Edited by Michaela Martin

Internal Quality Assurance:
Enhancing higher education quality and graduate employability

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New trends in higher education

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Abbreviations

AACSB	Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business
ACQUIN	Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute
AFELT	Association for Faculty Enrichment in Learning and Teaching
AIMS	online assessment information management system
AIUB	American International University ─ Bangladesh
AMBA	Association of MBAs
AOL	assurance of learning process
APDC	Academic Planning and Development Committee
APPR	action plan progress report
AQAC	AIUB Quality Assurance Centre
BEDB	Bahrain Executive Development Board
CEMS	Community of European Management Schools and International Companies
CESR	course evaluation via student representatives
CGPA	cumulative grade point average
CHE	Commission for Higher Education
CHEDQE	Centre for Higher Education Development and Quality Enhancement
CILO	course intended learning outcome
CNA	National Accreditation Commission
CQA	Centre for Quality Assurance
CTL	Centre for Teaching and Learning
CUE	Commission for University Education
DAAD	German Academic Exchange Service
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DIRAP	Directorate for Institutional Research and Academic Planning
DU	Daystar University
EAC	Partner States of East African Community
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EMS	Economic and Management Sciences
EQA	external quality assurance
EQAR	European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies

EQUIS	European Quality Improvement System
ERB	Education and Training Reform Board
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
EUA	European University Association
FPE	faculty performance evaluation
GDP	gross domestic product
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
HEC	Higher Education Council
HECQ	Higher Education Quality Committee
HEI	higher education institution
HEMIS	higher education management information system
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Council
HEQEP	Higher Education Quality Enhancement Project
HEQSF	Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework
IAB	Institute of Architecture, Bangladesh
IAU	International Association of Universities
ICT	information and communications technology
IEB	Institute of Engineers, Bangladesh
IFC	International Finance Corporation
ILO	intended learning outcome
INCHER	International Institute for Higher Education Research
INQAAHE	International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
IQA	internal quality assurance
IQAC	institutional quality assurance cell
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
IT	information technology
IUCEA	Inter-University Council of East Africa
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
LMIS	labour market information system
MIS	management information system
MOU	memoranda of understanding
NAQQAET	National Authority for Qualifications and Quality Assurance for Education and Training
NAS	natural and agricultural sciences
NGO	non-governmental organization
NQF	national qualifications framework

OPA	Office of Placement and Alumni
PAASCU	Philippines Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities
PCAC	programme and course assessment cycle
PCHET	Professional Certificate in Higher Education Teaching
PD	programme director
PIM	Partnership in International Management
PQM	Programme and Quality Management
QAAC	Quality Assurance and Accreditation Centre
QAB	Quality Assurance Board
QAC	Quality Assurance Committee
QAE	Quality Assurance Executive Committee
QAO	quality assurance office
QAU	Quality Assurance Unit
QS-HRG	Quality Assurance Act
SAR	self-assessment report
SER	self-evaluation report
TAP	teaching analysis poll
TPE	teacher performance evaluation
TSF	teacher schedule form
UDE	University of Duisburg-Essen
UFS	University of the Free State
UGC	University Grants Commission
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UoB	University of Bahrain
UT	University of Talca
WHED	World Higher Education Database
WU	Vienna University of Economics and Business
XMU	Xiamen University

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Executive Summary

Higher education systems and institutions are exposed today to constant changes. As the sector has rapidly expanded, institutions and programmes have become more diversified. Many institutions have been privatized. Within this context, there has been a growing concern about the quality of higher education institutions (HEIs) and their programmes.

This situation has prompted the development of external quality assurance (EQA) mechanisms in higher education in various parts of the world. Indeed, governments have engaged in the quality control of HEIs and their programmes through periodic external assessments, by means of such tools as accreditation, quality audit, and evaluation. Although the phenomenon was initially externally driven, a growing number of individual HEIs have responded to quality concerns by setting up internal quality assurance (IQA) mechanisms for monitoring and management.

This publication is based on the findings of the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) research project 'Exploring effective and innovative options in internal quality assurance', which aimed to identify international trends, as well as innovative practices and good principles, for IQA. It is hoped that the findings it presents will be useful as a guide to HEIs planning to design and develop their own IQA systems. The research also sought to identify the various effects of IQA, and the internal and external factors which condition its effective functioning in universities. With these objectives in mind, the methodology chosen for the project was an international baseline survey and eight in-depth university case studies.

The publication begins with a comparative overview of international trends, derived from the international survey. This reveals that while IQA is often focused on teaching and learning, there can be gaps in its development. For instance, often neglected are IQA tools to monitor student assessment systems, the physical environment, and the employability of graduates. A more in-depth view, considering all eight case studies, makes clear that there are a variety of understandings of IQA. Indeed different IQA systems have different orientations and use diverse tools and instruments. In short, IQA means different things in different places.

Innovative structures for IQA are explored. In the eight case universities, the importance of linking IQA tools with other university functions emerges as a critical success factor for effective IQA. The University of Duisburg-Essen (UDE) in Germany, for example, developed IQA to function as an integrated system of tools and processes. The University of Bahrain (UoB) achieved a balance between centralization and decentralization of decision-making in IQA. In South Africa, the University of the Free State (UFS) integrated IQA with academic core processes to allow IQA results to feed directly into academic planning. In Chile, the University of Talca (UT) integrated IQA with the strategic management of the university.

Also discussed are innovative IQA tools in support of quality, employability, and quality culture. The importance of effective formal and informal communication structures for IQA is identified as a critical success factor. It is one of the key features of IQA at the Vienna University of Economics and Business (WU), an Austrian university that deliberately avoids technical language when involving academics in IQA. The systematic collection of perceptions on necessary quality improvement from different university stakeholders is discussed in the chapter on Xiamen University (XMU) in China. IQA tools and processes that address issues of quality and employability are highlighted from the experiences of Daystar University (DU) in Kenya and the American International University ─ Bangladesh (AIUB). Both universities have been influenced by a context of rising graduate unemployment and a rapid expansion of enrolments in higher education, and their IQA systems are thus particularly geared towards the collection of information from graduates and employers.

The publication presents a comparative analysis of the effects of IQA on teaching and learning, employability, and management. This discussion identifies a number of changes to improve the quality of study programmes – e.g. changes in content coverage, assessment systems, and teaching and learning methods – which often enhance the employability of graduates. When evaluating management structures and processes, IQA leads to organizational changes and new practices that better support academic core processes.

Internal and external factors conditioning the effective operation of IQA are identified as well. Inclusive systems with leadership commitment and stakeholder participation are confirmed as important internal factors

for effective IQA. National frameworks, in particular EQA and autonomy, are identified as external factors which can have a significant impact on the implementation of IQA in HEIs.

This publication concludes with the overall lessons learned from the IIEP research for national and institutional policy-makers and quality assurance officials. The conclusions emphasize the importance of flexible, qualitative tools for IQA, which function in an integrated manner with quantitative tools, to avoid an information overload. They also highlight the need to balance academic- and employability-related IQA tools so as to avoid an excessive specialization of university graduates. Finally, the conclusions emphasize the importance of evidence-based dialogue on quality improvement among university stakeholders to the success of IQA.

Introduction

Michaela Martin

IQA – a worldwide higher education reform with many faces and facets

Higher education systems and institutions today are exposed to rapid change and transformation. In the short period of 2000 to 2013, enrolments in higher education doubled from 100 million to 199 million (UNESCO, 2015). This development has been spurred by an accelerated privatization and marketization of higher education, including public institutions. The pressure on higher education systems to provide access can be expected to increase massively in the years to come due to the catching-up of developing countries, in particular in Asia and Africa (Bloom, Canning, and Chan, 2005). While the quality of universities was unquestionable when they were serving a small elite, institutions in today's massified higher education systems are under tremendous pressure to change and adapt. In this context, questions about quality and graduate employability stand at the centre of higher education policy in many countries (Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumberg, 2009).

While concerns with quality and relevance in higher education institutions (HEIs) are not new, over the past 25 years more comprehensive and systematic approaches to control and enhance them have been introduced in many countries (Martin and Stella, 2007). External quality assurance (EQA) bodies that periodically assess the quality of HEIs and/or their programmes through accreditation, quality audit, or evaluation, have become a familiar feature of the higher education landscape. Some of them were guided by regional integration processes, such as the Bologna Process in Europe, with its heavy policy emphasis on quality assurance, others were inspired by national reforms, and still others introduced as part of development cooperation.

Based on the now-widespread assumption that HEIs bear the main responsibility for the quality of their services (ESG, 2015), internal quality assurance (IQA) mechanisms have been established in many HEIs across the globe. These mechanisms are often set up to comply with the requirements of national EQA agencies or regulatory bodies, but also

to generate information that responds to institutions' own requirements for internal quality monitoring and management (Señal *et al.*, 2008).

This being said, in most countries and HEIs, varieties of quality assurance have been in existence for a long time, some of them formalized but often quite informal. They have been located at different levels of authority, but often at the level of individual staff and the basic academic units in which they are located. However, in the changing and challenging times of expansion and differentiation of higher education and its social and economic importance, many of the long-established traditions of IQA in HEIs are seen as no longer adequate to meet current and future needs and requirements.

Concern with IQA has therefore become a major strand of institutional reform worldwide. Much experimentation has taken place at the university level over the past 20 years in this area. Given the international spread of this reform movement, policies, structures, and processes vary tremendously across national and institutional boundaries (Pratasavitskaya and Stensaker, 2010). IQA relates to diverse understandings of quality, many of which are contextually determined (Harvey and Green, 1993), reflecting different national, institutional, and disciplinary traditions and cultures. According to an international study by Brennan and Shah (2000), IQA can have an academic, managerial, pedagogical, or employment focus. The dominant approaches currently emphasize the quality of student learning, and IQA would thus have a prime purpose of enriching the learning experience for students (Srikanthan and Dalrymple, 2005).

While IQA is primarily concerned with the enhancement of academic quality, it also has the potential to establish necessary linkages between academia and the labour market. Indeed, procedures linked to the quality assurance of academic programmes are very commonly concerned with the question of whether or not a programme is sufficiently aligned with the competencies needed in the labour market. A related question, therefore, is whether professionals are sufficiently involved in periodic reviews of a programme and its organization. Typically, IQA is concerned with the collection of information on the success in the labour market of graduates of a given academic programme, and of the graduates' and employers' opinions on the relevance of the programme in light of their professional realities (Lain and Maginn, 2003). However, relationships between higher education courses and the employment entered into by their graduates can vary significantly and may change over time.

Universities worldwide also struggle with certain challenges related to IQA. These challenges include: developing cost-effective IQA, in which tools and processes are well articulated between each other and function together as a system; integrating IQA with planning, management, and resource allocation; striking the right balance between management, consumer, and academic interests; finding or setting up appropriate mechanisms to make best use of evidence to enhance programme quality and student employability; finding the right balance of centralized and decentralized structures; and, last but not least, designing IQA that supports the development of continuous quality-enhancement processes in a university (Ehlers, 2009; Harvey, 2016).

Over and above these challenges, HEIs in developing countries face supplementary problems in the organization of their IQA, to do with securing adequate financial and competent human resources for IQA and operating it in an institutional context where information systems are often fragile, data are scarce, and computer-supported solutions are not easily available (Mhlanga, 2013).

The IIEP-UNESCO research project on IQA

In order to address these concerns, the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) launched the international comparative research project on IQA in higher education 'Exploring effective and innovative options in internal quality assurance'. Given the international nature of IQA and the wide variations in approaches and functioning, it was deemed necessary to use a broad, yet unifying, definition of IQA to set some boundaries for the research project. According to the authoritative glossary of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE),[1] IQA is defined as 'the process, supported by policies and systems, used by an institution to maintain and enhance the quality of education experienced by its students and of the research undertaken by its staff'. While this definition is relatively broad, it distinguishes IQA from other management tasks, and puts the emphasis on the maintenance and enhancement of quality. It embraces both education and research functions of higher education, which is interesting because IQA practices for the two functions are frequently kept separate. The focus of the present report is mainly on the education function.

1. This definition was taken from the Analytic Quality Glossary available at the INQAAHE website: http://qualityresearchinternational.com/glossary/qualitymanagement.htm

Although there is by now an abundant literature on the processes, tools, and structures of IQA, little evidence on the impact and effects of IQA is available. According to Leiber, Stensaker, and Harvey (2015), there is a lack of 'methodologically more comprehensive and empirically more reliable knowledge about the effects and mechanisms of action of QA measures'. Also, the aspect of context and how it influences IQA is widely under-researched from an empirical point of view. In particular, previous literature has not paid sufficient attention to empirical evidence on IQA from universities in developing countries. There has also been a neglect of the increasing institutional differentiation of many higher education systems and the questions and challenges which this poses for IQA (and EQA). So, in order to help make IQA sustainable as a means of enhancing the quality and relevance of higher education in different contexts, it was thought necessary to identify innovative practices and good principles for effective IQA solutions – practices and principles that are well embedded in their various contexts.

Bearing these concerns in mind, IIEP decided to focus its research on the following four objectives:

- Identify main trends internationally in the orientation, functioning, drivers, and obstacles of IQA.
- Illustrate approaches and options, considered as innovative practices and good principles, which can guide other HEIs in the design and development of their own IQA.
- Demonstrate the effects of IQA with regard to the teaching and learning process, the employability of graduates, and the effectiveness of management.
- Identify internal and external factors that condition the effective functioning of IQA at universities.

The research adopted a mixed-method design: baseline data on IQA worldwide were first collected through an international survey, before IQA in different national and institutional contexts was further analysed in eight case studies.

The international survey

In order to capture the current state of IQA internationally, IIEP conducted an international tri-lingual[2] online survey during 2015/2016, in collaboration with the International Association of Universities

2. The survey was programmed in English, French, and Spanish.

(IAU). Primary data were generated from an integrated quantitative and qualitative (open-ended) designed survey questionnaire. A link to the final survey questionnaire was then sent to institutions held on the IAU's World Higher Education Database (WHED). This means the data were derived from a non-probability, convenience sample (selected from the target population on the basis of their accessibility).

The survey focused on an analysis of the underlying purposes of IQA, its main orientation, structures, tools and processes, drivers, and obstacles. Underlying *purposes* of IQA relate to the main motivations for IQA, such as quality improvement or compliance, some of which are driven internally, others externally. The *orientation* of IQA concerns the functional areas to which IQA applies, i.e. teaching, research, etc. *Structures* for IQA refer to leadership positions devoted to quality assurance – collegial bodies (committees) or technical support structures (IQA offices) at both centralized and decentralized levels responsible for supporting IQA and making decisions in relation to the quality of academic activities. *Tools* for IQA systems are investigated by functional area, i.e. teaching and learning, research, and services. Tools may be data-collection instruments, such as student evaluation of courses, or processes, such as reviews of learning outcomes or curriculum-approval mechanisms. And finally, with a view to preparing policy recommendations for national and institutional decision-makers, the survey investigates both external and internal factors that support (*drivers*) or hinder (*obstacles*) the development of IQA in an HEI.

The survey is the first worldwide data-collection effort on the topic. Thus it fills a clear knowledge gap on IQA in HEIs worldwide.

Eight university case studies

In order to deepen the understanding of IQA in context, the research further aimed to document good principles and practices of IQA in eight selected universities by means of case studies. The case study approach (Yin, 2013) was chosen to better understand selected IQA mechanisms in their country and institutional contexts, and to highlight contrasting approaches to IQA in a comparative perspective. The case study design was thought to be well adapted to the second, third, and fourth research questions, which required a detailed documentation of existing IQA practices (policies, structures, and processes) as well as an in-depth analysis of their effects and the internal and external factors that condition their effective and efficient functioning.

Eight universities were selected from various contexts on the basis of their innovative practices and their application of good principles in their IQA policies, structures, and processes. A pre-selection of possible case studies was made based on a literature review as well as the recommendations of a group of international experts. The final selection gave preference to universities with a proven record of IQA processes geared to both quality enhancement and the employability of graduates, and to those that integrate IQA well into institutional strategy and policies. The following eight institutions, a mixture of private and public, comprehensive and specialized, universities from four continents were chosen:

- Austria: Vienna University of Economics and Business (WU),
- Bahrain: University of Bahrain (UoB),
- Bangladesh: American International University – Bangladesh (AIUB),
- Chile: University of Talca (UT),
- China: Xiamen University (XMU),
- Germany: University of Duisburg-Essen (UDE),
- Kenya: Daystar University (DU),
- South Africa: University of the Free State (UFS).

The case studies documented innovative practices and good principles in the functioning of IQA within national and institutional contexts. Four of the case studies demonstrate innovative practices with regard to structures for IQA (*Chapters 4* to *7*), while four others show good principles with regard to tools and instruments (*Chapters 8* to *11*). The case studies further studied the effects of IQA on the universities (see *Chapter 12*). The impact of IQA on quality, employability, and management was appraised by looking at its effects on the teaching and learning system, the managerial system, and employment orientation. With regard to the focus of the study, it was decided to investigate both external and internal factors which were thought likely to condition the effectiveness of IQA in HEIs (see *Chapter 13*).

IIEP case study research adopted a multi-stakeholder approach to the collection of primary data. This allowed for comparison of the different actor groups' perspectives on IQA and enabled triangulation of perspectives and interpretations by actor groups. Stakeholders included academic and administrative staff, students, and academic and administrative leaders. In order to allow for comparison among the

different subject cultures, each case study also analysed differences across academic disciplines (i.e. humanities, social sciences, and sciences).

Online surveys were administered to academic and administrative staff; in five of the eight universities they were conducted in the local language.[3] The results from the survey questionnaires were expected to provide useful insights for the qualitative interviews and focus group discussions conducted during the second stage of the research. In all case-study universities, semi-structured interviews were held with senior academic leaders, senior administrative leaders, staff, and students. Focus group discussions were organized in one selected department within each faculty to discuss with programme heads and academic staff the changes that had been made as a result of IQA. The guided interviews and focus group discussions allowed for a more in-depth exploration of the effectiveness or otherwise of the different tools and procedures in place at the universities. They also enabled the researchers to obtain information about potential shortcomings and suggestions for improvement.

Scope and limitations of the research

Although the IIEP research on IQA was comprehensive in nature, combining an international survey with a case study design, there were a number of limitations that need to be acknowledged.

First, the international survey was able to collect some 311 exploitable responses from HEIs located in different continents (for more details on the respondents see *Chapter 1*). This represents an important number of responses, but cannot be considered as representative of the several thousand universities existing worldwide. In addition, the WHED provided access to a non-probabilistic convenience sample, drawn from only a limited number of private for-profit universities.

Second, it is also likely that there is a bias in those universities responding to the survey; the majority of them believed that they had well-functioning IQA in place. Suspicion of bias from self-selection is supported by the fact that the majority of respondents to the questionnaire in each institution indicated their positions as either head of IQA, or the head or deputy head of the institution. As a consequence, the respondents

3. UDE, WU (German); DU, UFS, AIUB (English); UoB (Arabic); XMU (Chinese); UT (Spanish).

to the questionnaire were largely from HEIs with a formalized quality assurance structure in place.

