a binary institution (with university and polytechnic programmes) within a formally binary system has been confirmed by the audit results, which have also contributed to the ever ongoing debate about how to achieve a balance between a more comprehensive or a more focused university.

It was thus a defining moment for UA's future that ultimately led to its transformation into a public foundation under private law (a new institutional setting) and to the approval of a new statute, implementing a substantially different governance model.

One important characteristic of IEP is the formal and explicit involvement of the major stakeholders of the university, both internal and external. This led to an increased awareness of the community, stimulated the debate and communication – both vertical and horizontal – and reinforced the quality culture and institutional planning. The elaboration of the self-evaluation report, the internal discussions and gathering and dissemination of data, all made up the internal process of organisational learning by managers, teachers and researchers, non-teaching staff and students. These may be considered “soft” results, not readily visible, but which have a long-standing effect and, indeed, have paved the way for a comprehensive set of initiatives related to planning, quality promotion, evaluation and transparency.

The IEP evaluation, coupled with the afore-mentioned dynamics of legal change, was in some ways used as a driver for internal change. It may not be straightforward to identify which changes have been a direct result of the evaluation, but it is nevertheless clear, particularly in the quality field, that the IEP assessment

<sup>1</sup> University of Aveiro was evaluated by IEP in 1995 (first full evaluation, in the framework of CRE project exercise), 1997 (follow-up evaluation) and 2007 (second full evaluation)

<sup>2</sup> Rector, University of Aveiro, Portugal

and recommendations to further develop the internal quality processes, had an impact on the steps taken shortly afterwards. The setting-up of a working group in 2008 to develop and implement the subsystem for quality assurance of curricular units, or the development of a monitoring programme for the academic cycle tasks, are just two examples. Many others could be added to these, such as the development of a portal, grouping together several indicators, making institutional information readily accessible, both for use in the decision-making and management processes, as well as in the wide dissemination of key information, establishing a common ground across the community and thus enabling better discussion, in accordance with the IEP recommendations.

There was an overall improvement in the disclosure of information for a wider audience. The IEP reports are publicly available through the institutional website, the reports of the subsystem for quality assurance of curricular units are made available every semester on the Pedagogic Council webpage and an increased set of indicators is available to the departmental and school directors. This momentum is being continued into the future with, for example, the creation of a Quality Forum, the development of a Quality Manual and the subsequent certification of the Internal Quality Assurance System, or a workshop to assess the achievements and drawbacks over the last four years in this area.

Already seven years after the IEP evaluation, the University of Aveiro is a different and better prepared institution, with greater support for decision-making and management that is generated by a community which is both more aware and more active. The processes that were put in place, as well as the information produced and the communication and transparency that took place amongst internal decision-makers, greatly helped UA to deal with the adverse funding and regulatory environment of recent years in an appropriate manner.

In this new phase one can see as potentially beneficial, in the short or medium term, a new institutional evaluation to help project the UA into the 2020s in a more complex environment which is internationally challenging, and where the cooperation-competition dilemma takes on a new meaning.



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## IEP at University of Liège<sup>1</sup>

Freddy Coignoul,<sup>2</sup> Catherine Vandeleene,<sup>3</sup> Dominique Thewissen<sup>4</sup> and Elodie Chapaux<sup>5</sup>

Sometimes, one can wonder if our universities existed before Bologna. They did! In these ancient times, the University of Liège (ULg), like many others, used to live in a peaceful world of complacency, self-esteem and public allowances. They did not know they were going to be in the eye of a tornado.

In 1997, our Rector heard about evaluations organised by the European Association of Universities (known under the surprising “CRE” acronym). He also heard that our two major competitors, the Free University of Brussels (ULB) and the Catholic University of Louvain (UCL), had already been evaluated. No discussion then: we had to do it too!

The reason one of us (Freddy Coignoul) was summoned to run the self-evaluation is another story. To make it short, he had already been auditing for the French “Centre National d’Evaluation” (CNE), the “European Association of Establishments of Veterinary Education” (EAEVE), and was a member of the European Commission-driven “Advisory Committee on Veterinary Training” (ACVT). This was an unusual curriculum at a time when, for most academics, quality was still a word used in reference to canned soup, evaluations only meant student controls, and strategy was for military use only.

We asked to see an evaluation report from an institution that had undergone an evaluation, but were refused. No doubt, we would have to do it all by ourselves. At the time, publishing quality assurance reports was not part of a regular procedure. We decided then to apply for an evaluation by the CRE and received in return an impressive lot of papers: instructions, procedures and guidelines. Enough to keep us busy during the whole summer of 1998.

In the meantime, the universities of the country were under increasing governmental pressure. Rather unexpectedly, a series of decrees were issued on increased university autonomy (1994), forced institutional fusions (1995), and new limitations on public financing (1998). The good old times were definitely over and new challenges were in sight: more competition, more accountability, more efforts for recognition.

The first measures to boost management were launched by the Rector: he would designate an advisory board of academics as counsellors, a new financial tool was acquired, and discussions were engaged with the government on an early retirement plan for non-academic staff. Not quite a revolution, but still ...

Our first CRE-Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) evaluation was planned for the academic year 1998-1999. The visiting team gave us six stringent recommendations:

<sup>1</sup> University of Liège has undergone several IEP evaluations: in 1998 (first full evaluation), 2001 (follow-up evaluation), 2005 (second full evaluation) and 2010 (follow-up evaluation).