Third, with regard to the case-study research, it was decided to concentrate on the effects of IQA in teaching and learning, employability, and management, thus excluding the study of IQA of the research function. This choice was made because IQA was expected to be more typically geared towards the enhancement of teaching and learning. In addition, in the research domain there are competitive processes (e.g. bidding to access research funds) and peer review, which tend to drive performance enhancement in ways quite different from the IQA of teaching and learning.

Fourth, the involvement of those in charge of IQA (i.e. quality management professionals) in the research teams that were set up in each case-study university may have led to increased subjectivity in the discussion of institutional practices of IQA. However, this was also expected to generate a more in-depth understanding and reflection on the nature and functioning of IQA in the case-study universities.

Finally, it needs to be acknowledged that the study of effects and conditioning factors of IQA was widely based on the perceptions of actor groups, particularly academics, since they were the main actor group in both IQA implementation and experiencing changes in the teaching and learning domain. Such perceptions are therefore only a proxy of real change. Also, although perceptions may sometimes establish a linkage between IQA processes and change, this is not strictly based on a causal relationship: there would be multiple factors conditioning changes in an HEI.

Target group of this publication

The IIEP project on IQA was conducted to add to existing knowledge on innovative practices and good principles for the development of IQA in universities located in varying national and institutional contexts. On the assumption that an effective IQA can contribute considerably to the enhancement of quality of teaching and learning, employability, and management, this knowledge will be particularly useful for the following four target groups:

- First of all, institutional policy-makers, such as rectors, presidents, and vice-presidents, who make decisions on the creation and development of IQA in their HEIs, will find directions to policy

options with regard to IQA and the institutional environment which best supports an effective IQA system and processes.

- Secondly, the publication will also be useful for those directly in charge of IQA in their universities, such as quality managers and their collaborators. They will find guidance at the operational levels on innovative practices and good principles for IQA. For them this publication is meant to be a source of inspiration to enrich their thinking on possible options for developing IQA.
- Thirdly, national policy-makers will find the publication useful as it addresses factors related to national higher education policy, such as the linkage of EQA with IQA, and the level of autonomy of HEIs – factors which are clearly identified as conditioning the effectiveness of IQA in many contexts.
- Lastly, given its empirical and international nature, the publication is also meant to add to the knowledge base on the effects of IQA among researchers on IQA as well as its relationships with EQA and employability factors.

Overview of the publication

This publication comprises a combination of the condensed findings from the international survey (*Chapter 1*), comparative analyses of selected aspects of the eight case studies (*Chapters 2*, *3, 12,* and *13*), and reduced versions of the eight university case studies, each focusing on a particular feature derived from one of the case studies (*Chapters 4* to *11*) to illustrate innovative approaches and good principles of IQA.

The publication is divided into four parts. *Part 1* provides a comparative overview of trends in the development of IQA internationally, varying understandings of IQA, and a discussion of the relationship of IQA with employability based on the case study research. *Part 2* presents case experiences with regard to innovative structures for IQA focusing on IQA as an integrated system, and its interrelatedness with academic processes and management. *Part 3* discusses innovative tools in support of quality, employability, and quality culture, thus looking both at innovative tools and processes for IQA and how their effectiveness can be maximized in terms of expected outcomes. *Part 4* draws conclusions from the research with regard to effects, conditioning factors, and lessons learned.

Chapter 1, Overview of IQA Internationally, presents the survey's findings on the current state of IQA. These include the main orientations, policies, structures, tools, and drivers and obstacles of IQA. The information collected provides an international overview on IQA development, but also identifies concerns and gaps.

Chapter 2, Comparing Varying Understandings of IQA and Associated Tools, discusses varying definitions of quality and IQA in higher education, and compares these with the definition and conceptions of IQA which emerged from the eight case studies. These understandings were identified through a comparative analysis of policy documents, tools, and processes used for IQA in the case universities.

Chapter 3, IQA and Employability – International Perspectives, offers a comparative overview of the various approaches and mechanisms which the case universities use to enhance the employability of graduates. Before discussing the role of higher education and IQA in employability, the notion of graduate employability is addressed, as well as the strategies of the case-study universities.

Chapter 4, University of Duisburg-Essen (UDE) – Designing IQA to Function as an Integrated System, reflects the background and processes of systematization and integration of IQA structures, tools, and processes at UDE, Germany. Analysing the development of IQA at the university, the chapter offers ideas on how to address current challenges in the process of developing an IQA system.

Chapter 5, University of Bahrain (UoB) – Balancing Centralization and Decentralization, examines the structure that UoB has developed for decision-making in IQA, balancing centralization with decentralized processes. It discusses how the university maintains this balance, and how the management of IQA contributes to this process.

Chapter 6, University of the Free State (UFS) – Integrating IQA with Academic Processes, presents the case of UFS, which has developed IQA as a tool for internal transformation in order to respond to tensions arising from a recent institutional merger and a student body whose composition has radically changed. The chapter focuses on the efforts of UFS to make IQA and quality enhancement an integral component of its core functions, and to integrate IQA into academic processes.

Chapter 7, University of Talca (UT) – Integrating IQA with University Management, examines the case of UT, a university whose broad range of processes and tools for quality assurance have put it at the forefront of such efforts in Chile. Examining how UT's processes and tools have been fully mainstreamed within the university's management system, it also looks at the effects of these tools, various conditioning factors, and the overall perceptions of IQA stakeholders at the university.

Chapter 8, Developing a Quality Culture through Internal Dialogue at Vienna University of Economics and Business (WU) – 'The medium is still the message': This chapter argues that IQA needs to be firmly embedded in an institution's quality culture, with an effective communication architecture, both formal and informal. It emphasizes that language and communication are pivotal when setting up a system for IQA, and asserts a need for informed decision-making, as well as a concept of IQA as an ongoing management of relationships.

Chapter 9, Xiamen University (XMU) – Integrating Stakeholders' Perspectives for Effective IQA, explores the issue of stakeholder involvement in IQA at XMU. The chapter argues that stakeholders' understanding and recognition of the institution's IQA system is a prerequisite to their involvement, and that the level of involvement partly determines the relevance of IQA mechanisms to teaching activities. It highlights the importance of providing stakeholders with feedback from IQA tools.

Chapter 10, Daystar University (DU) – Supporting Quality and Employability with IQA, starts from the context of a rising unemployment rate among university graduates in Kenya, and rapid expansion of enrolments, which has raised concerns about the quality of education and employability of graduates. The chapter discusses the IQA tools at DU that focus on enhancing employability. It argues that effective IQA tools for employability involve employers, and share results with stakeholders to allow for a discussion on the quality and relevance of study programmes.

Chapter 11, American International University – Bangladesh (AIUB) – Supporting Quality and Employability with IQA, depicts a similar context of high graduate unemployment and rapid expansion of higher education in Bangladesh. Through its IQA and other mechanism for employability, AIUB has improved the quality of education, as well as graduate employability. This chapter examines various tools and

processes at the university in order to identify IQA's contribution to graduate employability over the last decade.

Chapter 12, What Are the Effects of IQA on Teaching and Learning, Employability, and Management?, reviews the effects of IQA as identified by the IIEP research. The chapter contends that the effects of IQA tools are, in general, well aligned with their direct purposes, but also that these could be extended to other aims. It also considers how the effectiveness of selected IQA tools could be enhanced.

Chapter 13, What Factors Support Effective IQA Systems?, presents findings on factors that support or hinder the effective functioning of IQA systems. Making a distinction between internal conditions (the institutional environment for IQA) and external factors (the national environment that affects the functioning of HEIs), it presents evidence from interviews on those features which are most highly valued by stakeholders.

Finally, the *Conclusion* presents useful lessons, drawn from the IIEP research project, for national and institutional policy-makers and quality managers. These include good practices and principles for IQA.

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Part 1:
Comparative overview

Chapter 1

Development, drivers, and obstacles in IQA: Findings of an international survey

Michaela Martin

Over the past two decades, different driving forces have made internal quality assurance (IQA) a global reform trend in higher education. In certain countries, it was a voluntary response to requirements emerging from external quality assurance (EQA) and its various processes of accreditation, audit, and evaluation. In other countries, IQA was implemented as part of national higher education reform, which made IQA compulsory for all universities or HEIs. Within the broader European region, the Bologna Process, which involved 48 Member States in 2017, formally integrated quality assurance into its reform agenda in 2005. All Bologna countries agreed to introduce both EQA and IQA to their higher education sectors. In the global South, on the other hand, IQA frequently emerged as part of externally funded reform projects delivered by multilateral or bilateral organizations, as well as through inter-university collaboration. As a consequence of the diverse and uneven global development of IQA, there is great variation in terms both of stage and functioning.

In order to assess the present state of play, as well as the external and internal drivers, as perceived by managers responsible for IQA (i.e. vice-rectors for academic affairs and quality managers), IIEP and the International Association of Universities (IAU) jointly conducted an integrated quantitative and qualitative (open-ended) international survey. In total, 311 institutions from 94 countries around the world responded to the questionnaire. More than three-quarters of responses (241 or 77.5 per cent) were in English, with 11 per cent (34) in French and 11.5 per cent (36) in Spanish.[4] This chapter will provide insights on the features, drivers, and obstacles in IQA reported by several hundred HEIs, while *Chapter 2* will provide deeper lessons on how universities define IQA and put it into practice.

4. It is likely that many respondents chose to respond to the questionnaire in English rather than in their native language.

1.1 Characteristics of responding institutions in the international survey

The responding institutions were classified according to their country of origin into five regional groups: Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), and North America. Around 41 per cent of responding institutions are based in Europe, 23 per cent in Asia and the Pacific, 15 per cent in Africa, 14 per cent in LAC, and 7 per cent in North America. While European institutions were slightly over-represented in the sample, institutions from Africa, LAC, and the Asia-Pacific region were still well represented.

Institutions were furthermore categorized in terms of ownership, either public (those for which public funding accounts for 80 per cent or more of the total), public with significant private funds (more than 20 per cent private funds), private not for profit, private for profit, and other. Some 58 per cent of responding institutions said they were public, with a third (or 16 per cent of the total) of these receiving significant private funds. Just over a third (37 per cent) of responding institutions said that they were private, with a majority of these being not-for-profit institutions. Only 7 per cent of responding institutions reported being private for-profit institutions.

The institutions were also categorized as comprehensive (multi-disciplinary university), specialized (university with a special focus, e.g. technology university), post-secondary (non-university institutions like a higher institute or community college), or other, on the basis of the courses they provided. Sixty-two per cent of responding universities said that they were comprehensive in nature, while 24 per cent said they were specialized universities. Only 6 per cent of responses were from post-secondary institutions.

Institutions in the survey were classified in terms of the highest-level degree they offered to students at their institution, namely associate degree/diploma, bachelor's, master's, or PhD.[5] Sixty-three per cent of responding institutions offered degrees up to PhD or doctoral level, while 26 per cent offered master's degrees as the highest level of education. In total, therefore, 89 per cent of institutions offered master's level

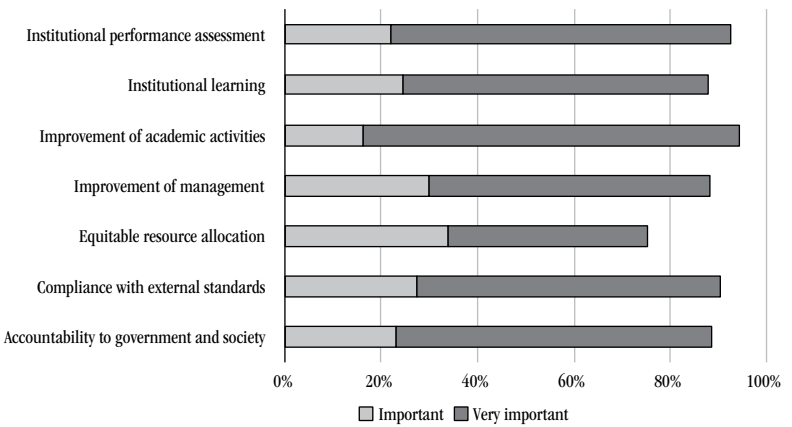
5. Associate degree/diploma level indicates undergraduate academic degrees granted after one or two years.

education or higher. Nine per cent of responding institutions offered only bachelor's degree level education.

In terms of overall student enrolment, 33 per cent of responding institutions had between 1,001 and 5,000 students in a given year while 25 per cent had between 10,001 and 30,000. Overall, there was a higher presence of small-sized institutions (defined as institutions with 10,000 students or fewer) in our sample (61 per cent). Finally, a majority of responding institutions (68 per cent) indicated both teaching and research as their main orientations, while 27 per cent said they were predominantly teaching-oriented. Four per cent of responding institutions were exclusively research-oriented.

Despite the diversity of institutions responding to this survey, the majority can be categorized as comprehensive universities that offer education up to PhD level and have both research and teaching orientations. Most were also public institutions with a student body of fewer than 10,000 students.

Figure 1.1 Purposes of IQA



1.2 The purpose of IQA

A question was asked about the purposes underlying IQA in HEIs (*Figure 1.1*). Typical purposes, covering both externally and internally driven motivations discussed in the literature, were presented to respondents who evaluated them according to importance. Externally driven purposes included compliance and accountability to the requests of national authorities or external stakeholders. Internally driven

purposes comprised performance assessment, institutional learning, and management improvement, and were intended to improve internal processes and strengthen institutional self-regulation.

As indicated in *Figure 1.1*, the most significant purposes for IQA were the improvement of academic activities (94 per cent), institutional performance assessment (92 per cent), and compliance with external standards (90 per cent). These were followed by accountability to government and society (89 per cent), institutional learning (87 per cent), improvement of management (88 per cent), and equitable resource allocation (75 per cent). Considering that a majority of institutions viewed each of the purposes as underlying their IQA system, it was evident that IQA remained driven by both improvement and compliance. The survey therefore indicated that IQA worldwide has not yet resolved the tension that can arise between internal and external purposes.

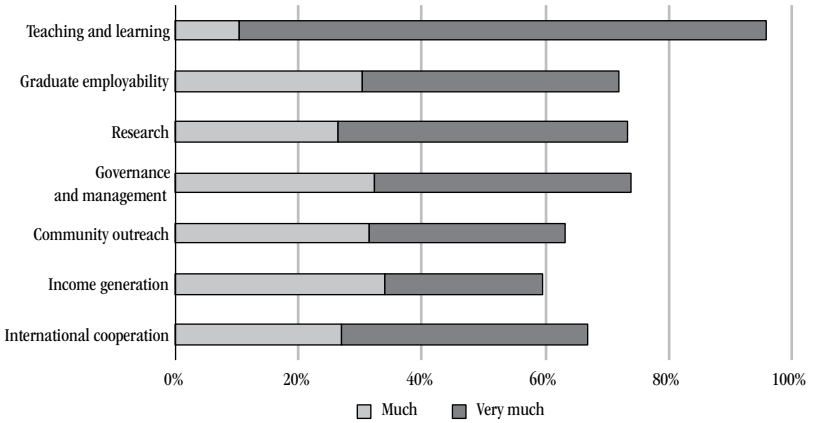
Some institutions, in answering an open question on the purposes of IQA policy, added to the list enhancement of teaching and learning, research and innovation, graduate employability, and contribution to society. One institution also highlighted improved transparency as an objective of IQA.

1.3 Focus of IQA

IQA activities can focus on different functional areas of HEIs. These areas may include teaching and learning, graduate employability, governance and management, research, community outreach, income generation and community services, and international cooperation. In order to investigate the orientation of IQA activities, institutions were asked to indicate the focus of their IQA activities.

As *Figure 1.2* shows, teaching and learning (96 per cent) remained the primary focus of IQA for the responding institutions. Teaching and learning was followed by governance and management (74 per cent), research (73 per cent), graduate employability (72 per cent), and international cooperation (67 per cent). Community outreach and income generation activities were considerably less popular. There was, thus, a clear hierarchy among institutions in terms of defining the focus of their IQA, with teaching and learning, unsurprisingly, most prominent.

Figure 1.2 Focus of orientation and activities in IQA



1.4 Quality policy, IQA structures and orientations

IQA in an HEI can be formalized in a written commitment to quality set out in a strategic plan or quality policy. This formalization can be further consolidated in a quality manual describing the operational processes through which quality will be enhanced. HEIs distinguish themselves through the existence of structures for quality assurance, which are intended to provide support to quality processes conducted at programme, department, and faculty levels. The survey aimed to investigate the variation in IQA with regard to these aspects of the formalization of IQA.

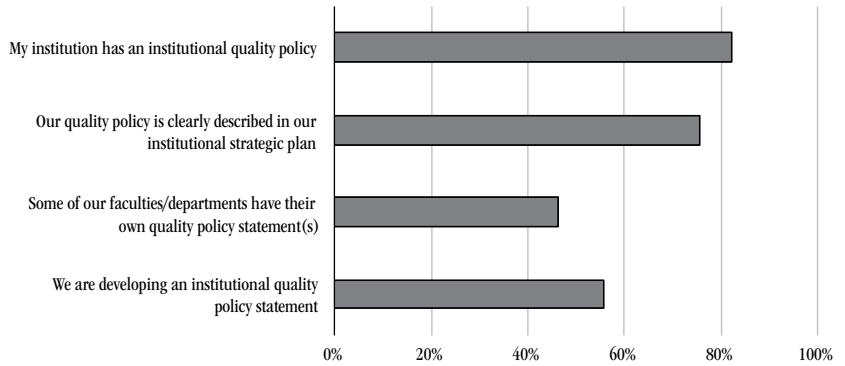
Institutional quality policy

The importance of academic quality to overall institutional policy was acknowledged by the vast majority of responding institutions. In order to investigate the presence of institutional quality policy, a question was asked about the existence and nature of such a policy. In the survey, the term 'quality policy' was defined as a strategic document that described goals, principles, and rules on quality issues, and determined present and future decisions on these issues.

As *Figure 1.3* indicates, a majority (82 per cent) of responding institutions indicated that they had an institutional quality policy and 76 per cent said that it was clearly described in the institutional strategic plan. Almost half (46 per cent) of responding institutions indicated that faculties and departments had their own quality policy. Slightly more

than half (56 per cent) said that they were currently developing a quality policy statement.[6]

Figure 1.3 Presence of institutional quality policy



In the open question on other possible modalities, one institution added that they 'had many quality policies and processes, but not a central policy that governs them all'. A few reported that the quality policy was 'embedded into our other policies and was not a stand-alone policy' while one institution mentioned that it was attempting to create a policy structure based on a form of continuous evaluation and improvement.

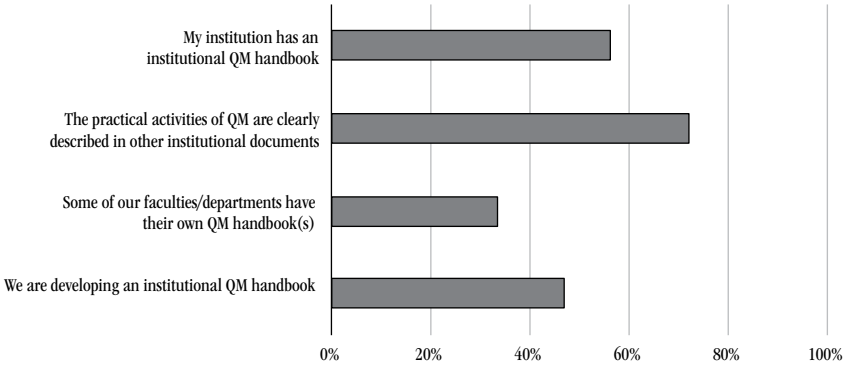
These findings demonstrate that concern with quality may be present in a variety of policy documents, probably developed at different points in time, and pertaining to different aspects of institutional life. Furthermore, they show that the presence of an institutional quality policy, largely understood as a formalization of the institutional commitment to quality, need not imply the presence of decentralized quality policies at faculty and department level, with less than half of the institutions reporting that they had such documents at this level.

IQA handbook

An IQA handbook is another element of the formalization of the IQA system in an HEI. A quality handbook was defined in the survey questionnaire as an operational document on the processes and tools used by institutions to conduct the practical activities of IQA.

6. This proportion includes institutions that already have an institutional quality policy, given that 45 per cent of responding institutions indicated that they had a policy and were developing a new one. This implies that 11 per cent of total responding institutions did not have a policy and are now developing one.

Figure 1.4 Presence of IQA handbook



The survey results (*Figure 1.4*) show that the majority of responding HEIs used institutional documents other than an IQA handbook to describe the practical activities of IQA. Almost three-quarters (72 per cent) of institutions said that they clearly described the practical activities of IQA in other institutional documents. Furthermore, only a third of responding institutions indicated that some of departments and faculties had their own IQA handbooks, reflecting the lack of decentralized authority over IQA. This indicates that this level of formalization of IQA is not, by and large, a prevalent feature across and within the institutions.

In response to the open question, one institution indicated that it 'utilised an online internal quality assurance system containing policy, procedures, rules and forms' as a non-traditional form of quality handbook. Another institution said that it 'used the reports compiled for accreditation exercises as template references for future reports and guides'.

People and structures involved in IQA

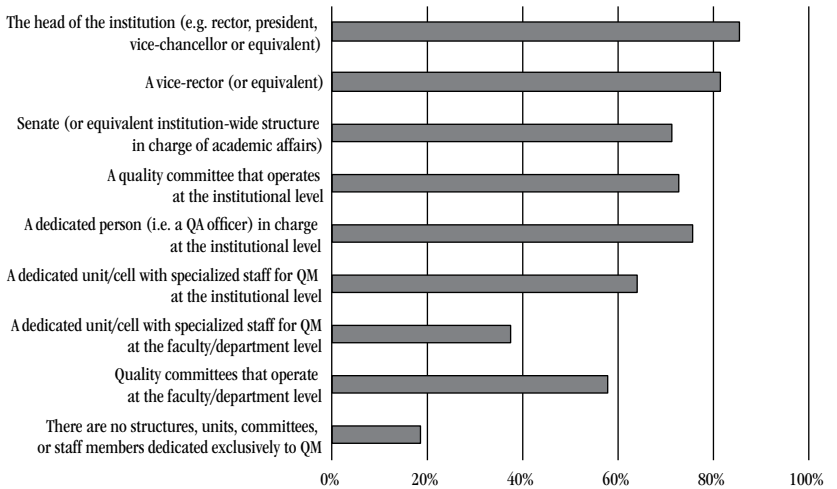
In order to gain an understanding of the responsibilities and support structures for IQA, institutions were asked to indicate the types of leadership positions and structures involved in the IQA of their institution.

As *Figure 1.5* indicates, 76 per cent of responding institutions reported having a dedicated person responsible for IQA at institutional level. The survey found that IQA was commonly centralized under the head of the institution (86 per cent) and/or a vice-rector (81 per cent). Furthermore, 64 per cent of institutions indicated having a unit or cell with specialized staff responsible for IQA at institutional level, while

73 per cent reported having quality committees at institutional level. These technical structures were usually responsible for the development of institutional policies on quality assurance, quality handbooks, and IQA instruments for data collection (e.g. surveys, polls, qualitative methods).

Despite the prevalence of structures responsible for IQA at institutional level, these structures seemed less developed at faculty or department level. These differences suggest, once again, that IQA structures remained centralized in most institutions.

Figure 1.5 People and structures involved in quality assurance



Commenting on the people and structures involved in IQA other than those specified in the questionnaire, responding institutions indicated that central management played an important role in quality assurance.

1.5 IQA of teaching and learning

As indicated in previous sections, IQA has been focused largely on teaching and learning across responding institutions. This section presents survey findings on the extent to which IQA instruments and processes in the institutions focus on the enhancement of teaching and learning, particularly in relation to courses, student experience, and academic staff performance. It also examines the availability and use of information on teaching and learning.

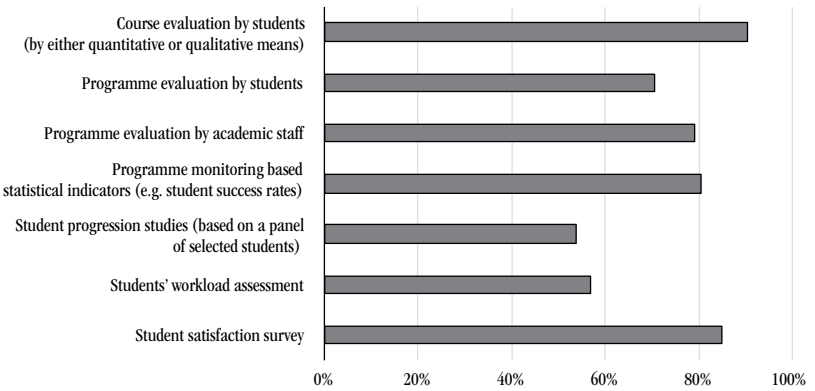
Enhancement of academic programmes

The enhancement of academic programmes has long been an important component of IQA in the field of teaching and learning in HEIs. One of the oldest and most widely used tools for this purpose is *student course assessment*, whereby students evaluate certain quality dimensions of teaching and learning at course level. Over the years, new IQA instruments have emerged, such as *student satisfaction surveys* and *workload assessments*. Student satisfaction surveys assess the broader student experience, and thus include their satisfaction with support services and extracurricular activities. Student workload assessments usually involve the recording of workload by students in each course of a given programme in order to estimate the level of adequacy in terms of its credits. This instrument is thus used mainly in countries where course credit systems have been introduced and credits correspond to a particular pre-assessed workload. Another trend is the development of *student progression studies*, longitudinal assessments of selected students at key moments of transition within a study programme (e.g. first year, mid-term, and final year). Student progression studies require the regular follow-up of a preselected group of students. In many countries, *programme evaluation* has also been introduced in response to the demands of (e.g.) accreditation. It usually assesses the adequacy of learning objectives and the extent to which the pedagogic system and the available resources in a programme serve those objectives. Programme evaluation is typically conducted by academic staff, but it can also involve students and external stakeholders, such as employers and academic staff from other HEIs. With regard to the latter, an external peer review element in programme evaluation can be an important process for the sharing of experiences and innovations between institutions. *Programme monitoring based on statistical indicators* is a particular form of programme evaluation, based on selected indicators related to certain process indicators (e.g. student–staff ratios, student progression, and completion).

As *Figure 1.6* indicates, a majority of institutions used most of the processes and tools proposed in the survey questionnaire. Course evaluation by students (90 per cent) and student satisfaction surveys (85 per cent) were the tools most frequently used. This was followed by programme monitoring based on statistical indicators (80 per cent), programme evaluation by academic staff (79 per cent), and programme evaluation by students (70 per cent). Student workload assessments (57 per cent) and student progression studies (54 per cent) were less

frequently used, reflecting the fact that these tools were more recently introduced and are more demanding from a technical point of view. Extensive use of both technical and human resources in these assessments means that institutions facing resource constraints find them harder to implement.

Figure 1.6 Processes and tools used for the enhancement of academic programmes



Monitoring of student assessments

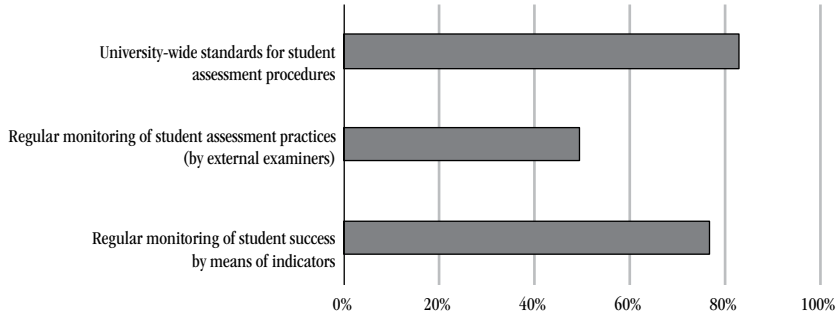
Student assessment is another integral part of teaching and learning, hence the growing focus on this in IQA. There are different approaches to the monitoring of student assessments. To discern trends in monitoring student assessment, HEIs were asked to indicate the processes and tools they used for this task. Three tools were proposed in the survey: *university-wide standards for student assessment* procedures (e.g. as laid down in internal rules and regulations, or within the framework of processes in a quality manual) and the regular monitoring of student assessment procedures through either *external examiners* or *indicators*.

As *Figure 1.7* shows, regular monitoring of student assessment by external examiners was used by only about half of the institutions (49 per cent). University-wide standards for student assessment procedures (83 per cent) and regular monitoring of student success by means of indicators (77 per cent) were more widely used for monitoring student assessments.

Monitoring the quality of academic staff performance

Academic staff assessment is one of the most common and crucial components of an IQA system related to teaching and learning. Academic staff can be evaluated by supervisors, peers, and students. In some cases, teachers are required to examine their own performance through self-evaluation. *Annual performance appraisals,* conducted by supervisors (e.g. heads of department), are used to examine a broader range of activities carried out in the course of a year, including contributions and performance in the teaching area. Similarly, *classroom supervision* of academic staff can be conducted by academic authorities (e.g. heads of department) in certain contexts.

Figure 1.7 Processes or tools used for monitoring student assessments



Academic staff may also be assessed for promotion by their peers on the basis of their research performance and productivity, at either national or institutional level. In cases of *peer reviewing of a teacher*, a colleague from the same academic institution sits in the teacher's class and provides feedback, typically on the basis of a set of predesigned criteria. *Mentoring arrangements* have been developed in many HEIs to improve the teaching capacity of academic staff who are in the early stages of their career. Under such arrangements, an experienced colleague offers support to a younger member of academic staff in his or her teaching responsibilities.

Students' evaluation of teachers may involve evaluation of instructors based on, for example, preparedness for class, the promotion of learning, the encouragement of student participation, the use of

suitable evaluation methods on student learning, and the availability for help. *Internal evaluation (or self-evaluation)* may be used to evaluate systematically the consistency between the university's mission and existing practice. Each unit can generate a self-evaluation report and interview the key informants. The information generated is used for decision-making processes such as staff promotion.

In order to understand current patterns in academic staff assessment, institutions were asked to indicate the processes and tools used in monitoring the quality of academic staff. As *Figure 1.8* shows, student evaluation of teachers (85 per cent) was the most popular process or tool used by the responding institutions to monitor the quality of academic staff performance, followed by internal evaluation of staff performance for promotion decisions (76 per cent) and regular staff appraisal (73 per cent). Neither peer review of teaching nor classroom supervision were popular among the institutions, with fewer than half using these instruments. This may be because these tools were thought to run contrary to the culture of professional autonomy within academia. Mentorship arrangements were, however, among the more commonly used tools related to academic staff.

Other types of tool used to monitor the quality of academic staff, highlighted in the open question, included internal audits and annual development discussions. One institution indicated that 'junior staff [members] were guided by senior staff and encouraged to further their studies'. This suggests a desire among institutions to promote the upskilling of staff members.

Availability and use of information on teaching and learning

The successful implementation of IQA largely depends on the availability of data and information derived from a management information system (MIS). The survey investigated whether or not available management information was used for IQA purposes within HEIs, and whether it constituted an integral part of it.

Institutions were asked whether certain key information on teaching and learning was *available* (without being used) or whether it was *used* (given availability) for IQA purposes (*Figure 1.9*). Around 87 per cent of institutions had information on student progression available. However, only 40 per cent of these institutions used this information for IQA. Eighty-one per cent of institutions had access to

information on teacher–student ratios, but only 36 per cent of these institutions used it for IQA. Information on the existence of a learning inventory was also reported to be available in 80 per cent of institutions, while only 28 per cent used it in IQA. Information on student characteristics was the least available form, with around 70 per cent of responding institutions indicating its availability, of which 38 per cent used it in their IQA. Overall, the availability of key information on teaching and learning appeared substantial. However, in most responding HEIs, relatively little systematic use was made of this information for IQA purposes.

Figure 1.8 Processes or tools used for monitoring the quality of academic staff performance

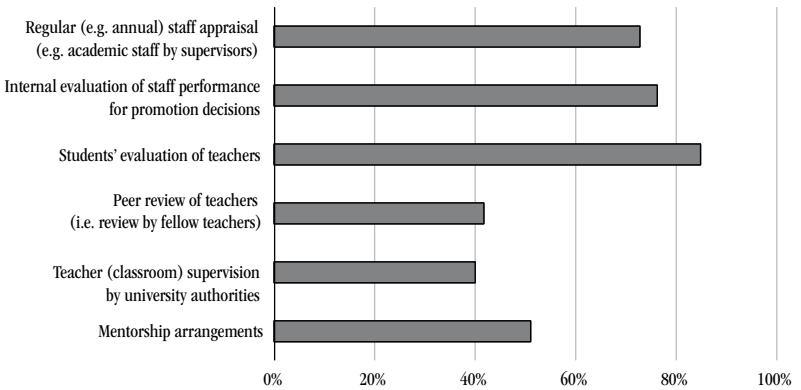
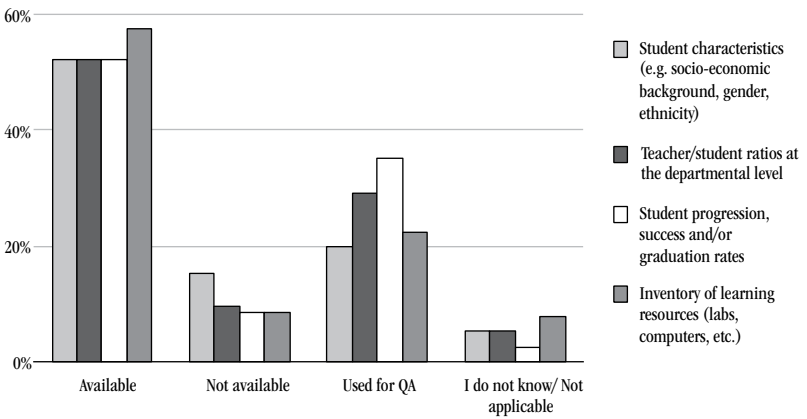


Figure 1.9 Availability and use of information on teaching or learning in IQA



1.6 IQA and employability

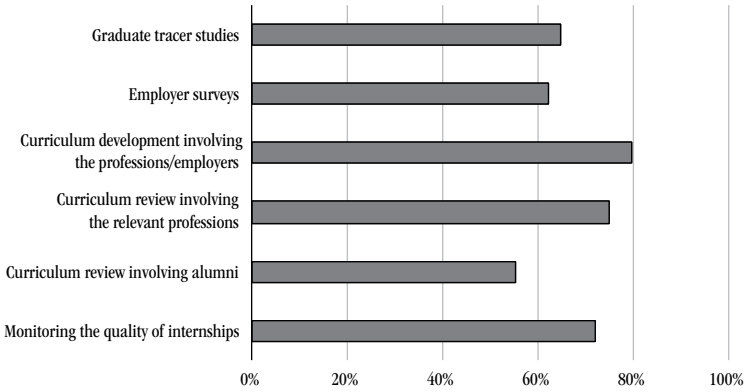
IQA can integrate a concern with the employability of graduates; an important consideration in the context of increasing graduate unemployment in many countries. *Employers or professionals* may be involved in the development and review of an academic programme in order to gauge their impression of the effectiveness of the programme in relation to the performance of the graduates. Graduates from a given academic programme can be surveyed through *tracer studies* at specified intervals (e.g. six months, one year, or three years after graduation) to gather data on their entry into the labour market and their opinion of the relevance of the programme from which they have graduated. *Employer surveys* can be conducted to collect information from employers on their appreciation of graduates, concerning, in particular, the extent to which they think they fulfil the requirements of the labour market. Under the imperative to facilitate the link between academic programmes and the labour market, *internships* have also become quite an important feature of academic programmes.

To understand whether and how IQA takes into account the dimension of graduate employability, the survey asked respondents to specify which IQA tools and processes they used to enhance this dimension. According to *Figure 1.10,* curriculum development involving professionals (79 per cent) was the most popular tool used by responding institutions to enhance graduate employability. This was followed by curriculum review (75 per cent) and monitoring the quality of internships (72 per cent). Graduate tracer studies and employer surveys were used by two-thirds of responding institutions, while only half of these institutions involved alumni in curriculum review.

Other tools used for the enhancement of graduate employability, mentioned in the open question, included discussions with employers during programme reviews, employers' presentations, and simulations of professional interviews with students. Tracking graduates by means of administrative data from the social security system was also mentioned by several respondents.

The focus of most of these methods tended to be on graduates' entry into employment, the nature of the 'first job after graduation', the 'suitability' of the job, and the 'preparedness' of the graduate to perform it. Information about longer-term experiences and progression within the labour market was rarely collected.

Figure 1.10 Employer surveys used for enhancement of graduate employability



1.7 IQA and management

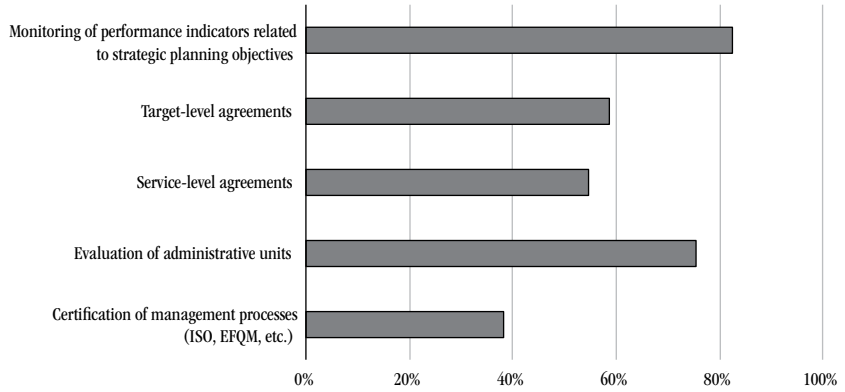
In many countries, HEIs have reformed their management structures and processes, often as a consequence of national governance reforms implemented under the new public management paradigm. In order to ensure the quality of management, and its impact on the quality of educational processes within the institution, such reforms involve IQA mechanisms. The use of key performance indicators for the *monitoring of strategic planning objectives* is one such mechanism in the management area. The indicators comprise *internal target-* and *service-level agreements*, which university leadership agrees with academic or administrative units (or both) based on outcomes expected from the work of the unit. *Evaluation of administrative units* has also become a more regular feature of IQA on management, and is conducted together with target- or service-level agreements to assess whether specified objectives have been achieved. In addition, some HEIs have engaged in the *external certification* of certain management processes (e.g. ISO or EFIQA standards) to reform and standardize the work of administrative units.