<sup>2</sup> Vice-Rector for quality management, University of Liège, Belgium

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<sup>4</sup> Quality Officer, Quality Management and Support Service (SMAQ), University of Liège, Belgium

<sup>5</sup> Administrative Assistant, Quality Management and Support Service (SMAQ), University of Liège, Belgium

- 1) Write a strategic plan.
- 2) Modify teaching methods towards a learning process.
- 3) Re-allocate teaching responsibilities periodically.
- 4) Develop internal evaluation procedures.
- 5) Replace the rector's "private advisers" by elected "vice-rectors".
- 6) Elect the deans from a wider constituency than the faculty council.

The first reaction was that these IEP people had absolutely no idea of what our university was like. First of all, what was a strategic plan? Our main and sole strategy was to maintain financial stability. Secondly, modifying teaching methods would take a century, or at least until the retirement of the whole present academic staff. Also, no way we were going to re-allocate teaching responsibilities. In our small world, courses were allocated to professors by law, until they died or retired.

With regard to developing internal evaluations, a pilot test had been organised in Applied Sciences and Economics by the Rectors' Conference the previous year: the eyes of those engineers, when a veterinarian and a member of the administration staff came over to tell them they were going to be evaluated, was something to be seen. A re-make of the last glaciation in a ten-minute span.

Last but not least, the proposals concerning elected vice-rectors and the election of deans were legal constraints, and therefore a reform was unthinkable, at least without fighting a civil war.

The signature of the Bologna declaration, on 19 June 1999, was going to be the start of a civil war.

As far as the IEP report was concerned, it did circulate, like a *samizdat* in the former Soviet Union. The results were not officially publicised but the Rector used them extensively when he ran for re-election in 2001. He was indeed re-elected.

In 2001, at the beginning of the Rector's second term, major events occurred at the European level, which strengthened the implementation of the Bologna declaration. A Convention of the National Union of Students in Europe (ESIB) in Gothenburg (Sweden) on 24-25 March, the creation of the new "European University Association" in Salamanca on 29-30 March and the Bologna Ministers Conference in Prague on 19 May introduced recommendations to the member states to implement the two-level cycles and the credits system, and to promote quality assurance.

At the university level, a set of reforms occurred between 2002 and 2006. Teaching departments were created which organised periodic allocation of teaching responsibilities and new regulations were issued for central administration operation and for finances control.

In 2002, the University of Liège considered itself ready for an IEP follow-up evaluation to be called. By and large, the same auditing team of "critical friends" visited us. They were mostly critical, adding nine recommendations to the six initial ones. Our main weakness would be a haunting nightmare: the lack of a strategy to cover our financial plans. Other additional flaws were pointed out: a strong effort to improve communication, a need for research priorities with an emphasis on humanities, the necessity of a "quality observatory", the new departments that should be evaluated, the vice-rectors issue, advice

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to define and clarify the mission of the administration staff, and a lack of attention to the gender issue. However, we were on the right track, thanks to the finance tool.

The IEP report was, this time, announced and presented to the university community. It shook the boat, but not nearly as much as the Bologna decree that was issued by the government in March 2004. This time, the university had gone from the cyclone eye to the cyclone winds. Among the major external changes imposed by the decree was the immediate implementation of the two-cycle degrees and the “credits” system. A quality assurance agency was created, which ran programme evaluations, and universities were requested to cluster into three “academias” centred in Liège, Brussels and Louvain.

The University of Liège tried to adjust, as did the others, and internal changes, mostly focused on education, were agreed.

An institute for the promotion of learning and new techniques of information and communication (n-tics) was set up. But, when the turmoil receded, we still did not have a strategy to lead the system.

A new Rector was appointed in 2005 and he decided that we needed a second round of IEP evaluations. As expected, the 2006 IEP visiting team was severe. Not only did the university have no long-term strategic planning management chart (we knew that), but it also needed to make decisive choices in partnerships, to develop internal quality culture, to clarify research priorities, and to push for legal changes allowing the designation of vice-rectors. It was the time when new faculties joined the university, compounding the problems.

Crises continued up to 2009. The “academias” system collapsed. Catholic universities rejected their planned fusion with UCL, the difficult negotiations between ULB and the University of Mons came to an end and ULg fused with its academic partner of Gembloux. The quality assurance agency was not operating with a sufficient independence from the state and its autonomy was reinforced in 2008 by a new decree of the government. On top of this, the main source of public research money, the “Fonds National de la Recherche Scientifique” (FNRS) underwent major restructuring and adopted new funding procedures.

A shift occurred in 2009 with the re-election of the Rector. He had issued a management programme setting the priorities of his second mandate and, taking advantage of a new, long-awaited decree that allowed public universities to elect additional vice-rectors, he appointed three vice-rectors in charge of research, international affairs, and quality assurance, respectively. A new Quality Management and Support Service (“Service de Management et d’Accompagnement de la Qualité” – SMAQ) had as a mission to evaluate all teaching and research departments as well as the administration. Emphasis was also placed on business intelligence with a new pilot unit (“Récolte et Analyse de Données et d’Information d’Utilité Stratégique” – RADIUS) providing certified data for strategic planning.

The University of Liège underwent another follow-up evaluation in 2010. At the time, most of the 1998 and 2006 recommendations had been fulfilled, with a clear weakness in strategic planning and long-term policy.

In 2013, a ministerial decree modified the rector’s election, extending the right to vote to non-academic staff, administration and students, but more importantly, requesting from rector candidates to draft a four-year managerial programme to be circulated and debated with and within the university community.