The survey asked institutions to identify which processes and tools they used to enhance management. As *Figure 1.11* indicates, monitoring of performance indicators related to strategic planning objectives (82 per cent) and evaluation of administrative units (76 per cent) were used by a majority of the responding institutions. Target and service-level agreements were used by between 55 per cent and 60 per cent of

responding institutions, while certification of management processes was used by fewer than 40 per cent of the institutions.

Some responding institutions highlighted the use of a centralized framework set by education ministries for governance enhancement. One institution reported that development plans rather that target-level or service-level agreements were key to the enhancement of governance.

Figure 1.11 Processes or tools applied for the enhancement of governance or management



1.8 External drivers and internal factors

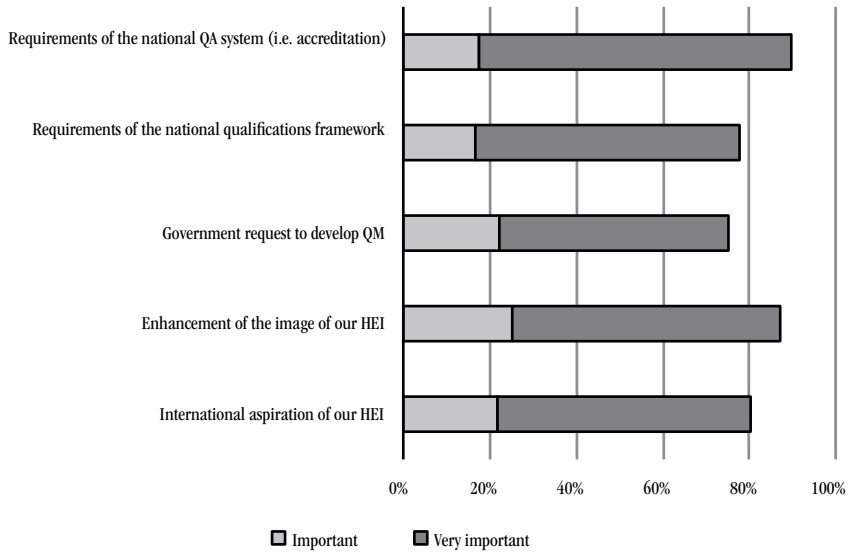
IQA cannot develop independently without the support of a number of contextual factors, which relate to both the internal and external environment of an HEI. External factors typically take the form of either governmental or market pressure. Internal factors are understood in the survey as features of the IQA system itself, some of which can either support or hinder the development of IQA in an HEI.

External drivers

The development of IQA in HEIs is usually driven by the requirements of the government or by market competition. Some HEIs have been *asked by government to create structures* and processes of IQA as part of national governance reform. In other contexts, where HEIs are operating closer to the market, *the enhancement of the external image* or an *aspiration for international visibility* are important elements that strengthen the market position of an HEI.

A question was asked about the importance of the above-mentioned external drivers in the development of IQA in the institution. Answers confirmed the importance of the external factors. *Figure 1.12* shows that the requirements of the national quality assurance system formed the most important motivation (89 per cent) for the development of IQA in responding HEIs, closely followed by enhancement of self-image (87 per cent). This was followed by international aspiration (80 per cent) and requirements of the national qualifications framework (NQF) (77 per cent). About three-quarters (75 per cent) of institutions highlighted government requests to develop quality assurance as an important external driver. This suggests that public policy and market requirements are equally important external drivers for the development of quality assurance among the responding HEIs.

Figure 1.12 External drivers in development of quality assurance



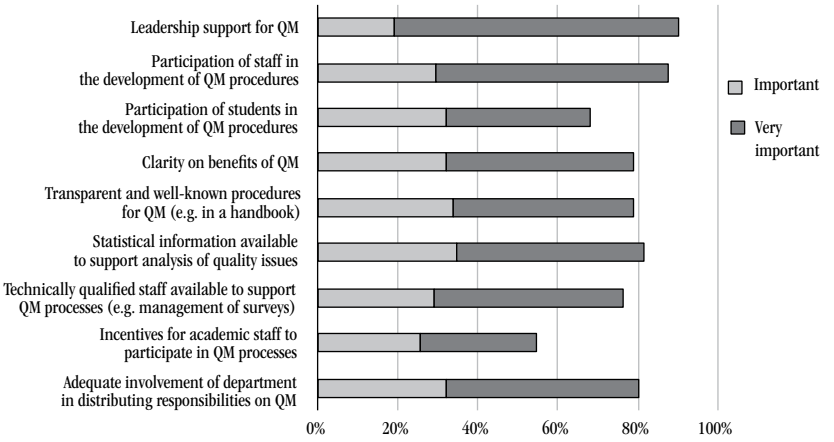
Internal factors

In addition to external factors, IQA is also shaped and conditioned by internal institutional environments. Several factors, reflected frequently in the literature on the topic, were identified and submitted to respondents for consideration.

The survey asked institutions to indicate what they considered the most important internal factors in the development of IQA in their

institution. Most factors were seen as either important or very important by the majority of the respondents. As *Figure 1.13* indicates, leadership support for IQA (90 per cent) and participation of staff in the development of IQA (88 per cent) were considered the most important internal factors in the development of IQA for the responding institutions. This was followed by statistical information available to support analysis of quality issues (82 per cent), adequate involvement of departments in IQA responsibilities (80 per cent), clarity on the benefits of IQA (79 per cent), transparent and well-known procedures for IQA, as set out in a handbook (79 per cent), technically qualified staff available to support IQA processes, such as the management of surveys (77 per cent), and the participation of students in the development of IQA procedures (68 per cent). Incentives for academic staff to participate in IQA processes was the least-recognized factor, with slightly more than half (55 per cent) of respondents identifying it as important.

Figure 1.13 Internal factors in the development of IQA



1.9 Conclusions

This survey aimed to understand the current state of developments in IQA and to identify the external and internal factors that conditioned the implementation of IQA mechanisms in HEIs around the world. The following main trends could be identified, indicating also certain gaps in the development of IQA tools and processes.

Quality is high on institutional policy agendas. One of the key findings was that quality was high on institutional policy agendas, with

a majority of HEIs having an institutional quality policy statement or statements. Indeed, a majority of responding institutions in our survey indicated that they thought of academic quality as either important or very important. Another large majority reported that they had an institutional quality policy. Yet this policy was not necessarily translated into a coded quality handbook, which only slightly more than half of the responding institutions had. However, although the importance of 'quality' was universally recognized, what was meant by the term was less clear from the survey. Thus, it could not be assumed that different actors – students, academics, managers, employers, etc. – shared the same conception of 'good quality', or that quality concepts were similar across course, institutional, and national boundaries.

The lack of technical support for quality assurance at decentralized levels within institutions is an obstacle to the institutionalization of quality assurance. In most responding institutions, the university leadership (head of the institution and the vice-rector) played the most important role, followed by a quality committee and a dedicated person in charge of quality assurance. Decentralized authority over quality assurance (deans and departmental committees) was, however, less frequent. Technical support structures, such as a dedicated cell or office in charge of quality assurance, were less common as well, particularly at the decentralized level. This suggests that IQA is still widely perceived as a central-level responsibility, which needs to further permeate HEIs to become fully effective.

The main focus of activities in quality assurance is on teaching and learning. Other institutional structures, such as research, governance, and management, are typically less a focus of IQA. Concerns with graduate employability and international cooperation were also less well recognized by respondents, in terms of both their importance and coverage. Within the area of teaching and learning, IQA tools pertaining to academic programmes are the most common. Perceptions of teaching quality were typically gathered from relevant stakeholders, and could include resource, process, and outcome measures, although it is not always clear which measures are being used in different contexts and by different individuals.

There is a convergence of IQA tools and processes in the field of teaching and learning. When looking at individual tools or processes for the enhancement of academic programmes, student course evaluation

and student satisfaction surveys were viewed as the IQA tools most frequently used in the teaching and learning domain. University-wide standards for student assessment procedures were most commonly used to monitor students' achievements. In terms of processes or tools used for monitoring the quality of academic staff performance, student evaluation and academic staff appraisal seemed to be preferred by the responding institutions.

There are gaps in the coverage of IQA internationally. While there is a convergence in the use of IQA in the teaching and learning domain, where IQA tools concentrate at course and programme level, there are also some gaps. The monitoring of student assessment was less prevalent, as were peer appraisal of academic staff and the evaluation of student support structures. This indicates that even in the teaching and learning domain, IQA is often not comprehensive, and that its coverage could be enhanced to comprise all aspects that pertain to the quality of academic programmes and student development. Despite high attention in political and institutional discourse, employability and management concerns are also relatively less covered through existing IQA tools. Curriculum development and review were nonetheless the tools most frequently used by the responding institutions to enhance graduate employability. Similarly, less emphasis was placed on management, although monitoring of performance indicators related to strategic planning objectives was frequently used by responding institutions to strengthen management.

Much information is collected, but it is not necessarily used for IQA purposes. The survey showed that selected common indicators related to quality are typically collected, but that they are much less frequently used for IQA purposes. Most importantly, the survey demonstrated that the indicators were not necessarily used for decision-making in relation to programme design and review. This highlights a common shortcoming in IQA, known as the 'closing the loop difficulty': much information is collected, but it is not necessarily fed into either ad hoc or regular decision-making cycles.

There is no state–market dichotomy in the drivers of the development of IQA. Given the requirements for institutional change and innovation in ever-expanding and increasingly diverse higher education systems, IQA is important for institutional development processes and offers opportunities to identify areas which require adaptation. The

survey demonstrates that the development of quality assurance has been influenced by both external and internal factors. Enhancement of the image of the HEI and responding to the requirements of EQA were identified as equally important external drivers for IQA. It therefore seems that the tensions that can arise when HEIs try to implement IQA geared both to external requirements and the need for internal development are not yet solved.

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Chapter 2

Comparing varying understandings of IQA and associated tools

Michaela Martin, with Jihyun Lee

The findings from the international survey on internal quality assurance (IQA) presented in *Chapter 1* have clearly demonstrated that IQA is a multi-faceted reality in terms of orientation, focus, structures, processes, and tools. The IIEP case study research may shed further light on variations in the shaping of IQA, which can be explained largely by variations in national, institutional, and disciplinary contexts. This chapter will briefly refer to the concepts of quality and IQA as they are addressed in the literature before discussing how they are translated and operationalized in terms of processes and tools in the eight case universities of the IIEP research project.

2.1 Defining the concepts of quality and IQA

'Quality' has been used in previous literature as a vague concept, with Tam (2001) defining it as a highly contested concept with multiple meanings. The role of quality assurance is precisely to develop a set of criteria which describe attributes of quality and therefore a so-called 'quality model'. Like quality, IQA is also defined in various ways. In the UNESCO glossary of quality assurance and accreditation (Vlăsceanu, Grunberg, and Parlea, 2007), IQA is defined as 'intra-institutional practices in view of monitoring and improving the quality of higher education' (p. 72). In the INQAAHE glossary,[7] IQA is defined as 'the process, supported by policies and systems, used by an institution to maintain and enhance the quality of education experienced by its students and of the research undertaken by its staff'. Harvey (2004–2016) also referred to IQA as an institutional mechanism of reviewing and evaluating the quality of education and/or research. He further defined an IQA system as 'a set of integrated policies and practices that structure management,

7. This definition was taken from the Analytic Quality Glossary available at the INQAAHE website: http://qualityresearchinternational.com/glossary/qualitymanagement.htm

implementation and adaptation of quality assurance processes'. None of these definitions mention that IQA is typically responding to norms and standards both external and internal to a higher education institution (HEI). As a consequence, IQA, like quality itself, is highly contextual and can differ across national, institutional, and, possibly, disciplinary boundaries.

Defining the concept of quality

To investigate how quality was defined at the case universities, a question about the meaning of quality in the HEI was asked in interviews and focus group discussions. It seemed from the case studies that the definition of quality was widely influenced by the national policy framework for higher education. The case study of the University of the Free State (UFS) in South Africa clearly illustrated that the understanding of quality at that university has been shaped by the national policy framework, which views quality and IQA as necessary concepts for transformation during the post-apartheid period. Xiamen University in China (XMU) defines quality within the context of the national excellence initiatives for research in that country. At the University of Bahrain (UoB), the creation in 2012 of a national qualifications framework widely influenced the quality assurance work at the university, directing it towards the definition or revision of learning outcomes for study programmes to bring them in in line with professional requirements.

External quality assurance requirements also played a major role in defining quality in the universities. Four of the eight universities taking part in the IIEP research (Vienna University of Economics and Business [WU], American International University – Bangladesh [AIUB], UoB, and XMU) underwent several international programme accreditations conducted by quality assurance agencies from abroad. Others were responding to external review (UoB and UFS), evaluation (XMU), or institutional and/or programme accreditation organized at the national level (University of Duisburg-Essen [UDE], Daystar University [DU], University of Talca [UT]). Two case study universities (WU and UDE) had either set up or revised their approach to quality when preparing for a quality audit aimed at the validation of their IQA system.

In addition to national action, the definition of quality could also be guided by the regional level. In the European region, as part of the Bologna Process, the so-called ESG (*Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area*, 2015) represent a

strong reference point for HEIs and quality assurance agencies in the development of quality assurance. In the East African region, the Inter-University Council of East Africa (IUCEA) runs a regional mechanism aimed at the quality assurance of academic programmes in its six member countries, including Kenya. The reference point for quality assurance in the region is a handbook entitled *A Road Map to Quality* (IUCEA, 2010). Initiatives in the area of quality assurance are developed in other regions as they become necessary to facilitate the recognition of study programmes and thus intra-regional student mobility.

From the case studies it was also apparent that internal stakeholders approached quality in different ways. Across the case studies, students generally related quality predominantly to graduate employability, in the sense of providing education that led to labour market entry, while academic staff or faculty members tended to associate it more frequently with academic peer standards, content, and good teaching. Administrative or support staff thought of it as the institution or department having a good reputation. The divergence of approaches to IQA within the same university is an indicator of some underlying tensions in perceptions of what quality of higher education means.

Defining the concept of IQA

To investigate how IQA was defined and used at the case universities, both purpose and focus of IQA were investigated through different research methods. First of all, a question was asked in the survey to both academic and administrative staff on how they view the main purpose of IQA (see *Table 2.1*). Despite the varying perceptions between staff members and among institutions, the two dominant answers were compliance with external standards and generating improvement. While both academic and administrative staff at the majority of case universities (e.g. AIUB, DU, UT, WU, and XMU) agreed on the main purpose of IQA at the respective universities, there was a gap in perceptions between the two staff groups in other universities. For instance, administrative staff from UFS and UoB viewed the purpose of IQA as improvement, with academic staff at these universities commonly describing their IQA as a mechanism for complying with external standards. Accountability to stakeholders was dominantly perceived as the main purpose of IQA at XMU, which was in line with their institution's IQA focus.

Table 2.1 Main purpose of IQA instruments and processes

		Compliance with external standards (%)	Accountability to stakeholders (%)	Enhancing organizational learning (%)	Improvement (%)	Control (%)	Other (%)
AIUB	Academic staff	39.36	13.30	25.53	17.02	4.26	0.53
	Administrative staff	50.72	11.59	10.14	26.09	1.46	0
DU	Academic staff	30.8	11.5	19.2	26.9	11.5	0
	Administrative staff	42.9	19	14.3	14.3	4.8	4.8
TU	Academic staff	15.1	3.2	3.2	68.8	7.5	2.2
	Administrative staff	11.8	5.9	9.8	70.6	2	0
UDE*	Academic staff	35.7	14.3	21.4	7.1	14.3	7.1
	Administrative staff	16.7	8.3	16.7	8.3	33.3	16.7
UFS	Academic staff	33.33	11.29	18.28	24.73	10.22	2.15
	Administrative staff	20.45	17.84	12.64	31.97	14.87	2.23
UoB	Academic staff	41.3	7.9	17.5	20.6	10.3	2.4
	Administrative staff	19.9	10.9	19.9	30.8	10.9	7.7
WU**	Academic staff	24.5	8.2	–	42.9	16.3	8.2
	Administrative staff	22.6	13	–	38.6	22.6	3.2
XMU	Academic staff	34.7	46.4	4.9	5.4	8.5	1.5
	Administrative staff	35.4	37.3	6.8	13.7	4.6	2.3

Note:*The small size of the sample for the survey at UDE does not allow reliable conclusions. **Improvement at WU is a combined value of improvement in employability of graduates, research, teaching, and administration.

The area of action of IQA encompasses a variety of aspects of higher education, ranging from teaching and learning to graduate employability and management. This aligns with the perspectives of Brennan and Shah (2000) that IQA mechanisms can have an academic, managerial, or employment focus. Stakeholders were asked in interviews and focus group discussions to refer to any IQA activities that they were aware of or involved in at their university. Despite the varied nature of interviewees and focus group participants, responses seemed to centre on enriching the learning experience for students across institutions. This can be understood as a reflection of the current imperative in the higher education policy of many countries of emphasizing the quality of student learning (Srikanthan and Dalrymple, 2005), and is confirmed by the findings from the international survey (see *Chapter 1*). The heavy emphasis of IQA on teaching and learning was demonstrated by the various supporting structures and instruments at the case universities, as will emerge in subsequent chapters.

2.2 Varying understandings of IQA

One of the challenges in the IIEP comparative research on IQA was to understand what exactly IQA meant in a given case university. In order to operationalize this concept, case universities were invited to describe the policies, processes, and tools they have used for their IQA. Based on these descriptions, this section analyses the variation in understandings of IQA, as they emerged from institutions' quality policy and quality manual, if these existed, and the IQA instruments used. The discussion on the selection of quality-related documents and IQA tools to be included for each case study confirmed that the conceptualizations and understandings of the boundaries of IQA varied considerably from one university to another.

Variation in quality policy and manual

As already indicated in *Chapter 1*, a quality policy and a quality manual are two means to formalize and provide structure to a university's commitment to IQA. With regard to the content of its quality policy, AIUB, for example, emphasized the university's commitment to quality assurance through compliance with the prescribed national and international standards of quality and through cooperation with every unit of the university to ensure them. The policy also indicated the university's intention to achieve this objective through a variety of means such as academic programme accreditations, staff capacity-building,

and participation of stakeholders in IQA. The quality manual at AIUB was used to describe and guide the system and procedures for quality management at the university. AIUB used in fact a series of quality manuals: the *Institutional Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) Operations Manual*, a lab manual, and a self-assessment manual.