Central questions remain unsolved, however, and probably will for a long time: does quality assurance measure progress and does quality culture work? How do we know it?

Evidence-based proof is indeed impossible to provide since unlike the Koch's postulate, where an unequivocal link can be proven between cause and results, nobody really knows how things would have evolved if quality assurance evaluations had not been applied to a specific institution, at a specific time, in a specific environment.

What is beyond doubt, however, is that in the case of the University of Liège, the successive rounds of IEP evaluations have suggested major recommendations for internal improvement, six in 1998 and nine in 2006. All but one have been addressed and implemented in the following years, including those that were beyond the university's reach, such as the legal constraints that were lifted by the government, in line with the progression of the Bologna directives transposed and implemented by Belgium. The impressive part of it is the clear-sightedness of the evaluation teams that were appointed by IEP to set a path and lead the way to a university in search of identity and prospects.

What more could be expected from critical friends?

# Part 2: IEP in action

## IEP at El Bosque University<sup>1</sup>

By Rafael Sánchez Paris<sup>2</sup>

In Colombia, the Ministry of Education, through the National Accreditation Council (CNA), is responsible for defining the standards of high quality in higher education institutions. Even though in 2008, El Bosque University did not meet the requirements to pursue the high quality accreditation, El Claustro (internal governing body) and the presidency of the university committed themselves to the process of consolidating a culture of quality and an institutional self-evaluation model; this process would allow the accreditation being achieved afterwards and, therefore, an institutional external evaluation was considered to complement the self-evaluation process conducted at the university.

In this context, and by recommendation of the presidency, the institution decided to strengthen the self-evaluation process by undergoing an evaluation carried out by the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP).

To start this process, the university constituted its own self-evaluation model based on the documents and questions included in the IEP Guidelines for institutions, articulated with the ones from the model of the CNA. This was undertaken bearing in mind that the next step in the self-evaluation process would be to pursue the institutional accreditation by CNA.

The institutional self-evaluation started in 2009 and for over a year, we experienced substantial participation of all internal stakeholders at the university. During this time, we learned a great deal and the opportunities for improvement led us to immediate actions in many cases.

As one product from this self-evaluation process, we produced the document “Self-Evaluation Report and Institutional Self-Evaluation for the European University Association – EUA” which includes a response for each question in the IEP model. From this analysis, a Consolidation and Improvement Plan was created which proposed to work towards six strategic lines.

The institutional self-evaluation in 2009 and the IEP evaluation in 2010 provided us with two main elements: 1) the need to define a strategic profile that oriented the university's development; and 2) to devise a plan that will allow us to advance towards that profile.

Specifically, Line 1 “Planning the university we want to build” and Line 2 “Designing our university for the future” involved the planning process of the university. The process resulted in two important elements: the definition of the Institutional Strategic Orientation, where the university defines the elements of the approach towards its development, and the Institutional Development Plan (IDP) 2011-2016 that presents the programmes and strategic projects that will allow us to advance towards improvement.

The collaborative design of the IDP was a valuable process for the university due to the significant participation of all stakeholders in the planning activities.

<sup>1</sup> El Bosque University was evaluated by IEP in 2009 (full evaluation) and 2011 (follow-up evaluation)

<sup>2</sup> President, El Bosque University, Colombia

The Institutional Strategic Orientation reflects the evaluation conducted by the university regarding its own position within the Colombian educational system and the definition of a specific cluster that directs the university's development toward realistic goals and a clearer mission. The university then presents the areas of health and quality of life as main academic fields for social development which have always been the areas of excellence of the university and one of its biggest strengths.

The implementation of the IDP 2011-2016 has been institutionalised with various programmes and projects conducted to support centralised management for all activities and objectives defined within the plan. The definition of institutional policies is the main pillar in this process, since they refer to the relevant areas in the university management, such as research, planning, quality, knowledge management, curricular management, etc. In each academic unit, the implementation of the IDP is carried out through their development plans which are aligned to the university's mission, the Institutional Strategic Orientation, the accompanying programmes, projects and institutional policies.

One of the main challenges of the IDP 2011-2016 has been to promote a culture of long-term planning within the university. This is the first IDP that goes beyond the periods of the presidency and Board of Directors and it has brought changes to the dynamics in the management of the institution as a whole. In this regard, the Institutional Strategic Orientation and the IDP 2011-2016 have become the elements that have generated the most impact in the institution's governance and management after the 2009 self-evaluation process and the 2010 IEP evaluation.

As we mentioned before, during this evaluation process we were able to visualise greater opportunities for improvement and in many cases it allowed us to implement immediate actions. The IEP evaluation provided us with a greater perspective and impetus to implement these changes. Among the many positive aspects within the institutional self-evaluation process, we can highlight the permanent, dynamic and committed participation of all university stakeholders; the commitment and unlimited support of the leadership team and Board of Directors; the creation of a teamwork climate conducive to the growth and consolidation of the institution towards quality. The organisational learning process resulted in a better knowledge of the institution, its history, its contributions to society, its dynamics, functioning and human resources.

The impact of the IEP evaluation became evident in specific actions related to the IEP recommendations, on aspects such as the improvement of the schemes and models of the organisational structure and the representation and participation of the different stakeholders. Students' participation has been strengthened since the IEP evaluation, the students consolidated their model of participation and representation based on the university statutes. As a result, they have presented proposals and initiated improvements such as the policies for participation of the elected representatives in the Board of Directors, Academic Council and faculty councils.

The university has taken actions related to the IEP recommendations on academic aspects: for example, for the development of new academic programmes, there are more explicit standards aiming at the consolidation of the institutional profile defined by the Institutional Strategic Orientation. The university is working on the improvement of the academic activities and therefore takes care of the qualification of its academic and administrative personnel which support all institutional actions. The IEP evaluation allowed the university to identify the fact that internationalisation was one of its key challenges. This motivated the university to strengthen an institutional unit in charge of all international relations.

As a follow-up to the recommendations made by IEP the university considered that it was relevant to work on other opportunities for improvement that have been identified. These are:

## Part 2: IEP in action

- The Student Success Programme has evolved from the concept of management and control of dropout rates to student success. So far, the main achievement has been the appropriation of a culture of student success within the institution, starting with the leadership team, faculty and staff.
- Improvements in the management of human resources. This has been a special challenge; we have been able to attract, hire, develop and retain a better team through the implementation of the projects framed within the IDP 2011-2016 and the policies.
- Improvements in the development of the campus infrastructure; these respond to the intention of innovating and improving the quality of the spaces for teaching and learning, research and service.

The IEP follow-up evaluation in 2013 confirmed the progress the university had made from 2009 to 2013. El Bosque University is glad to have had the IEP team as peer evaluators, since they offered us an evaluation to support the continuous development of our strategic management and the culture of quality. The peer evaluators built up trust within the community, particularly because they belonged to an independent organisation and acted objectively, but above all because of their impressive qualifications and their valuable contributions. This reflected on the impact they generated at the university and the joint actions of students, faculty and administrative staff, as well as the leadership team in the self-evaluation processes, planning and implementation of the plan.

As an important learning outcome from this process with IEP, we are aware of being a community that is committed to quality, continuous improvement and the relentless pursuit of excellence; therefore we have a permanent agenda for self-evaluation, implementation of improvements and innovations, follow-ups and further self-evaluation. The pursuit of excellence is a road we have taken and must enjoy, as fortunately, it never ends.

# Part 3: IEP at system level

## The impact of IEP on higher education in the Western Balkans

By Fuada Stankovic<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

This chapter aims to discuss some of the key findings of the Institutional Evaluation Programme's (IEP) evaluations carried out in the Western Balkans (WB) and the way they have been addressed by institutions and authorities in the region. The chapter starts with a brief review of the first reforms of the higher education systems after signing the Bologna declaration by countries in the region and continues by presenting themes regularly addressed in the IEP reports and examining changes that have taken place in the region a decade after the evaluations.

The countries in the Western Balkans that have signed the Bologna declaration and therefore joined the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) launched in 2010 are: Croatia in 2001, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania in 2003.

In that period, new laws on higher education were approved in all WB countries, starting long and complex reforms of the higher education systems and traditional WB universities. The new provisions introduced the three-cycle system, ECTS, new diplomas with diploma supplement, student evaluations through questionnaires, etc. At the same time new bodies such as national councils, agencies, accreditation bodies were introduced.

After 2000, at the earliest stage of introduction of the Bologna structures in the region, IEP was invited to undertake institutional evaluations of the universities to help them in the change processes by assisting in identifying progress already made and highlighting the steps which still needed to be taken. Some of the evaluations were carried out in the framework of system-wide coordinated exercises. The University of Zagreb was evaluated in 1999-2000, all five state universities in Serbia in 2001-2002, all state universities in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2003-2004 (with another evaluation of one of the universities five years later). Macedonian universities underwent institutional evaluations between 2003 and 2011 (Ss Cyril and Methodius in Skopje also a follow-up). The evaluation of the University of Mitrovica (Kosovo UN 1244) was conducted in 2008-2009. Institutions in Montenegro are being evaluated in 2013-2014.

In the framework of the coordinated evaluations in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, wrap-up post-evaluation conferences were held in both countries after the completion of the individual evaluations. Cross-cutting summary reports were presented by IEP in order to analyse what lessons could be learned from the exercise and how these could contribute to the ongoing reforms of higher education in the region.

The system reports, the individual reports and background information revealed that almost all universities in the region shared characteristics which had been inherited from the previous period. The institutions also demonstrated the same readiness to undertake reforms in order to reach European standards and become equal members of the EHEA.

<sup>1</sup> Former Rector, University of Novi Sad, Serbia, IEP pool member



# Part 3: IEP at system level

## Recurrent themes in the reports

The IEP evaluations focused on institutional governance capacity within universities, provisions of institutional quality assurance, internationalisation and capacity for change in general.

While scrutinising the IEP reports submitted to the institutions, it can be seen that in early 2000 all universities that were evaluated followed the same traditional model in their organisation and structure. They all had similar profiles of faculties, curricula, academic programmes, and teaching materials were highly similar to one another. Moreover, in terms of human resources, in many cases the same senior teaching staff were employed by several universities at one time.

One of the major findings of the IEP reports was that universities in the former Yugoslavia, unlike most universities in Europe, operated as non-integrated federal structures and weak conglomerates of highly autonomous faculties and other bodies. This structure imposed significant limitations on the overall capacity for change, effectiveness and efficiency of universities, quality assurance processes, and the university's use of public funding, across areas as diverse as human resources, buildings and facilities, student services, and research infrastructure (Pausits, 2010).

As a result of such fragmented organisational structure, universities were not in a position to develop any agreed university-wide vision and mission, which in turn made it extremely difficult to move forward in any strategic direction. Faculties had their own strategic plans, but they were devised and then implemented separately from each other within one institution. As a result the very necessary synergy benefits were not achieved.