Some of the case universities interpreted the quality policy and/or manual in particular ways. The quality policy at XMU was understood in the case study to be the commitment of XMU to quality as laid down in its master plan[8] for reform. The quality manual was interpreted as a set of internal regulations related to education and teaching practice recently developed at the university, including the implementation of teaching plans, course preparation, classroom teaching, after-class assignments, mid-term and final exams, experiments, internship, and graduation theses. Similarly, WU referred to quality-related documents as its strategic development plan, which included various quality-related developmental goals and activities until 2020 and provided a framework for the IQA system at the university. At UFS, the quality policy related to the so-called quality enhancement framework, whose particular focus was to 'encourage academic departments to examine their implicit and explicit understandings of teaching and learning and research in order to identify what works and what does not work' (p. 32). The quality policy at UFS was used as a guiding document for academics to approach quality based on a critical enquiry, unlike the traditional concept of the policy related to quality.

While the content of quality policies and manuals might vary across universities, it is important that both academic and administrative staff know about them, and view them positively. As a consequence, the surveys conducted in the case universities investigated the extent to which academic and administrative staff knew these documents, and how they viewed them. As shown in *Table 2.2*, a majority of staff members at most of the case universities were aware of the existence of the quality policy and thought that it was useful. Administrative staff had, in general, a higher awareness and appreciation of quality policy than their academic counterparts. However, in some universities, awareness and simultaneous positive appreciation was low or close to only half of the staff (UDE, UFS, UT, and XMU), which clearly illustrated the need to strengthen internal communication on these important IQA references.

8. The XMU master plan places special emphasis on the enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning, and advocates a student-centred approach to education.

Table 2.2 Comparative table on staff awareness of quality policy

		Academic staff (%)	Administrative staff (%)
Yes, this document exists and is useful for my work	AIUB	71.35	94
	DU	76.7	73.3
	UDE*	13	23.5
	UFS	35.24	28.65
	UoB	54.5	31
	UT	52	56
	WU	68	72
	XMU	55.2	63.36

Note: The small size of the sample for the survey at UDE does not allow us to draw reliable conclusions.

Variation in IQA tools and processes

A broad analysis of institutional documents dealing with the different tools and instruments that formed the IQA system in each of the case universities showed that there were a certain number of common tools for all universities, with others specific only to some universities. There follows a comparative overview of the IQA tools in place in the universities (see *Table 2.3*). In the teaching and learning area, all universities employed student course evaluation and programme (self-) evaluation, and many implemented student workload assessment. Typically, IQA tools specific to certain universities were more recent instruments – innovations to the IQA system. In the area of graduate employability, there was a higher level of convergence in instruments used. Graduate tracer studies were the most common IQA tool, together with employer (satisfaction) surveys, while internship supervision was relatively rare. In the management domain there were many common IQA instruments among the case universities, such as target-level agreements, unit evaluation, and performance agreements, while some, such as certification, were less common.

In addition to those IQA tools which today form nearly standard instruments for IQA, more innovative tools were reported by the case universities. New tools were developed to respond to new priorities of IQA, such as the analysis of whether stipulated learning outcomes were achieved or to investigate individual and institutional determinants of study success and therefore improve study conditions.

Table 2.3 Comparative table on IQA tools and processes used by case universities

	Teaching and learning	Graduate employability	Management
AIUB	Course evaluation, programme evaluation, teacher supervision, programme self-evaluation, student workload assessment	Graduate tracer study, employer satisfaction survey, employer involvement in study programme revision, student competency assessment	Unit self-evaluation, unit external evaluation, certification, service level agreement
DU	Student (course) evaluations, programme evaluation through graduate exit studies, internal and external programme evaluation*	Supervision of student internships, tracer studies, employer surveys, jobs market analysis	Performance contracting (target and service-level agreements), unit or department self-evaluation, unit evaluation (by peer review)
UDE	Student course evaluation, module (programme) evaluation, workload recording, UDE student panel,* teaching analysis poll,* course evaluation via student representatives*	Graduate tracer studies, employer satisfaction survey, student competencies assessment	Institutional evaluation,* certification, target and performance agreements, staff satisfaction surveys*
UFS	Curriculum review,* course evaluations, student engagement surveys (by students)*	Assessment of graduate attributes (equivalent to student competencies)	Department (programme) or unit review (both self- and external evaluation), internal programme approval,* (unit and personal) performance target agreements, service-level agreements, performance indicator monitoring*
UoB	Course evaluation, programme evaluation, teacher supervision, programme self-evaluation, programme monitoring, student workload assessment	Graduate tracer studies, employer satisfaction survey, employer engagement in study programme revisions, job market analysis, student competency assessment	Unit self-evaluation, unit external evaluation, certification, target agreement, service-level agreement
UT	Module evaluation, programme evaluation, programme self-evaluation, teacher supervision, programme monitoring, student workload assessment	Graduate tracer studies, employer satisfaction surveys, employer involvement in study programme revision, job market analysis, assessment of student competencies	Internal evaluation, external evaluation, certification, performance target agreements

Table 2.3 (cont.)

	Teaching and learning	Graduate employability	Management
WU	Course evaluation (student evaluations of teaching), programme evaluations (both programme evaluation and self-evaluation), assurance of learning process (AOL),* research evaluations*	Student panel monitoring and labour market tracking (graduate tracer studies), job market analysis, student competency assessment	Internal auditing, unit self-evaluation, unit external evaluation, certification, goal agreements between rector's council and departments, personal development (both academic and administrative staff training programmes)*
XMU	Course assessment, teaching supervision, programme evaluation by student surveys, programme self-evaluation, programme monitoring (normal state data checks), student workload assessment		Unit self-evaluation, unit external evaluation, certification, target agreement, service level agreement

Note: IQA instruments with an asterisk (*) were not included in staff survey questionnaires; they were only investigated through interviews and focus group discussions.

2.3 Variation in the implementation of IQA tools

This section is an analysis of individual tools based on content analysis of institutional documents at each case university, regarded as common or specific across case universities in terms of objectives and modalities for implementation. An analysis of variation in the implementation and use that individual universities make of the instrument is also presented.

Course evaluation by students

Despite some variations in methods, course evaluations were administered to students through survey questionnaires by all universities, and have been, in general, for quite a number of years. Courses are typically assessed in terms of the following aspects: students, course structures or instructors. DU, for instance, conducted course evaluation to obtain student feedback on their learning experience throughout a course. The evaluation consisted of questions regarding students themselves (e.g. readiness for class, participation in class, seeking help from teachers), courses and instructors. XMU and WU also regularly examined courses by students, though with a particular focus on teachers and their teaching performance. Despite the variations in the focus of evaluation, student surveys can be therefore seen as the most common and traditional way of assessing the quality of courses.

Courses can also be evaluated through a variety of other means. UDE has complemented the existing questionnaire-based course evaluation by students with a qualitative course evaluation via student representatives (CESR), which was introduced in 2013. According to CESR, courses were evaluated through a series of feedback meetings between lecturer and student representatives, two to five of whom were elected by the students on the course. AIUB also did not entirely rely on student surveys for course evaluation, but examined courses based on feedback gathered through surveys, group discussions, interviews, and trend reviews from a diversity of stakeholders (e.g. students, faculty, academic and administrative staff, employers, and experts).

Approaches to course evaluation have been diversified to complement the traditional way of evaluating courses based solely on students' judgements. Some course evaluations were limited to the assessment of course content itself, thereby relying on the judgement of experts rather than students. Course evaluations at UT were used to evaluate course syllabuses in terms of coherence, consistency, and congruence with the institution's competency-based education model and their contribution to the development of student learning. This evaluation of courses was performed by the Department for Teaching Evaluation and Quality Assurance according to a rubric validated by an expert. In addition to course evaluation surveys, the contents of a course were reviewed at UoB against course intended learning outcome (CILO) assessments by the department chair, and course portfolio audits by the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) at the university. This assessment was done so that programmes were fully aligned with the requirements of the NQF. This suggested that various means for course evaluations were currently in use in the universities in addition to student course assessment, although student surveys were a key tool in assessing the quality of courses across the case universities.

Programme evaluation by academic staff and external stakeholders

Programme evaluations were another major IQA tool used in the case universities. They were typically conducted by academic staff involved in the delivery of the programme, although they could bring together a variety of information derived from different stakeholders. Like course evaluations, there are diverse approaches to evaluate programmes. The basic approach is to assess programme content against educational

objectives or intended learning outcomes (ILOs) by means of self-evaluation, sometimes followed up by a peer evaluation. As the programme relevance and responsiveness to the needs of students and employers is increasingly important, most of the case universities involved various stakeholders in the review of programmes. This trend can be observed in the composition of programme review committees. At the AIUB, for instance, they consisted of academic and administrative staff, students, alumni, industry representatives, and professionals/practitioners. WU also involved a variety of relevant actors and stakeholders in programme evaluation (e.g. programme management, university management, students, alumni, teachers, labour market representatives, and academic peers from abroad), which was conducted through an innovative and highly interactive format of a one-day workshop.

Some of the universities put a particular emphasis on students' perspectives in reviewing programmes. At UoB, each academic programme had a programme advisory committee composed of employers, alumni, and other external stakeholders, but also a student advisory committee. Both committees took part in the annual programme evaluation process conducted at the university. DU evaluated programmes through student surveys based on which the perspectives of students in the final year of their studies were drawn to enhance the programme quality. XMU further administered educational experience surveys to new students in addition to graduating students, and the data were used for the assessment of academic programmes. This indicated that programme evaluations were increasingly based on stakeholder participation rather than the sole assessment of programme intended learning outcomes by the academic staff.

Graduate tracer study

Graduate tracer studies were indicated by the case universities as the most common IQA tool to enhance employability. The overall purpose of this instrument is to track the labour market entry, career status, and professional progress of former graduates in order to evaluate the relevance of education provided at university to the needs of individuals and the job market.

Tracer studies are mandatory in some national contexts, for example in the case of the German region North Rhine-Westphalia, where UDE is located. Also, WU monitored the integration of graduates in the job market based on the comparison of university system data

with social security database of the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection in Austria. But in most contexts, they were organized at the initiative of the university itself, either by a central university administrative department or by individual departments, as was the case at the UoB. This instrument was directed to graduates within 18 months to three years of graduation, so as to capture a reasonable time-span related to labour market integration.

The results from graduate tracer studies are used to improve either study programmes or student support services (e.g. job-placement services) in general with the ultimate aim of enhancing the employability of students. In most of the case universities, tracer studies were conducted through online surveys. Universities in many developing countries did not conduct tracer studies regularly. At DU, for instance, only two tracer studies have been conducted in the recent past, and they were organized at five-year intervals. One of the main issues with this instrument was a generally low response rate to the questionnaire, which limited the generalizability of the findings and their usefulness in making decisions for programme reforms.

Target-level agreement

Target-level agreements are generally associated with the monitoring and evaluation of set objectives, both of a quantitative and qualitative nature, at the level of units and/or individuals. The majority of the case universities used target agreements between units and the university management (i.e. rectorate, rector's council). Also, this instrument was usually implemented in a top-down manner (e.g. from the central administration to individual units) as the target agreement was developed on the basis of the objectives of an institutional strategic plan.

However, it has been noted that there were some variations in the target-level agreement approach. For instance, the WU narrowed down the use of target-level agreements to academic units, while other universities, including UFS and UT, applied it to both units and individual staff. In addition, contrary to the top-down approach, some of the case universities (e.g. XMU, UT, and DU) allowed units and/or individual staff to formulate their unit and/or personal targets based on self-assessments. These targets were to be further approved by the university rectorate and then assessed on a regular basis. Target-level agreements were sometimes combined with the use of incentives (such as access to staff development opportunities) to support innovative practices of decentralized units or

encourage personal involvement in target agreements, as demonstrated in the cases of UDE and UT, respectively.

With a view to better understand the effectiveness of different IQA tools in terms of their potential to affect change, the IIEP research sought to understand whether staff at the grassroots level received feedback from IQA tools, and whether they used them in their work. *Table 2.4* shows the comparative overview on the feedback and use of common IQA instruments. It clearly appeared that level of use was correlated with the amount of feedback staff members receive. For instance, graduate tracer studies were reported not to have been properly used across the universities. This seemed to be attributable to the fact that the feedback from this instrument was also relatively low compared with other instruments. In contrast, course evaluation (by students) and programme evaluation (by staff) had higher averages in terms of both feedback and use. An important consideration here is the need to work out how feedback can be provided systematically to academic and administrative staff to ensure that the information derived from IQA tools is used effectively.

Assurance of learning process (AOL)

The assurance of the learning process (AOL) is an instrument used at WU to measure the extent to which students achieve learning goals set by the programme. AOL consists of the following three phases: a measurement phase, an action plan and implementation phase, and an impact-assessment phase. In the phase of measurement, a condensed measurement report for each programme is generated by an AOL core team. This report should specify a qualification profile in terms of learning goals, competencies, and sub-skills. A method for measurement (e.g. exams, theses, and projects) is developed, together with rubrics based on which the qualification profile of each programme is assessed. Action plans are then developed to address problems and issues identified at the previous phase. These plans are to be implemented in one to two years. Lastly, the progress and achievements of each action is evaluated by programme managers and an institutional coordinator. AOL is innovative in the sense that it specifically focuses on ensuring the quality of the learning process itself and aligning learning objectives with students' competencies.

Teaching analysis poll (TAP)

The teaching analysis poll (TAP) is a qualitative tool used at UDE to provide lecturers with detailed, activity-oriented feedback throughout the course. UDE had been using this instrument since 2013 to complement course evaluations by student surveys, which were usually conducted at the end of the semester. The TAP is conducted by a consultant, who discusses problematic issues of a selected course with a lecturer. During the poll, the TAP consultant asks students to reflect on the following questions: What helps you the most to learn in this class? What impedes your learning? How can improvements be made? During the follow-up meeting, the TAP consultant presents a summary of the poll's results to the lecturer. The consultant clarifies the opinion of the majority and individual opinions, and provides relevant suggestions to the issues being raised by students. A TAP therefore enables students to engage actively in the feedback process, while a course is still running. This tool also allows more flexibility on the part of the lecturer in using the feedback to enhance classroom interaction, student learning, and teaching strategies, thereby creating a collaborative and interactive learning environment.

Student panel analysis

Student panels are used at both UDE and WU to monitor student study progress throughout the years of their study at the university. The ultimate purpose of the student panel is to identify individual and institutional determinants of study success and therefore improve study conditions. This instrument usually collects information about students over their entire student life-cycle through online survey questionnaires. This includes their socio-demographic backgrounds, career plans, motivation, satisfaction, and desired and acquired skills. Information related to students' experience in study programmes is also gathered such as daily study routine, study conditions, and the problems and needs of the students. The student panel was reported by both universities to have been conducted in general at the beginning, middle, and end of their studies, and three to five years after completion. The student panel can also be used to complement the graduate tracer study (or labour market tracking), as shown in the case of WU.

Table 2.4 Comparative overview on the feedback and use of common IQA instruments

		Course evaluation (by students)	Programme evaluation (by staff)	Graduate tracer study	Target-level agreement
AIUB	Feedback	4.2	3.8	2.9	–
	Use	4.2	3.8	2.9	–
DU	Feedback	2.8	3.5	1.6	3.3
	Use	3.1	3.5	1.7	3.2
UDE*	Feedback	4.6	2.7	2.4	3.0
	Use	3.7	3.7	1.9	2.3
UFS**	Feedback	4.3	–	–	3.2
	Use	4.1	–	–	3.2
UoB	Feedback	3.7	3.5	3.1	3.5
	Use	3.5	3.4	3.2	3.6
UT	Feedback	3.6	3.3	3.3	3.7
	Use	3.6	3.5	3.3	3.9
WU***	Feedback	2.6	1.0	2.0	1.9
	Use	1.5	1.9	2.5	1.3
XMU	Feedback	3.1	2.9	2.5	2.8
	Use	2.9	2.9	2.5	2.8

Note: 1. Course evaluation (by students), programme evaluation (by staff) and graduate tracer study are the IQA instruments used by academic staff, while target level agreement is only applied to administrative staff. 2. Averages were calculated as follows: a) A numerical value was attributed to response categories with, for instance, 5 = very much and 1 = not at all. b) Averages were then calculated in the following way: (number of 'very much' responses × 5) + (number of … responses × 4) + (number of … responses × 3) + (number of … responses × 2) + (number of 'not at all' responses × 1) / the total number of responses. In addition to this more common set of IQA tools, the case studies mentioned other tools, which can be viewed as innovative in a sense that they were recently implemented and less conventional in the collection of evidence. *The small size of the sample for the survey at UDE does not allow us to draw reliable conclusions. **In this table, target-level agreement at UFS refers only to the one conducted at the unit level. Individual performance target agreement was excluded for the easiness of the interpretation and comparison across the universities. ***Both of the terms 'feedback' and 'use' refer to 'usefulness for WU' and 'involvement' in the original data from WU.

2.4 Conclusions

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate the variety of understandings on how quality is supported through IQA in the case universities. Differences in the understanding of IQA were derived from an analysis of quality-related documents and instruments, and a comparison of tools to assess and enhance quality in the case universities. Based on this comparative analysis, several conclusions can be drawn.

There was divergence in the concepts of quality and IQA. The analysis of the case studies brought to light different understandings of quality in higher education, with quality being defined according

to the national policy framework for higher education, stakeholder perspectives, and disciplinary orientation. Quality referred to policy objectives as different as contributing to transformation, enhancing positions in university rankings, and improving learning outcomes. The concepts also varied depending on the stakeholder. Students were likely to relate quality to employability, while academic and administrative staff tended to define it in relation to teaching and learning, and university management, respectively. The perspectives of academic staff on quality varied also across the different disciplines. Since the definition of IQA was subject to that of quality, interpretations of IQA in terms of purpose and focus also differed. The purposes of IQA varied from compliance with external standards to improvement. In line with the findings from the international survey, its centre was located in the field of teaching and learning, although graduate employability and management were also viewed as key orientations in several of the case universities; the first, however, depended on the disciplinary context.

Implemented IQA tools varied across the universities. With regard to tools for IQA, some were commonly found across the case universities, others were specific to an institutional context. For instance, course evaluation was conducted in all case universities through survey questionnaires to students, with the evaluation focusing on students, courses, and instructors. In addition to survey questionnaires, some of the case universities employed other methods for course evaluation including feedback meetings, group discussions, interviews, and trend reviews from stakeholders. Depending on the institutional context, the focus of course evaluation also varied, with course evaluation at XMU particularly focusing on teachers and their teaching performance, while evaluation at other case universities were broader in scope.

IQA was an evolving reality within the same institutional context. In order to complement existing, mainly quantitative-based, IQA tools in some case universities, new and innovative tools were employed. As indicated above, course evaluations were usually conducted through student surveys at the end of semesters; their limitations were pointed out – particularly in terms of utilizing feedback from the tools. In order to overcome these limitations, course evaluations by student surveys were complemented by a TAP at UDE. As a TAP was conducted while a course had been running for half of its duration, the use of feedback was maximized for the improvement of a course. Currently, the combination

of quantitative student surveys with a qualitative TAP is used to evaluate courses and collect data from students. This demonstrated that IQA was evolving within the same context in response to the demands for new and more reliable data-collection tools. Both sets of tools have their own strengths and weaknesses, and a combined use allows institutions to maximize their overall advantages as a tool for data collection.