Moreover, one of the conclusions drawn by IEP was that due to the structures described above, universities suffered from multiple layers of unnecessary and costly duplication in a number of fields (teaching, administration, services) resulting in wasted resources at all levels and a high degree of inefficiency. There were many consultative bodies with, in reality, very limited decision-making powers. Overall the decision-making structures were weak, both absorbing and wasting large amounts of time and effort for senior personnel across the institutions.

All universities lacked effective management information systems for data collection and analysis (concerning the most basic issues, including financial issues). This was a serious handicap for the necessary strategic planning and management processes as well as for monitoring of performance and efficiency and, last but not least, for benchmarking and comparisons with other institutions.

Another area of concern was international cooperation of the universities in WB, which was in general weak and disorganised, with activities scattered between the faculties and different bodies and with a very low level of staff and student mobility (incoming mobility particularly). Only a very small proportion of students and academic staff had the opportunity to spend some time at universities abroad. IEP teams found that the international relations offices of the universities were generally in extremely weak positions and were given only marginal importance in the overall structure of the institution. This was seen as a serious handicap for the internationalisation of the universities.

In the self-evaluation reports of the institutions, some of the weaknesses mentioned above were recognised. The need for developing greater awareness of quality assurance within the universities was acknowledged in most cases as well as the need for developing them into an internal quality culture.

With regard to teaching and learning, IEP recommended to introduce evaluation of courses and teachers by the students; with regard to staff development, it was advised that recruitment and promotion criteria and procedures should be made comparable and transparent on lines similar to those used in most European countries.

## A decade later

A decade after the conclusion of the IEP evaluations, it is interesting to observe the traces and impact of IEP evaluations in the WB region and the way IEP's recommendations were taken forward. In particular three themes are of interest: quality assurance, integration and internationalisation.

In terms of quality assurance, legal frameworks have been gradually developed over the last ten years for quality assessment and control through accreditation, obligatory institutional self-evaluations, new higher standards and criteria in teaching and learning, transparency in teaching staff promotion, and students' questionnaires have spread in the region. There is still work to be done in the area of staff development, particularly in terms of mobility of teaching and administrative staff, more open competition for staff promotion, as well as greater interdisciplinarity and flexibility in introducing new Master and PhD programmes.

The lack of good quality data acquired on a systematic basis and a meagre overarching and effective information system will continue to prevent universities in the region undertaking the necessary relevant benchmarking with other EU and regional universities, or meeting the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

An important improvement is related to the process of university integration, which is strongly recommended in IEP cross-cutting reports. The Macedonian higher education law of 2008 serves as one of the examples. It took away the legal entity status from the faculties and transferred it to the university as a single legal entity. This regulatory change had a major impact on the functioning of universities in Macedonia. Universities undertook a significant process of integration to harmonise the functions and areas of activities across the whole institution. The faculties' work is now submitted to regulations that codify their relations within the universities and their functioning in accordance to the Statutes of the universities. The regulations were adopted by the university Senates and approved by the national parliament in 2008. The full implementation of the integration also involved regulations related to a new organisational structure (where central governing bodies and management units were reinforced), changes in academic procedures, and a joint financial model. The complexity of such a change process should not be underestimated, given the high level of independence previously enjoyed by the faculties. Following the organisational restructuring under the integration scheme, Ss Cyril and Methodius University of Skopje introduced the Senate as the highest governing body of the university, which is presided over by the rector. Equally important in terms of governance is the Rector's Board – which consists of the rector, the vice-rectors, the faculty deans, and the directors of the sub-units, the academic councils, commissions and other bodies.

The law on higher education in Montenegro was adopted in 2003, integrating a large number of faculties under the University of Montenegro, which is the only integrated university in the country. However, this integration is still not functioning fully, as observed by the IEP evaluation from 2014, since the culture of independent faculties is still strongly present within the institution. Other universities in Montenegro are small private institutions.

## Part 3: IEP at system level

The process of integration within universities in Croatia already started with the Law passed in 2003. One of the key steps on the path of reform was the introduction of a new model of lump sum financing of universities, envisaging a single transfer of the entire university budget from the state budget, which would then be autonomously distributed by the university between its constituent parts. The Law in 2013, adopted just before Croatia's accession to the European Union, encompassed this process by defining universities as institutions with the right to establish faculties and other units within them. It is natural that there are still concerns at the faculty level of losing autonomy and control over certain issues and these concerns need to be properly addressed by developing optimal internal organisation and a system of governance. Therefore, it is important to demonstrate that an integrated university model brings many advantages to all parts of the institution.

The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is extremely complex because of serious external challenges, is improving, especially after the new framework law passed the BiH House of People in 2007. Although some universities following cantonal regulations started an integration process already before this Law came into force (University of Banja Luka, University of Tuzla), other universities started it later. To date almost all universities in BiH formally started the process of integration (for example, as a further step in the integration process a steering committee of the integrated University of Sarajevo was recently established).

In Albania, the law on higher education defines universities as “compounded and integrated structures”.

Serbia is the only country in the Western Balkans where universities are not integrated institutions by law. In the Law of 2005 faculties are still legal entities together with universities. Some integrated functions were given to the central university level but faculties still enjoy a strong legal independence with all the negative consequences for strategic management, such as efficiency, costs, quality, etc.

Experience of other WB countries showed that stimulus (and pressure) in this matter must come from a top-down legislative decision. A good example to confirm this approach is the experience of Croatian universities as explained above.

Internationalisation is another improved area at WB universities. Following IEP recommendations on the need for strategic development of international relations, some universities in the region defined internationalisation as their priority, which gave visible results such as growing numbers of new or renewed international contacts, growing mobility of students and academic staff, improved international offices with professional staff, a growing number of international projects, etc.

Substantial efforts and support have come from the international community. Concerning mobility more and more programmes are offered by the EU to students and staff from the Western Balkans such as Erasmus Mundus, CEEPUS I, II, III. Another excellent example is financial support from the King Baudouin Foundation (KBF) for mobility and strengthening of international offices to a number of WB universities (Universities of Novi Sad, Niš, Kragujevac, Mitrovica, Tirana, Sarajevo, Podgorica, Southeast University in Tetovo, Ss Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje). The project TRAIN is another programme supported by KBF, designed for new academics in building up their knowledge, skills, motivation and confidence to enhance their own practice in ways that will improve student learning, their own research and their contribution to society and industry.

Establishment of new Master studies in English and joint Master studies with partners from European universities in some institutions, are among other positive results of the internationalisation process. Substantial contribution to these developments came from the Tempus programme.

Tempus projects, which cover many areas of teaching, research and transfer of knowledge, as well as restructuring and management, contributed greatly to overall developments in the reform process in WB countries. They supported cooperation of WB universities with the wider European community as well as regional cooperation. The European University Association's (EUA) project EUREQA is an example of a way for EUA to support its members in the WB to follow up IEP recommendations and to promote regional cooperation in quality assurance.

Opening up to European and other universities contributed very much in improving the curricula at WB universities through benchmarking, and also under the influence of incoming and outgoing students who pushed WB universities to change their curricula and teaching methods, which confirmed the importance of mobility.

Interdisciplinarity in teaching and research is not yet among the priorities for universities in the region. Faculties are mainly oriented to narrow professional programmes. Duplication of programmes still prevails, including in new public or private universities. Innovative interdisciplinary programmes and research projects are mainly initiated from outside faculties (whether it is at central university level or international projects).

## Concluding remarks

The overall picture of higher education in the Western Balkans has changed considerably since early 2000. New universities, which are mainly private, have been established. Most of the Bologna action lines have been implemented. Procedures for accreditation and quality assurance are present in all legal higher education regulations. As far as the recommendations from the IEP evaluations are concerned, the improvements are also visible. However, some issues such as integrated university functions showed that even when these recommendations were welcomed by universities and governments in WB, it took more than a decade to gain the first positive results.

Another cycle of external evaluations could show how deep these changes are present in the daily reality of WB universities.

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# Part 3: IEP at system level

## IEP and its effects on Irish Higher Education

By Lewis Purser<sup>1</sup>

The 1997 Universities Act introduced in Ireland, for the first time, the requirement for Irish universities to establish and implement procedures for quality assurance. The legislation explicitly states that these procedures, which include evaluations of all academic and other structures (i.e. academic departments, faculties, service units, etc.) are aimed at improving the quality of education and related services provided by the university. The 1997 legislation also states that a review of the effectiveness of these procedures should take place “from time to time and in any case at least every 15 years”.

In 2004, the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB, the external quality agency created by the universities to assist them in meeting the requirements of the legislation) and the Higher Education Authority (HEA, the government funding and regulatory body for higher education in Ireland) came together to request that the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) undertake an external review of the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures in each of the seven Irish universities, in accordance with the legislative requirements.

Building on the standard IEP methodology, the process in Ireland was therefore structured to be consistent with the respective responsibilities of the universities and the HEA concerning quality assurance. The review was designed to ensure that the university system and its stakeholders could gain maximum benefit from comprehensive reviews by teams of experienced, international quality assurance experts, and that the procedures and processes in place in Irish universities could be reviewed against best practice internationally.

An innovation to the standard IEP approach was the Irish request that each IEP team consist of an expert from either North America or Australia, given the strong links between the Irish universities and the university systems in those countries. Suitable experts, meeting the same criteria as for European experts, were appointed from these systems by IEP and were seen from the Irish perspective as bringing additional relevant experience to the IEP teams.

As in other IEP “coordinated evaluation” processes, IEP conducted an evaluation of each university during 2004-2005, and then produced a sectoral report bringing together the main findings. These reports were all published by the IUQB and HEA in 2005 (EUA, 2005a; EUA, 2005b). A number of cross-cutting recommendations were identified in the sectoral report, in areas such as the organisation and planning of the quality assurance process, the self-assessment phase, the peer evaluation phase, in the area of quality improvement, and, also of importance, in the area of strategic governance and management.

Given that these were the first systematic reviews undertaken of the universities as institutions, there was considerable stakeholder interest in the process. As per its normal methodology, IEP teams met stakeholders of each university during the process. In addition, a national stakeholder panel was assembled by the HEA as a “reference panel” to provide an external perspective on the social, cultural and economic context within which the Irish universities operated (Walsh, 2008). The chairs of all the IEP teams assembled in Dublin at the end of the

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process to present the sectoral report to these stakeholders and to a number of senior officials across a range of interested government ministries. A special briefing was also provided to the Minister for Education and Science.

The issue of follow-up to the IEP recommendations, at both institutional and sectoral levels, then arose. As this was not specified in the legislation, and the terms of reference for the 2004-2005 evaluations did not contain an explicit protocol in this regard, a process was agreed between the universities, the IUQB, and the HEA to ensure transparency around the follow-up process. Each university provided annual progress reports on this topic over the following three years to IUQB, and IUQB published comprehensive overview reports, thus strengthening the case for an IEP-type supportive methodology (Walsh, 2008).