There are limitations to the comparison of IQA tools in different institutional contexts. When implementing the research, the comparison of tools and instruments was not always easy because a closer analysis of each instrument demonstrated that universities used different names for a similar instrument, and the same name often covered different modalities. For instance, the instrument of programme evaluation covered a wide variety of implementation modalities – a one-day quality conference with stakeholders at WU, programme ILO assessment at UoB, and programme evaluation through graduate exit surveys at DU. On the other hand, graduate tracer studies had that name in some universities, but 'student labour market tracking' in others. As a consequence, some caution is necessary in the interpretation of similarities and differences in the use of IQA tools across the universities, limiting the comparability of instruments across different institutional contexts.

The most desirable IQA is the one that is fit for its context and purpose. Taking into account the increasing diversity and differentiation of higher education, the question can be asked whether there *should* be differences in IQA, reflecting differences in contexts and aims between institutions (and even faculties within institutions). There are also differences related to reputational issues. For some institutions, 'high quality' is assumed; there is nothing to prove! Other institutions have to establish themselves and prove their quality. The analysis of IQA in the eight case universities located in different continents and development contexts may demonstrate that the best IQA is the one that is adapted to its specific context and that is fit for its purpose. In each of the case universities, the meaning of IQA depended on the understandings of quality itself. The tools and processes chosen to implement IQA were a function of the purpose and available financial, human, and information resources. The use that was made of results was again related to the way that IQA was related to other management domains. While there is, therefore, no model for IQA, there are good principles in its functioning. These will be discussed in the next chapters and in the conclusions of this publication.

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Chapter 3

IQA and employability: Viewing the linkage in different contexts

Michaela Martin, with Jihyun Lee

Within the context of growing levels of graduate unemployment, the search for improved employability has become a major issue in higher education policy. IIEP research on internal quality assurance (IQA) adopted the assumption that IQA could play a role in supporting closer linkage between the services offered by higher education and the world of work. The objective of the research was to analyse how eight case-study universities viewed employability as a policy concern, and how their IQA system integrated this concern in terms of approaches and mechanisms.

This chapter provides a comparative overview of the approaches and mechanisms the eight universities embraced in order to enhance the employability of their graduates. Before the contribution of IQA to employability is discussed, however, the notion of graduate employability is presented, together with various strategies and supporting mechanisms used by the universities for this purpose.

3.1 The notion of employability of graduates

The literature on employability is abundant, and definitions of this complex term vary. Yorke (2006) suggests looking at employability as 'a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes that make graduates more employable and successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy'. Furthermore, the literature suggests that employability can be approached from both demand and supply sides of higher education. The demand-side approach emphasizes the role of higher education institutions (HEIs) in responding to labour market demands, while the supply side is more focused on their role in producing employable graduates (Teichler, 1999; European Commission, 2014). The supply dimension of employability can further be broken down into employment- and competence-centred approaches (European Commission, 2014).

The rapid expansion of higher education, particularly in developing countries, has not been reflected in reductions in levels of graduate unemployment and underemployment. These, in fact, have grown as economies and labour markets have failed to keep pace with the rapid transformation of the higher education sector. Considering *World Development Indicators* data on the proportion of unemployed people who have tertiary education, in 46 of those countries where data is available this share increased between 2007 and 2013. In addition, numerous studies indicate a mismatch between the skills required in the labour market and the existing profiles of graduates (Allen and Weert, 2007). Therefore, the official policy discourse in many countries emphasizes the employability of graduates as a major outcome of higher education, with a particular emphasis on the supply side. This places more pressure on HEIs to adapt their education and training offer in such a way that graduates develop skills and competences during their studies that allow them to enter the labour market (Tomlinson, 2012: 64). Against this backdrop, employability has been defined as a combination of factors that facilitates the employment and/or career development of individuals[9] (Working Group on Employability, 2009). Brennan (2016) also indicates that the relationship between higher education and employment is not only about 'getting a first job', but also about 'doing that job', 'changing that job', and 'getting a different job' in the future. On this view, employability is not only to do with the skills needed to find a first job; it is also about fostering the adaptability and flexibility graduates will need throughout their working lives.

3.2 Higher education and employability

As the above definitions show, higher education has been closely associated with the development of employability. Today, in many higher education systems, institutions are expected to adopt a variety of strategies to connect to the world of work, for example, through the adaptation of their academic offer to the needs of the labour market and economy. The IIEP research found that the case-study universities used several means to do this, including through external quality assurance (EQA), strategic orientation, and operational strategies.

9. Council conclusions of 11 May 2012 on the employability of graduates from education and training, OJ 2012/C 169.04, p.10.

External quality assurance

Most of the universities engaged regularly in the accreditation of their programmes by external or professional bodies, on either a voluntary or compulsory basis depending on national regulatory requirements. Four submitted some of their programmes on a voluntary basis to foreign accreditation bodies. Although the declared purpose of such accreditations was to ensure the quality of education provided by the university, a concern with employability and the link to labour market needs featured prominently in the accreditation of professional programmes. The Vienna University of Economics and Business (WU), for example, has achieved three major international business school accreditations, all on a voluntary basis: AMBA (Association of MBAs), AACSB (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business), and EQUIS (European Quality Improvement System). Similarly, the University of Bahrain (UoB) has requested international accreditation for its engineering programmes, a chemistry programme, and its IT programmes since mid-2000. Through these accreditations, the universities were able to demonstrate the relevance of their programmes, thereby contributing either directly or indirectly (i.e. through the enhancement of the prestige of the programmes) to the employment orientation of study programmes and the employability of their graduates.

The American International University – Bangladesh (AIUB) has also engaged voluntarily in professional accreditations to increase the relevance of its academic programmes to labour market demands, though in some cases this was a requirement for employment in certain professional fields. While the majority of AIUB's other academic programmes were submitted for international accreditation (e.g. by the Philippines Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities), its engineering and architecture programmes were accredited by local bodies (i.e. the Institute of Engineers, Bangladesh [IEB] and the Institute of Architecture, Bangladesh [IAB]). Only graduates of IAB- or IEB-accredited courses were able to enter professions in the fields of engineering and architecture in Bangladesh. Overall, these external accreditations are perceived as advantageous by students who feel that an accredited programme carries more prestige and increases their chances of gaining employment after graduation.

Strategic orientation of the university

In the majority of the universities, the issue of employability featured high in strategic development plans. In specialized universities in certain fields, the notion of employability was strongly embedded in the vision and mission statements of the universities. For instance, AIUB aimed to fulfil its vision of 'producing skilled graduates in various fields and showing excellence leadership in order to cater for the technological and development needs of the country'. Similarly, WU was founded with the vision of preparing students for a career in international trade. Producing competent graduates has also been the vision of Daystar University (DU), which specializes in the field of communication. The university has articulated its vision as 'developing managers, professionals, researchers and scholars to be effective, Christian servant-leaders through the integration of Christian faith and holistic learning for the transformation of church and society in Africa and the world'.

Although not specialized in certain fields, most of the eight universities still expressed their willingness to enhance the employability of graduates through the provision of high-quality academic programmes relevant to labour market needs. Thus, even if an academic programme was not directed towards entry to a particular occupation or profession, it could still have a broader relevance to preparation for work in many occupational fields. This would involve the transmission of generic skills relevant to employment as well as job awareness and aspiration-raising. In its strategic development plan 2015–2018, UoB stated its aim as 'enhancing the quality of programmes through the alignment of the academic programmes with the market needs and national priorities'. The University of Talca (UT) also targeted the provision of quality education, competency-based education, and the development of a model for social responsibility, working closely with internal and external stakeholders, as a way of enhancing the employability of graduates from the university.

Operational strategies to support employability

Whether the strategic goals were directly related to employability or not, universities have employed a range of operational strategies in order to enhance employability. The following common mechanisms and structures were identified from analysis of the case studies:

- job placement offices and career services,
- employer involvement in university governance and teaching,

- internships, departmental programmes and courses on employability,
- events for employers to organize informal contacts.

A specialized structure for job placement was a common institutional mechanism for employability across the universities. Such structures usually collect information on the evolving labour market and the conditions for entry for graduates, while maintaining contact with alumni. DU has established a Job Placement Office with the objective of supporting the career development of current students and graduates. The office provides them with a wide range of career services, including jobs market information, career days and seminars, mentorship programmes, and internship opportunities, through which students can receive the relevant information and guidance on the jobs market in order to actualize their career aspirations. The Office of Placement and Alumni (OPA) at AIUB also provides support for students and alumni by building strong links with the labour market. OPA informs students of jobs market trends and the professional trajectories of graduates. It also organizes career workshops, seminars, and an annual job fair.

In the case of UT, the development of a mechanism for employability was supported by the Office for Graduate Tracer Studies and Employer Links as well as by the Centre for Job Placement and Young Professionals Programme. While the former aimed to promote graduate employability through the collection of information on the university's graduates and their labour market entry, the latter directly linked recently graduated young professionals with employers. This supporting structure provided a bridge between students and the world of work through various career-related events and services. Over and above, it allowed the creation of intelligence on the current labour market, which provided a basis for the continuous adaptation of the academic offer to changing labour market needs.

In some cases, supporting mechanisms were part of the regular curriculum through compulsory courses and programmes on entrepreneurship. Xiamen University (XMU) made venture education[10] a major part of its student development plan, and offered career development and employment guidance courses. Each year, the university also introduced innovation and business start-up programmes for graduate training. In addition, some departments at XMU provided mentoring

10. This refers to education at XMU which aims to encourage students to set up venture businesses during their university years through the provision of various courses and programmes.

programmes in which students could receive employment-related support from postgraduate students, alumni, and/or faculty members. The Department of Business Administration, for instance, launched a programme to provide each junior student with two supervisors (one a successful alumnus and the other a full-time faculty member) who could offer academic and career counselling to enhance their employability. A similar programme was also offered in the School of Information Science and Engineering, through which postgraduate students could provide academic tutoring for undergraduates.

In several universities, events were arranged to maintain informal contacts with employers. Either through a job placement office or through a department, professionals and practitioners were invited to give talks and seminars on how to boost graduates' employability. WU organized both formal (e.g. surveys and programme evaluations) and informal (e.g. events and individual relationships) discussions in order to receive feedback on its activities from employers regarding students and graduates. Similarly, UT arranged meetings, business lunches, and workshops through which the university could receive necessary feedback for the revision and/or development of programmes. XMU also provided guidance materials across more than 70 specialisms. Social media applications, such as WeChat, QQ Group, and yiban.com, were widely utilized by the university to allow people to share career-related information and promote job opportunities to students.

3.3 Different views on the role of the university with regard to employability

Qualitative interviews with internal university stakeholders showed that some of the case-study universities placed the issue of employability at the centre of their strategic orientation, while others emphasized more strongly the importance of academic quality over employability. Academic quality can be defined as the knowledge, skills, and attitudes achieved by graduates as a result of their academic programme or degree (Axelrod *et al.*, 2013). In those universities where academic staff viewed employability as being of lower importance, there seemed to be a fear that an excessive emphasis on employability could narrow the definition of employability to the skills needed for a particular job. In these universities, sometimes both academic staff and students thought that graduates should be provided with a broader skill-based education which would be widely relevant in changing labour markets. Such

varying perspectives on employability were associated with different factors, such as the importance of employability in the national policy framework. It was also found that the types of faculties and orientations of programmes conditioned a certain type of academic culture and the level of openness towards employment orientations.

As noted above, the importance attached to employability was closely associated with national policy contexts. In countries with a high level of graduate unemployment, universities were quite sensitive to employment concerns. In Kenya, significant increases both in the number of institutions and in student enrolments have led to high levels of graduate unemployment, with graduates taking on average about five years to get a job (Muindi, 2014). In contrast, little attention has been paid to employability in South Africa, where graduate unemployment, until recently, has not been a major challenge (Altbeker and Storme, 2013; Makoni, 2014; Moleke, 2005; SAGEA, 2015). This situation has resulted in a lack of explicit discourse on graduate employability related to the labour market, or any tracking system on graduate employment at the University of the Free State (UFS).

In the European context, the Bologna Process has shaped the discussion on employability in higher education. This was a commitment by European governments 'to pursue complementary higher education reforms in order to establish a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) of compatible national systems' (Keeling, 2006, p. 207). Fostering student employability and mobility through the establishment of a common qualifications structure within the EHEA has been one of the critical objectives of this process, together with improving the attractiveness and the competitiveness of higher education in Europe. This has brought about a three-cycle qualification structure (i.e. bachelor's, master's, and PhD) and led to relatively higher importance being placed on employability at UDE and WU. The employability concern in both universities was reflected in internal discussions about making employability a major concern within study programmes.

The orientation of the academic offer of a university is another factor conditioning the institutional approach to employability. Comprehensive universities were inclined to take a broader view of higher education and to view it as a preparation for academia itself, while specialized universities were more likely to focus on professional programmes and enhance the employment orientation of their academic offer. For example,

in response to the communication needs of society, DU has placed communication studies at the centre of its academic offer. Established in 1992 as a private university, AIUB has been geared towards engineering, technology, and business education in order to cater for the technological and development needs of the country. Although employment orientation and employability have become increasingly important parts of the education provided by UDE, academic staff at the university seemed to resist this discourse. They insisted that employability as an outcome of education should not be over-emphasized at the expense of academic education. This can be explained by the fact that the university is a fully fledged research university with 11 faculties, having a distinctive academic focus, as well as distinctively academic values and traditions. It can thus be concluded that the level of importance given to employability at a university is affected by the prevailing academic or institutional culture as well as by the types of institution.

Different approaches to employability can also be found within the same institution between faculties and disciplines. This was highlighted in the interview findings of the UFS case study. Staff members in the humanities did not mention employability in the context of quality unless prompted, whereas academic staff from economic and management sciences, and natural and agricultural sciences, considered it as critical for the quality of education. The same distinction was made between professional (e.g. psychology, criminology, journalism, or music) and formative (generalist) academic degree programmes (e.g. English, philosophy, or anthropology) within the respective faculties. Despite the lack of an employment discourse in professional degree programmes in the humanities, it was reported that these programmes maintained active interactions with the labour market at UFS in the form of internships or work-integrated learning at the university.

3.4 Different views on the role of IQA in enhancing employability

The IIEP research investigated the role of employability in the universities' IQA systems and the mechanisms through which employability was enhanced. The first finding from the eight case studies was that all universities viewed the overall role of IQA in graduate employability positively. However, it is interesting to note also that the link between IQA and employability was considered as indirect by some and direct by others. The indirect link was evident when the overall practices of

IQA enhanced the university's reputation and this indirectly influenced the employability of graduates. The direct link could be seen where IQA helped to build a stronger interaction between academics and labour market representatives, leading to a closer relationship between curriculum content, pedagogies, and learning outcomes, on the one hand, and the future needs of employment, on the other.

Some of the institutions viewed the role of IQA as indirect, as it contributed to the development of the image or reputation of the university and affected graduate employability as a consequence. According to graduate students at WU, national and international employers equate the good reputation of the university with the quality of education, and IQA played an important role in shaping such a reputation. Similarly, students at DU stated that the student course evaluation system contributed to the positive impression of the quality of its study programmes and, thus, of the university's graduates in the labour market, a finding supported by the deans of school and departmental heads during the in-depth interviews. At this university, it seemed that the existence of IQA measures enhanced the employability of the graduates by creating a positive image of the quality of education provided by the university.

The analysis of perceptions related to tools associated with the enhancement of employability, however, allowed the researchers to establish a direct link between IQA and employability. For example, at UDE, all interviewed deans and most of heads of programme mentioned that employers' feedback on study programmes enabled them to revise the profile of the programmes according to the expectations of the labour market, thereby improving the employability of students. Employer involvement in study programme revisions was identified as most useful for enhancing employability at both UT and AIUB. Employers' feedback was taken into account when developing new programmes, revising the content of existing programmes, and introducing new competencies in course/programme curricula (e.g. foreign language requirements) at both universities. Department heads and programme directors at WU agreed that IQA's role was to make sure that students can acquire the necessary competencies from the education provided by the university and therefore improve their employability through study programmes.

Despite widespread appreciation of the role of IQA, as suggested above, some factors were identified as hindering the positive contribution of IQA to employability. First, a lack of feedback to academic staff

on employability-related IQA instruments (knowledge gained from graduate tracer studies, or employer surveys) has been reported to lessen their effectiveness. For instance, the heads of department at DU noted the impact of employer surveys on graduate employability during the interviews. Although the surveys were also perceived by academic staff to be highly effective, they pointed out that the results were not known or formally used within the university. Most interviewees also argued that tracer studies had the potential to improve graduate employability if recommendations from alumni and employers were properly taken into consideration. They raised issues about the university's feedback mechanisms on employability-related IQA instruments, stating that concrete data (statistics) were not immediately available at the university. Creating relevant processes to achieve appropriate feedback is therefore crucial for the systematic use of all IQA instruments.

In addition, it was pointed out that the increasing emphasis on employment-oriented programmes may have a negative effect on the employability of some students. Students in the focus group discussions at WU criticized the alignment of university studies with labour market demands, although they acknowledged the growing importance of employability in their university education. According to them, general knowledge, defined as broad knowledge in business administration, accounting, and economics, was more important than detailed, job-specific knowledge, since procedures and processes differed from company to company. There was also unease at UDE at the prospect of the employment orientation becoming too prominent in the reform of study programmes. To all the deans interviewed, 'academic education was a far more important element of university training than labour market orientation'. These factors should therefore be taken into consideration in order to maximize the effects of IQA on graduate employability.

3.5 IQA tools for employability

This section describes employability-related IQA tools used by the eight case-study universities taking part in the IIEP research. They are: graduate tracer studies, employer satisfaction surveys, employer involvement in study programme revision, jobs market analysis, and student competencies assessment. It is to be noted, however, that the distinction between IQA instruments for teaching and learning and those for employability was not so neat. It can easily be argued that quality improvement in teaching and learning enhances employability and

that enhanced employability is also an important element for quality improvement in teaching and learning. This problematic aspect will be further addressed when discussing the effects of IQA tools in *Chapter 11*.

The IQA instruments are described below in terms of their purposes, methods, target populations, and feedback mechanisms. The application of instruments differed across the universities, and this will be discussed in greater detail in the sections below.

Graduate tracer studies

As reported in *Chapter 2*, graduate tracer studies were the most commonly used IQA tool for the analysis of employability. Since it is quite a technical and labour-intensive exercise, the frequency of tracer studies varied from one university to the next. At DU, tracer studies were conducted once every five years whereas in other universities they were conducted annually. They can be administered by an external body on behalf of the university (e.g. a university research centre conducts tracer studies for 60 German and Austrian universities, among them UDE) or a specialized unit at the university (e.g. a placement office or a career development service). Finally, they can be implemented by a university department, as in the case of UoB, where each department was responsible for tracing its graduates through alumni surveys.