Following the example of the universities, the Dublin Institute of Technology, which operates under its own distinctive legislative requirements under the quality assurance supervision of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI), also requested an IEP evaluation in 2005. A further IEP evaluation therefore followed in 2005, this time of the Mater Dei Institute of Education, a teacher training college operating under the broader auspices of Dublin City University, one of the seven universities evaluated in 2004-2005.

Apart from helping to meet legislative requirements and providing expert reports and recommendations, the IEP evaluations in Ireland have also had a number of broader effects. One of these is that institutional review is fully accepted by all parties as a suitable methodology (as opposed to other possible options), meeting the needs of universities and other stakeholders. The international dimension of quality assurance has also become completely accepted in Irish higher education, and the use of international peers and other experts is now standard practice. The strategic aspects of quality assurance and its benefits for institutional governance and management have also become much better understood, with tangible results such as using the outcomes to inform institutional change processes, thematic reviews across an institution or groups of institutions, and creating more strategic links between institutional analysis, information systems, academic planning and quality assurance.

As noted in the 2014 report of an independent review team commissioned by the new Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI, the merged successor agency to IUQB, NQAI and other previous bodies), the IEP evaluations:

(...) undoubtedly had a profound effect on the Irish universities, requiring them to approach their quality assurance arrangements in a more systematic way than before, giving them an opportunity for increasing their self-knowledge, and providing collective information about the condition of the quality and quality assurance of their sector. Perhaps the most significant outcome, though, was the effect the exercise had on the IUQB itself, which was reconstituted along the lines requested by the HEA (QQI, 2014).

It can thus be seen that IEP has had long-term positive outcomes not only for the universities but also for the quality assurance agencies in Ireland.

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# Part 3: IEP at system level

## Impact of IEP coordinated evaluations in Portugal

By Howard Davies<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the last ten years, Institutional Evaluation Programme's (IEP) relationship with Portugal has been played out against a backdrop of political upheaval and economic crisis. In troubled times, it has been a supportive presence and has had a lasting influence.

In 2005, the government embarked on a radical shake-up of higher education. It passed a raft of new legislation, addressing the Bologna cycles, mobility, governance, access, and student loans. Simultaneously, it sought advice from three external sources. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) would produce an analysis at system level; the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) would evaluate the national quality assurance agency; and IEP would evaluate the universities and polytechnics.

IEP already enjoyed a high profile. Eminent former Portuguese rectors were members of the team pool. The University of Porto had been one of the first universities to be evaluated in 1994. In 2002 the five big-city medical Faculties (in Coimbra, Lisbon and Porto) had also been evaluated.

The "coordinated evaluation" launched in 2006 was the most bottom-up of the three initiatives. Institutional participation was voluntary, but backed by financial assistance from the state. Thirty-two higher education institutions were evaluated in three rounds. An interim report, which was prepared in 2009, presented observations drawn from 20 evaluations. IEP teams found that, despite ministerial micro-management, Portuguese institutions were working hard to implement the Bologna legislation and to develop strong strategic perspectives, particularly in internationalisation and regional development.

In addition to their ERASMUS activities, they were committed to raising their profile in the wider Portuguese-speaking world – in Brazil, Angola and Mozambique particularly. In support of this, IEP stressed the need for more professional public relations, bilingual websites, foreign language provision and joint Master programmes.

Responsibility for policy formulation and delivery is now typically located at the level of vice-rector or vice-president, which has enabled most institutions to enhance their capacity. From academic year 2014-15 onwards, they will be able to deploy it more effectively. New legislation permits the recruitment of international students on a full-cost basis.

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<sup>1</sup> Senior Adviser, European University Association, IEP pool member

The greatest challenge to Portugal's higher education system, however, is the uncertain viability of institutions located away from the mainland coast. Falling birth rates, emigration and financial crisis have all damaged the socio-economic fabric of inland and island communities.

In the face of this, IEP has helped consolidate the potential of the sector to stimulate regional regeneration. The experience of IEP teams coming from other European countries has been critical in strengthening local stakeholder representation in institutional governance. Moreover, enterprise education, employability, alumni tracking, knowledge transfer and innovation – policy options stressed in IEP reports – now occupy a prominent place in institutional strategies. There exists much greater focus on identifying synergies, mobilising all relevant regional actors, and applying EU structural funding more effectively.

The coordinated evaluation was not the end of the story. Five public institutions – two universities and three polytechnics, four of them in the interior of the country – have since opted for IEP "follow-up" evaluations, further boosting their capacity to manage change. And in 2012, the Portuguese Rectors' Conference (CRUP) commissioned a consultancy by the European University Association which has given renewed impetus to the IEP recommendations.



# Part 3: IEP at system level

## Coordinated evaluations in Romania

By Tia Loukkola<sup>1</sup> and Andrée Sursock<sup>2</sup>

Between 2012 and 2014, the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) undertook the largest coordinated evaluations exercise to date. The context of this exercise was a set of reforms introduced by the Romanian government. Most notably, in 2011, the Romanian Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports grouped 90 universities into three classification bands: 1) advanced research and teaching universities; 2) teaching and scientific research universities (including teaching and artistic/creative universities); 3) teaching and learning universities.

The government required that the classification exercise be followed by an independent, international evaluation carried out by a quality assurance agency listed in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR). IEP was selected to do this work. In keeping with IEP's philosophy, universities were invited to take part in the evaluations to the Programme and 70 universities decided to register.

The evaluations were carried out within two separate projects funded by the European Social Fund. The projects were coordinated by the Romanian Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI).

It was agreed that IEP would evaluate each category of university in Romania, over a three-year period, and that a system-wide report would identify shared challenges and issues, and propose recommendations to policy makers and institutional leaders. These issues include such aspects as the need to review: 1) the size and shape of the Romanian system in the context of the demographic decline and the limited financial resources; and 2) the detailed regulatory framework, which reinforces institutional isomorphism.

Among the topics covered by the system review report are: how to stimulate institutional change, assure quality, secure sustainable funding, invest in people, promote students' access and success, increase research capacity and engage with society.

This ambitious exercise was carried out successfully despite the need to expand the IEP pool of experts drastically. It required IEP to strengthen its internal processes in order to ensure consistency of judgement across 70 evaluation reports and has bolstered confidence that IEP can tackle large-scale projects.

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# Concluding remarks

By Tia Loukkola<sup>1</sup> and Lothar Zechlin<sup>2</sup>

The previous chapters of this publication have aimed to provide the reader with an overview of the 20 years of the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP): the ideology of the Programme; how this ideology has translated into practice; how IEP has responded to the changes in higher education over the course of these years and finally how IEP is positioned in the European quality assurance landscape.

IEP's role within the European University Association (EUA) is privileged in more than one sense. Although the Programme is part of EUA, it has its own governance structure that ensures the evaluations are carried out in an independent manner. The close association to EUA has allowed the Programme to benefit from the up-to-date knowledge of European level policy developments. This is reflected in the training offered to the IEP pool of experts, themes of evaluations and the overall development of the Programme that has followed European trends and it has also allowed IEP to build up a genuinely European expert pool. Simultaneously, the knowledge gathered through IEP evaluations on the institutional realities has greatly impacted EUA's policy positions on quality assurance. For instance, convinced by the IEP experience, EUA has for a long time argued on behalf of an institutional approach to external quality assurance and the potential of this approach to strengthen the institutional capacity to take charge of the responsibility for quality in line with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and Ministerial Communiqués.

Recent studies<sup>3</sup> indicate that there is growing interest in institutional approaches to external quality assurance in the context of national quality assurance systems. While some of these approaches are very different to IEP's, some do have certain similarities. Naturally this challenges IEP to endeavour further to identify its strengths and special characteristics and to decide in which ways it may need and choose to change so as to ensure its fitness-for-purpose as a unique service to higher education institutions, both now and in the future.

The present developments in higher education in Europe and elsewhere require universities to become professionally managed and to be able to be proactive and creative in their strategic thinking. The universities are facing numerous challenges: changing national public higher education policies; budgetary constraints; the brain drain; widening access combined with relatively high levels of graduate unemployment or decreasing enrolments due to demographic decline; new paradigms in learning and teaching towards student-centred learning; or demands for higher education institutions to act as economic drivers of their respective regions while becoming more engaged at international level. This is just to mention a few. Depending on the institution the challenges vary greatly and therefore so do the solutions.

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<sup>3</sup> See e.g. Focus on Higher Education in Europe 2010, The Impact of Bologna Process, European Commission, Eurydice 2010 [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic\\_reports/122EN.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/thematic_reports/122EN.pdf) and Quality Audits in the European Higher Education Area: A comparison of approaches, AQ Austria 2013 ([www.aq.ac.at/de/aktuelles/dokumente-aktuelles/Quality-Audit-in-Europe-2013.pdf](http://www.aq.ac.at/de/aktuelles/dokumente-aktuelles/Quality-Audit-in-Europe-2013.pdf))

# Concluding remarks

Throughout the years the feedback from participating institutions is that the IEP methodology, which was developed more than 20 years ago, refined and further polished through practice over the years, does work. It provides the evaluation teams with a clear structure in which to carry out their work, while allowing the flexibility required to be able to consider each institution individually in light of its own mission and specific institutional, national and international context.

Taking into consideration the challenges listed above and IEP's methodology, we are convinced that as an international peer service IEP is certainly as relevant now as it has been in the past. However, IEP is not ready to rest on its laurels. It was developed to evaluate the capacity for change of the institutions, but it has also demonstrated its own capacity to change and to adapt to new circumstances.

On the occasion of our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, IEP is engaged in a self-reflection with regard to its own future strategies with the aim of the IEP Steering Committee to adopt a new strategy in the course of 2015. In line with the recommendations which, over the years, the IEP teams have often provided for the participating institutions, this process combines both bottom-up and top-down approaches. The results of external reviews and feedback from participating institutions will strengthen the process that engages the IEP pool of experts to contribute to the reflections. Through this participatory process the Programme will draw benefit from the wealth of knowledge among its pool members and ensure their continued commitment to the pool, which we believe to be one of the key success factors for the Programme and which will remain so also in the future.



The European University Association (EUA) is the representative organisation of universities and national rectors' conferences in 47 European countries. EUA plays a crucial role in the Bologna Process and in influencing EU policies on higher education, research and innovation. Thanks to its interaction with a range of other European and international organisations EUA ensures that the independent voice of European universities is heard wherever decisions are being taken that will impact on their activities.

IEP is an independent membership service of EUA offering institutional evaluations to higher education institutions in Europe and worldwide. It also offers its expertise to conduct coordinated evaluations at national or regional level. To date (summer 2014), around 380 evaluations and follow-up evaluations in 45 countries have been conducted by IEP. The Programme is unique in Europe in that the methodology focuses on the institution's capacity for change including its strategic planning and internal quality management.