The results of the graduate tracer studies were used to improve either study programmes or student support services (e.g. job-placement services) in general, or both, with the ultimate aim of enhancing the employability of students. At UoB, the results were directly fed into the annual programme evaluation exercise, which produced recommendations for change transmitted to various bodies at the university. In some cases, tracer study results were reflected in the quality dialogue organized either at faculty or department level, as was the case at UDE and WU.

Employer satisfaction surveys

Employer satisfaction surveys measure the extent to which employers are satisfied with graduates in terms of competencies and skills in the workplace. The purpose of this IQA tool is to obtain feedback from employers on the performance of graduates and thereby improve the quality of education provided at a university. Usually, the satisfaction survey is focused on the strengths and weaknesses of individual graduates (e.g. communication, teamwork, ethics, social responsibility, work-readiness, and specialized knowledge and skills) compared with other

university graduates. However, employers can also be asked to assess graduates with reference to a specific academic programme.

In addition to its use of survey questionnaires, DU has also conducted in-depth interviews with employers, particularly in mass media industries in which a high numbers of DU graduates are employed. Similarly, the employer satisfaction survey at UT was sometimes followed by a telephone call to further investigate the opinions of employers.

The results of the satisfaction survey were, to differing degrees, reflected in the accreditation process, the revision of programmes, and the supporting mechanisms for graduates, with the ultimate aim of improving the employability of the graduates of a university. For example, at UoB, employer satisfaction survey results were discussed by the department council and used in programme self-evaluation. As a consequence, the information generated from the tool was fed directly into the discussion of how to enhance employability.

Employer involvement in study programme revision

Employers are increasingly involved in the development and review of university study programmes. Employers are usually engaged in the review processes through their participation in standing or ad hoc committees within academic programmes. In this review process, their suggestions are taken into account in the development and/or revision of programmes. For example, in order to take account of employers' needs at the development stage, each programme at UoB established a quality assurance committee. Each committee included a programme advisory sub-committee composed of alumni and employers. Similarly, UDE introduced employers' councils in some faculties to reflect employers' perspectives in designing and revising their study programmes. While the establishment of the councils was optional, the Faculty of Teachers' Education was required to set up a council in order to involve representatives from schools or from centres for practical studies within schools.

Although employer involvement was prominent at programme and faculty level, employers' advisory councils or committees were also introduced at institutional level to professionalize the activities of employers and encourage their participation. In addition, their participation at institutional level was sometimes encouraged, as in the

case of UT, to harmonize curricula across academic disciplines based on the competency-based education model.

Jobs market analysis

Jobs market analysis is used to identify market needs and, in some cases, employment opportunities for graduates. The information on jobs markets can be collected directly from the labour market through surveys or from the available on- and off-line (e.g. open days, internships) sources. Results were distributed in the form of annual reports on jobs markets and an employment opportunity analysis for graduating students, as in the case of XMU.

Jobs market analysis was usually performed by either the department or the specialized job placement office. Depending on the responsible unit, the purpose and use of the analysis could vary. In the case of the jobs market analysis conducted by the department, its results were taken into account in order to improve the relevance of programmes and/or the effectiveness of the department. Study programmes at DU, for example, improved their relevance to the labour market using the information collected from the jobs market analysis. At UoB, the department assigned an ad hoc committee to conduct the analysis, the results of which were reflected in the self-evaluation report (SER) and the strategic objectives of the department. In other words, the department used the analysis to improve its performance in terms of programme quality and management.

In the case of UT, the jobs market was examined by the Office for Graduate Tracer Studies and Employer Links. Each year, the office analyses jobs advertised on various portals for a defined segment of the labour market. Compared with the jobs market analysis by the department, the instrument here is more focused on informing students of the existing jobs market with the aim of informing their study choices with regard to career opportunities.

Student competencies assessment

Student competencies assessment aims to identify competencies necessary for students to perform well in the jobs market. Those competencies are generally referred to as knowledge, skills, and attitudes, most of which can be acquired from study programmes. The assessment is thus closely associated with programme evaluation in most of the case-study universities. For example, AIUB measured student competencies acquired in courses through formative assessment methods such as

quizzes, assignments, projects, and presentations, among others. After the assessment, there were usually follow-up treatments (e.g. special assistance, counselling) for those who fell short of the required criteria. Similarly, the student competency assessment at UoB was focused on evaluating the level of academic achievement of individual students according to the intended learning outcomes of the course or programme.

Student competencies are not necessarily limited to the specific competencies achieved in study programmes. XMU defined the concept more broadly than the other universities as competencies relating to both performance in the workplace and preparedness for work. UT also viewed student competencies as transversal skills such as oral and written communication, problem-solving, self-study skills, and the ability to work with others. Whether it was course-specific or general skills, the focus of this instrument was to identify the gap in such skills among students and provide opportunities for them to improve their competencies, thereby maximizing their chances of being employed after graduation.

3.6 Conclusions

This analysis of the eight case-study universities has brought to light the ways in which higher education and IQA have been closely associated with employability. The following section summarizes the main findings of the analysis of the linkages that exist between IQA and employability in the case universities of the IIEP research on IQA.

The importance of understanding context when analysing the importance of employability. Different approaches to employability were found among the eight universities. National contexts (e.g. unemployment rates of university graduates) or the regional policy framework in higher education (e.g. Bologna Process) have brought about different approaches to tackling employability. Furthermore, private and specialized universities have tended to have a more proactive approach to employability, compared with public and comprehensive HEIs where a more traditional academic culture is often valued above employability-related discourses. Even within a university, each faculty and discipline took different approaches to employability, with the more practical faculties and disciplines (e.g. social sciences and natural sciences) having more closely associated their programmes with employability than has the humanities, for example. These findings indicate the importance of contextual factors in the perceived role of higher education in developing employability.

Formalizing the participation of graduates and employers in the review of study programmes. In several of the universities, the participation of employers in the programme review process had been formalized through their representation in standing committees. In other cases, feedback from employers was collected at central university level, often on an ad hoc basis at special events organized to bring them to the university. Such informal and irregular feedback was, however, viewed as less effective, because it did not focus on specific programmes, and led to less specific recommendations for adaptation and improvement. This further shed light on the importance of formalizing the participation of graduates and employers in the review process of study programmes. It was, however, also mentioned that there were shortcomings to the participation of employers in such committees, due to their unavailability and their lack of insight as to the future requirements of jobs.

Supporting generic competencies and job-specific knowledge in academic study programmes. Since the employability discourse has come to be increasingly emphasized in the higher education sector, there have been many institutional efforts to align university studies with labour-market demands. However, some scepticism about employment-driven approaches to university education has been noted among stakeholders concerned at the excessive focus on skills needed to enter the labour market. They argue that attention to graduate employment should focus not just on the job-specific knowledge necessary for a first job but on building a broader knowledge base and a set of more generic competencies useful for longer-term graduate employability. There should be a balance between labour market demands and academic quality regarding the development or revision of academic study programmes provided by universities. Linked to this are distinctions that should be made between getting a job, getting a suitable job, and doing a job well. Institutions may be good at some but not at all of these.

Convergence in the use of IQA instruments which support employability. Despite variations in the use of employability-related IQA instruments, there seems to be a convergence in the type of IQA instruments used for enhancing employability. These were graduate tracer studies, employer satisfaction surveys, employer involvement in study programme revisions, jobs market analysis, and student competencies assessment. The common features of these instruments were that they involved key stakeholders such as employers and graduates in the processes of reviewing study programmes and/or support services, and

that the results from those instruments were used to improve the quality of education and services provided by the university. This, however, made the distinction between IQA instruments for employability and those for teaching and learning less obvious and rather complex.

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Part 2:
Designing innovative structures for IQA

Chapter 4

Moving from IQA tools to a system at the University of Duisburg-Essen

Christian Ganseuer and Petra Pistor

The University of Duisburg-Essen (UDE) is located in the north-western part of Germany, the Rhine–Ruhr area, which has the highest density of institutions of higher learning in Germany. Created in 2003 by the merger of the universities of the cities Duisburg and Essen, UDE is the youngest comprehensive research university in North Rhine-Westphalia and one of the ten largest universities in Germany. Close to 42,000 students from more than 130 countries are enrolled in more than 230 courses of study in 11 faculties, ranging from the humanities and social sciences to economics and business studies, engineering, and the natural sciences (including medicine).

Quality assurance at UDE began with a first, experimental stage, in which tools and procedures were tried and tested, with the most useful of them adopted for comprehensive installation. This phase generated a large amount of quantitative and qualitative data, which often remained unused. In the second stage, the selected tools and procedures were linked to management activities. They were embedded into strategic planning, supporting the rectorate as well as faculties with data and analyses. The third stage of internal quality assurance (IQA) development was characterized by a systematic thinning out of quantitative data, a reduction of double workload by coordinating and adjusting processes and activities at both centralized and decentralized levels, a reduction of processes by focusing on more decentralized follow-ups, and the combination of tools and procedures with centralized and decentralized control. It laid the foundation for the creation of a genuine system of quality assurance with interconnected tools integrated and used for broader management processes.

This chapter addresses the important question of how individual quality assurance tools can be integrated into an IQA system at a higher education institution (HEI). It will use the concept of 'system' employed

in the social sciences in order to present and analyse the quality assurance system of UDE. It is based on empirical research into the IQA system of UDE conducted in 2015 as part of the IIEP research project on IQA. The research aimed to deepen insight into the challenges and limitations of the process of systematization and integration of quality assurance within an HEI, understood as a 'learning organization'.

4.1 From tools to a system

The term 'system' has been used to denote the linkages between individual parts and a greater whole. The term has been understood as either something that is naturally given or something that is constructed or made. Its historical development can be interpreted as an ongoing process of recognizing the constructive nature of systems and gradually moving away from the notion that they are being naturally given.

Systems theory has been fundamentally shaped by the sociologist Talcott Parsons. With his so-called 'general system theory', he defined actions as constitutive elements of social systems. He also endeavoured to explain the stability of social systems (Parsons, 1951; Shils and Parsons, 1951). According to Parsons, there are four different functions that must be fulfilled to keep a system stable. He summarized these functions using the following model:

- Adaption of a system to its environment is a prerequisite for goal attainment.
- Goal attainment requires that goals are defined and that the required conditions to attain such goals are set.
- Integration of system elements is necessary in such a way that the pre-set goals are achieved.
- Latent (latency) pattern maintenance is carried out to stabilize the system structure to be able to deal with conflicts between or within the acting members of a system.

Based on this theoretical framework, the notion of an IQA system can be defined as a set of integrated policies and practices at HEIs to manage, implement, and adapt quality assurance processes, instruments, and measures to fulfil external standards and criteria as well as internal standards and objectives. Under this definition, a quality assurance system has to respond to a wide range of different stakeholders' needs. For instance, academic staff may be interested in ensuring the quality of their research and teaching activities, while deans may be more

focused on how to fulfil external quality standards for study programmes in each faculty. The leadership of an HEI may think about adequate incentives for recruiting and retaining academics in the organization. A well-functioning quality assurance system will thus have to address and balance these different perspectives and demands.

4.2 UDE's process of systemizing its quality-assurance activities

From the beginning, IQA was thought of as a system with a strong development orientation, thus putting emphasis on ensuring follow-up measures –in terms both of continuous improvement within the organization and of meeting external standards and requirements. The founding of UDE via a merger of two preceding institutions in 2003 drastically changed existing structures and provided fertile soil for the implementation of IQA structures. Besides this favourable starting condition, the development of IQA was also fostered by the evidence-based decision-making paradigm at the university, according to which measurable facts (e.g. numbers and figures) serve as a basis for valid strategic decisions. The university believes that the capacity for internal decision-making structures based on valid data (e.g. in terms of key performance indicators) allows for greater institutional autonomy.

The following explains the most important steps in the establishment of IQA at UDE. In 2003, UDE started its first study programme accreditations with four of the nine German accreditation agencies. Since then, reaccreditation of all study programmes, which are obligatory every six or seven years (with the exception of medicine), have been ongoing. Despite the fact that UDE is one of the 10 largest German universities, it is one of only a few to have all its study programmes accredited.

In 2005, two years after the first accreditation processes began, a quality assurance unit was set up at UDE. The Centre for Higher Education Development and Quality Enhancement (CHEDQE) began by developing the tools for quality assurance. These were student course evaluation, evaluations of all faculties and central research units (so-called institutional evaluations), and target and performance agreements between all organizational units and the rectorate as a follow-up process for institutional evaluation. Simultaneously, a data management system (SuperX) was implemented to create a software environment where quality-related data could be combined and stored. To start the cycle of institutional evaluation, the Rectorate subjected itself to an institutional evaluation including an

external peer review in 2006. In the wake of the merger, organizational structures and workflows among members of the Rectorate and their support structures, as well as the management of the merging process, were the focus of the evaluation. The process not only provided several recommendations for improvement (e.g. concerning communication between the Rectorate and the faculties), but – as the first institutional evaluation at UDE – was also very helpful in reflecting on the role of CHEDQE (moderator or evaluator?). Additionally, the evaluation served as a model for other evaluations and made it easier later on to approach faculties and central units for evaluation processes. However, there were also challenges. One concerned ensuring responsibility for the follow-up of evaluation outcomes, since there was no body above the Rectorate that could evaluate whether the Rectorate itself had implemented its own targets (target and performance agreements of the whole HEI and the ministry deal with different aspects). This challenge was addressed by the Rectorate preparing a written statement of commitment related to its own targets.

In 2007, graduate tracer studies were conducted among UDE's first graduate cohort. The studies used the framework of the Graduate Tracer Studies Cooperation Project, led by the International Institute for Higher Education Research (INCHER) in Kassel, which provides a source of data collection and analysis for many German universities and universities of applied sciences.

The most important impetus for the establishment of IQA systems in German HEIs resulted from a modification in the accreditation system itself. In 2009, the German Accreditation Council, the umbrella organization in charge of programme accreditors, decided to allow HEIs to accredit their IQA system instead of each individual study programme. This so-called system accreditation attested that the HEI was capable of assuring the high quality of its study programmes on its own by means of its quality assurance system. The system accreditation was proposed as an option to replace the accreditation of individual study programmes. In 2004, system accreditation began to be implemented on a pilot basis as an alternative to study programme accreditation. UDE wanted to be one of the first universities to embark on this new process. A two-year project to prepare UDE for the accreditation of its quality assurance system was carried out under the supervision of the Ministry for Science, Technology and Research of the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia, which also funded the project. The implementation of a process for quality assurance on study programme level was outlined, and training for UDE

personnel in the field of IQA was developed. In order to reflect on the progress of the evolving quality assurance system with members of other universities at European level, UDE became a consortium member in the project Promoting Quality Culture, headed by the European University Association (EUA).

In the course of the ministry-funded project, the number of quality assurance tools at UDE had to be reduced so as to ensure that only data of use in closing the quality loop was collected. Thus, processes were adapted to close the gap between data acquisition and the deduction of improvement measures, which also resulted in greater efficiency. Moreover, in order to gain more information about the characteristics of UDE's students, a student survey panel was established, providing the chance to survey one cohort of students at different points of time during their course of study. Prompted by feedback from study programme accreditation, a system was developed to evaluate study modules and student workload, and this was consequently linked to the process of course evaluation. In 2011 and 2012, the main tasks for the project to prepare UDE for system accreditation were communicating information about the adjustments and the newly developed tools, and implementation of the necessary changes. In order to fulfil these tasks, an advisory board, comprising members of all faculties, was established. Last but not least, a guiding strategy for teaching and learning, as well as a handbook for quality assurance, was developed and made available to all staff and students of the university.

After a unanimous vote in all university bodies in 2012 that the process of system accreditation should begin, UDE chose the German accreditation agency ACQUIN to start the system accreditation procedure. The university aimed to obtain system accreditation by autumn 2016.

In 2016, the IQA system at the UDE consisted of five core elements:

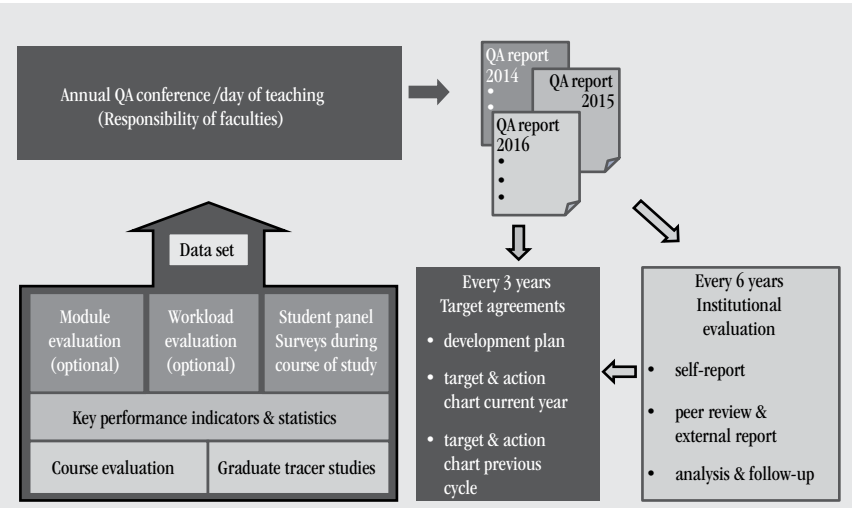
- Annual provision of data and information in the form of data sets.
- Quality assurance conferences/days of teaching in the faculties reflecting on the quality of study programmes and improvement measures.
- Quality assurance reports comprising development measures and providing aspects to be negotiated in the triannual target and performance agreements.
- Institutional evaluations every six years, taking into consideration quality assurance reports on study programmes and providing

content for negotiation in the triannual target and performance agreements.

- Target and performance agreements organized every three years, where development measures are negotiated and contracted.

Figure 4.1 illustrates the interconnections of components of the university's IQA system.

Figure 4.1 UDE's quality assurance system



Source: CHEDQE, University of Duisburg-Essen.

At UDE, successively developed IQA tools came into being with a defined follow-up process leading to internal discussions and decision-making. The descriptions of IQA tools offered below show how individual IQA tools were interconnected with management processes and decision-making (for a full description of IQA tools at UDE, see *Table 2.3* in *Chapter 2*).

Student course evaluation surveys have been used since 2004. In this process, students are asked about their level of satisfaction with courses via paper-based questionnaires. The surveys function as an instrument for exchanging feedback, and enabling students and teachers to improve teaching and learning interactions on a particular course. When the surveys are completed, CHEDQE produces aggregated reports for each teaching unit and faculty. These reports are sent to the deanery, together with a summary of the evaluated classes, the individual reports,

the raw data, and a comparison of teachers' individual results against faculty standards. If necessary, the deanery conducts follow-up talks with teachers whose results indicate a need for improvement.

Module evaluation began in 2013. It became an optional tool in the university's IQA system and is thus applied only where course evaluation results indicate problems in a particular module. In such cases, the make-up and structure of the module, the modalities and organization of the module examinations, and the targeted qualifications and learning outcomes achieved by the students are assessed. This information, which, in effect, summarizes the academic feasibility of the module, can be further used to develop the study programme, for example within the framework of an institutional evaluation or quality conference. CHEDQE and the faculty/department agree an appropriate follow-up measure, such as a module conference organized by the faculty.

A tool for **workload recording** was established in 2013. Workload recording has been also used as an optional tool whenever the results of student course evaluation indicate a need for a thorough check of students' academic workload. Workload is recorded using three surveys: a screening survey, actual workload recording, and a final survey at the end of the examination period. This latter survey records learning outcomes and performances achieved over the course of the semester, with regards to the module handbook and in relation to other classes. CHEDQE aggregates and distributes survey data to the faculty/department. At the start of the survey, a follow-up measure, such as an analysis discussion, is agreed with the faculty, which can request support from CHEDQE, if desired.

A longitudinal, cross-sectional student study – UDE's **student panel** – has been conducted since 2011 in response to demand for valid data about critical phases in the study cycle. This information has served to improve study conditions and, in the long run, has helped to create an environment which enables more students, whatever their personal circumstances, to graduate from the university. Participating students are questioned several times with the aim of tracking their individual study progress, as well as analysing the specific problems of particular student cohorts. Students are questioned up to six times from the time they began their studies up to the fifth year after graduation. Analysis of the data from the panel surveys is conducted annually. An analysis of selected questions from the data sets is carried out in February each year, and a

report is compiled for the rectorate and central committees each July. Additionally, the data are analysed in the context of diversity monitoring, with findings presented to UDE's decision-making bodies.

Graduate tracer studies have been conducted annually at UDE since 2009. Since 2012, they have been mandatory for all universities in North Rhine-Westphalia. Graduate tracer studies are used to obtain information about the subsequent life and career trajectories of UDE graduates. The information gathered is used in the ongoing development of the university's study programmes. The survey targets students who completed their final degree 18 months or two years earlier. CHEDQE checks the quality of the data within the framework of the annual data sets for annual quality assurance reports based on quality conferences, and prepares a graphical illustration of selected items at departmental and study-programme levels. It has prepares a comprehensive report for the Rectorate.

In addition to these quantitative tools, UDE has been experimenting with a number of qualitative tools that could be included as obligatory features of the IQA framework in the future. These tools have been developed as part of a project and are not officially part of the university's IQA system. Staff and student feedback, however, suggests that they have found them very helpful in stimulating a quality culture within the institution.

The teaching analysis poll (TAP) has been used at UDE since 2013 as a qualitative alternative to the student satisfaction surveys conducted at the end of the semester. It is a qualitative mid-term evaluation method that provides lecturers with detailed, activity-oriented feedback. This tool allows the lecturer to involve students more effectively in the feedback loop while a course is still running. Feedback from TAPs have been used to enhance classroom interaction, student learning, and teaching strategies. TAPs thus contribute significantly to the creation of a collaborative and interactive learning environment at the university.

Course evaluation via student representatives (CESR) has been conducted at UDE since 2013. Like the TAP, CESR aims to promote dialogue between lecturers and students as to how teaching can be developed and improved. Once the lecturer has explained the objectives and steps involved in this feedback method, a class meeting is held, during which between two and five representatives are elected by the students on the course. They meet the lecturer three times in the course of the

semester, in 'feedback meetings' at which course content and the study environment are discussed, with any potential problems highlighted.

A special challenge has been the integration – in Parsons' terms – of the system elements established from 2012 onwards with existing tools at UDE. This issue is discussed below, referring to the data collected for the UDE case study.

4.3 System formation at UDE perceived by staff – the empirical perspective

The main focus of the UDE case study on IQA was to obtain information on stakeholder perceptions of the university's IQA system and its effects, and to identify factors that facilitate or hinder the effectiveness of the IQA system. In order to answer these research questions, different data sources were triangulated. Quantitative online surveys[11] were administered to academic and administrative staff. While academics were asked about their perceptions of IQA tools in the area of teaching and learning, and their contribution to students' employability, administrative staff were asked about their perception of IQA tools in the area of management. In addition, guided interviews and focus group discussions[12] were conducted to allow for a more in-depth exploration of the question of effects and, indirectly, the perceived effectiveness of the different tools and procedures in place at UDE. They also helped to obtain information about potential shortcomings and suggestions for improvement.

In order to compare different subject cultures, the research collected data from staff members and students from the humanities, the sciences, and the social sciences. Three academic departments, including the Department of Anglophone Studies (Faculty of Humanities), the Faculty of Physics (only one department), and the Department of Business Administration, were the focus of the investigation. They were chosen because all three departments had implemented the centrally conducted tools and procedures for IQA.

11. The survey questionnaire was disseminated to 380 academic staff, of whom 31 (8.2 per cent) responded, and to 131 administrative staff, 22 (16.8 per cent) of whom responded.
12. Thirteen participants were involved in interviews and focus group discussions. The individual interviews were conducted with members of the university's leadership, academic, and administrative staff holding different positions, and students.

In the interviews[13] conducted within the framework of the empirical study, members of the Rectorate and deans considered UDE's IQA system to be 'a steering instrument adequate for higher education institutions' [interview no. II; translation by authors]. Members of UDE's leadership also emphasized the value of IQA for management purposes. As the IQA system of UDE provided data and information to the Rectorate, they believed that it enabled them to make well-informed decisions.

The survey findings (see *Table 4.1*) showed, surprisingly, that many academic and administrative staff at UDE are not aware of quality-related documents, although some of the respondents said they found those documents helpful for their work. Interestingly, none of the academic staff respondents who claimed to be unaware of the existence of the quality policy had a leadership function. This was explained by the fact that only a limited number of actors of UDE in certain positions (e.g. deans and heads of programmes) were involved in the design and revision of particular IQA tools. The same results emerged in terms of a quality manual among both types of staff. This indicates the unequal distribution of information on IQA within staff groups according to their leadership positions and responsibilities. In particular, the findings suggest that the 'ordinary teaching person' was not adequately informed of the existing IQA policy and manuals.

The in-depth interviews shed further light on the different levels of awareness of IQA tools and procedures among academic staff. The interviews showed that the responsibilities and ways in which staff members were involved in quality assurance activities differed from faculty to faculty. Deans, for example, were responsible for all overarching processes and their interconnections. This meant that they were responsible for incorporating information from data collection tools, such as surveys, into overarching processes such as quality conferences or institutional evaluations. They were supported by faculty heads of administration, as well as by heads of programme when quality assurance activities concerned teaching and learning. It can thus be said that differences in staff responsibilities may be responsible for different levels of understanding of IQA tools and processes.

13. For the purpose of readability, the quotes from the interviews are not documented individually. All can be retrieved in the full text (Ganseuer and Pistor, 2017).

Table 4.1 Awareness of quality policy and manual

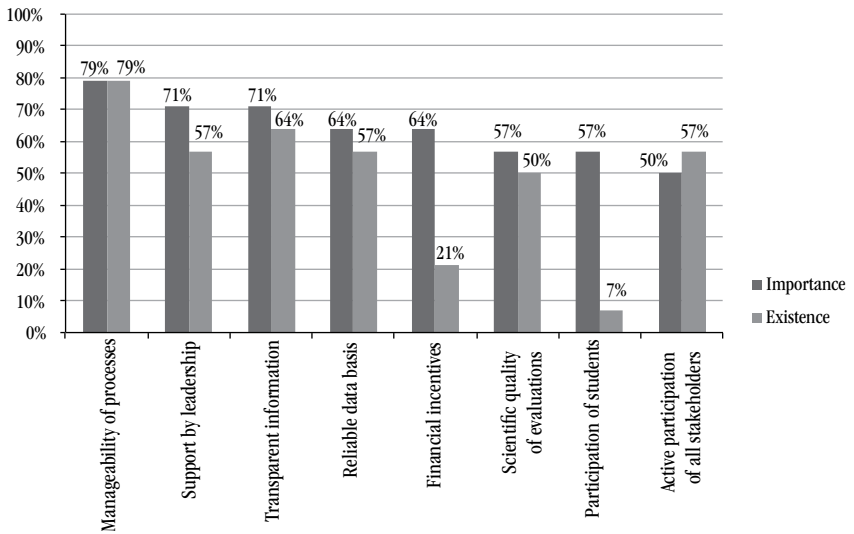
		Quality policy (%)	Quality manual (%)
Yes, this document exists and is useful for my work	Academic staff	13	4.3
	Administrative staff	23.5	11.8
Yes, but this document is not useful for my work	Academic staff	17.4	8.7
	Administrative staff	11.8	17.6
Yes, it exists but I do not have to deal with it	Academic staff	13	17.4
	Administrative staff	11.8	17.6
No, my university does not have such a document	Academic staff	0	4.3
	Administrative staff	11.8	5.9
I don't know	Academic staff	56.6	65.2
	Administrative staff	41.2	47.1
Total	Academic staff	100	100
	Administrative staff	100	100

Note: Academics N = 23, Administrators N = 17.

The effects of particular tools were perceived to occur mostly at the level of teaching and learning, more than in the area of employability and management. Qualitative instruments for course evaluation were reported to be working well by both students and academic staff members in interviews. Interviewees familiar with the new TAP method described it as being of very high value in improving teaching [interviews VII, IV]. The reasons given for this assessment were that information about what to improve was obtained mid-term (whereas results from the standardized surveys were often reported by the interviewees to be available too late), counselling was given by experts from CHEDQE as a follow-up to the information-collection process, and improvement measures were discussed with students directly. The information from TAPs was also said to be more detailed and focused than the information collected by standardized questionnaires.

Figure 4.2 and *Figure 4.3* show the various perceptions of internal factors among academic and administrative staff groups. According to *Figure 4.2*, academic respondents regard the manageability of processes, support from leadership, and transparent information as the most important factors conditioning the functioning of UDE's IQA system. Seventy-nine per cent of academic respondents found IQA processes sufficiently manageable, while 64 per cent agreed that transparent information is given, and another 57 per cent said that support from leadership is in place.

Figure 4.2 Importance and existence of conditioning factors for IQA (academic staff)

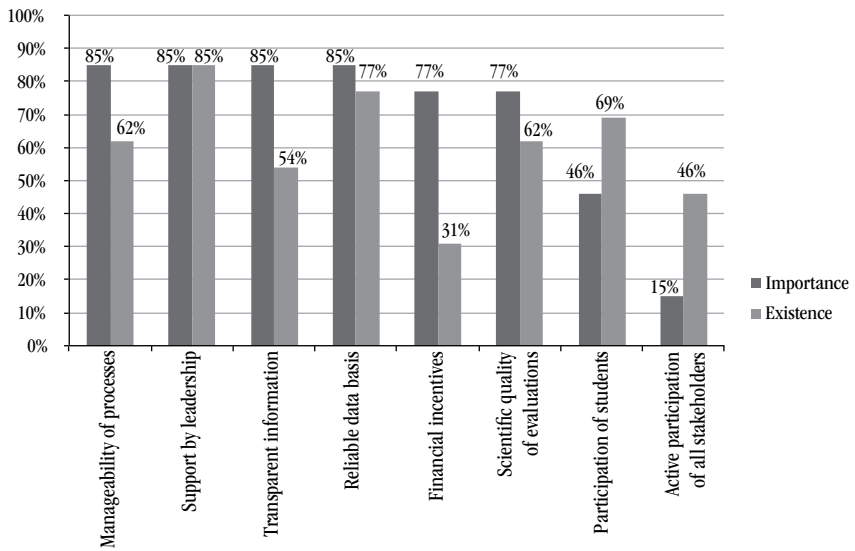


As *Figure 4.3* shows, administrative staff respondents assigned even more importance to the three factors mentioned above (85 per cent each), but considered two as being less well established. Furthermore, they assigned less importance to stakeholder participation. Only 15 per cent of administrative respondents thought that the active participation of all stakeholders was important for the success of the university's IQA system. This was significantly lower than among academic staff respondents (50 per cent). This may reflect a difference between the academic and administrative staff cultures. The qualitative interviews demonstrated that academics perceived quality as a feature inherent to their academic lives rather than as connected to certain administrative processes. Therefore, they were likely to perceive IQA more in terms of autonomy and freedom and less in terms of support and information. When it comes to the existence of key conditioning factors, 85 per cent believed that the support of the leadership was in place (at least in part), while only 62 per cent and 54 per cent respectively believed the same was true of the manageability of processes and the transparency of information.

Autonomy was viewed by most academic interviewees at different levels as very important to the success of the university's IQA system. In particular, members of the Rectorate and deans attributed autonomy to the (quality) development of both institutional sub-units and the university

as a whole. A member of the Rectorate said that 'autonomy is important for profile development, for positioning the university, and for taking responsibility. Consequently, autonomy and accountability promote self-assessment practices at the university, which is a necessary condition for development' [interview I, Rectorate, translation by authors].

Figure 4.3 Importance and existence of conditioning factors for IQA (administrative staff)



It seemed to be difficult for the heads of study programmes to judge the overall effectiveness of IQA at UDE as they consistently assessed the effectiveness of IQA only at the level of courses and study programmes. However, leadership, deans, and heads of study programmes at UDE agreed that it was better to have IQA than not, even if that meant additional work for research and teaching [interview no. VIII; translation by authors]. This aligned with the interview finding that the process of gaining acceptance from the wider staff body was ongoing: 'In the framework of the preparation for German system accreditation it became visible that this [the IQA system] was not completely thought out. We have therefore had to reinitiate the discourse with our staff members' [interview no. II; translation by authors].

One of the most important benefits of implementing an IQA system at UDE was reported to be the development of an ongoing discussion of quality issues, which grew out of the initial opposition to IQA and

the subsequent processes which helped to overcome such opposition. Deans and heads of study programmes also emphasized the role of IQA in fostering thought and discussion about quality development at UDE, reporting it to 'be a good basis for developing quality and thinking about improvement measures' [interview no. IV; translation by authors]. For example, it was reported that, as an outcome of institutional evaluations, new study programmes had been developed and that the faculty internal student support service, the so called 'LUDIs' (learning and discussion centres), had been extended. Furthermore, concrete measures such as the revision of module handbooks or changes in the structure of study programmes were reported as being the result of annual quality conferences, discussions of the results of quality assurance tools (surveys, etc.), and higher education statistics.

4.4 Conclusions

From these key findings, some lessons emerge for the strengthening of IQA within a system perspective in universities. These suggestions for developing and improving UDE's IQA system make reference to Parsons' system theory, and in particular the AGIL-model he developed (see *Table 4.2*). It becomes clear that a multifaceted approach is needed.

Table 4.2 Parsons' AGIL model and suggestions to improve IQA at UDE

Adaptation	Support the autonomy of organizational sub-units, especially faculties, i.e. creating a quality assurance system with enough flexibility to adapt to the culture, structure, and needs of organizational sub-units. Add flexible and qualitative tools to standardized quantitative instruments, i.e. adapt the system by adding elements which meet the needs of the stakeholders better and thus support goal attainment.
Goal attainment	Integrate IQA with other management processes, i.e. providing structures (such as target and performance agreements), which help to define and follow goals in a systematic way.
Integration	Integrate IQA with other management processes, i.e. connecting internal quality assurance tools and procedures (data acquisition and evaluation) to follow-up procedures such as target and performance agreements, human resource development.
Latency	Develop a communication concept for reaching all staff members, i.e. ensuring that all staff are informed about underlying paradigms and concrete goals of the quality system. Continuous communication is the underlying principle of the quality culture, i.e. providing opportunities to embark on the exchange of experiences and perceptions of the quality assurance system, and thus help to work on fundamental structures and maintain constitutive values.

It is important to develop a communication concept for reaching all staff members. The information flow concerning quality assurance activities, and, in particular, the revision of UDE's quality assurance for system accreditation, was channelled through organizational roles and positions (e.g. the project steering committee and advisory board, comprising deans and selected other stakeholders from the universities sub-units). The case study research highlighted what appeared to be an interruption in the information flow between stakeholders when it came to academic and administrative staff working at grassroots level. Since quality assurance particularly affected staff members working in teaching and research, it can be concluded that additional efforts should be made to inform staff who are not directly involved in strategic decision-making. This should be ensured by the university's leadership and by CHEDQE.

The autonomy of organizational sub-units, especially faculties, should be supported. Since UDE is an institution with highly autonomous organizational sub-units, it was no surprise that autonomy was emphasized – by all of the interviewees involved in management decisions, as well as by a number of survey participants – as one of the most important factors contributing to the success of IQA activities. This is reflected in UDE's and CHEDQE's approach to implementing a quality assurance system, which allows a significant amount of freedom for organizational sub-units to manage their own strategic development. While it is certain that the design and underlying paradigm of IQA activities and quality assurance systems are highly dependent on national circumstances, culture, and organizational culture, one can conclude that IQA should leave space for the demands of decentralized levels (e.g. faculties and departments), be as adaptable as possible within the framework of a given organizational culture, and only take a standardized form where strictly necessary.

Flexible and qualitative tools should be added to standardized quantitative instruments. This means that the degree of standardization of IQA processes – large and small scale – has to be thoroughly considered. For example, after more than 10 years of practice, CHEDQE was convinced that quantitative course evaluation had certain limitations, in particular when it came to inspiring improvement measures. Thus, it can be concluded that the number of qualitative methods needs to be increased, and that care must be taken that sanctions or rewards are based on course evaluation results.

IQA should be approached as a system embedded in the university. UDE's IQA system is of special interest because it aims to link the perspective of IQA with other processes of organizational change. The links made with curriculum design, human resource development, organizational development, institutional planning, and data management are important for the creation of an interconnected and coherent system geared towards continuous quality enhancement. Particular mention should also be made of the importance of establishing an institution which advocates the creation of IQA structures and supports faculties in undertaking the groundwork on quality development for the rectorate and faculties. To do this, it is helpful to approach this interconnectivity by structuring a quality assurance unit within an organization in such a way that it is able to serve a broad mandate.

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Chapter 5

Balancing centralization and decentralization of IQA at the University of Bahrain

Bassam AlHamad and Rama Aladwan

Bahrain is a small, high-income country with a population, as of 2013, of 1.3 million inhabitants. For many years, Bahrain has been at the forefront of public education in the Gulf region. By the late 1960s, the country had established a number of public higher education institutions (HEIs). In 2001, the Bahrain Executive Development Board (BEDB) identified education as one of six priorities for the country's economic development (Al-Alawi *et al*., 2009). As public HEIs were unable to meet the growing social demand for higher education, more than 10 private institutions were established by either local or foreign investors (AlSaleh, 2008; Karolak, 2012). This expansion was perceived as a threat to the quality of higher education, as, up to 2005, there was no authority supervising the performance of private HEIs. The 12 private HEIs were unable to recruit enough qualified academics to deliver courses and were inadequately funded. As a result, they delivered a rather low quality of education (Karolak, 2012).

Pressure on universities to manage the quality of their academic programmes grew as a consequence (Allen Consulting Group, 2009). Moreover, international agencies, such as UNESCO, the World Bank, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), encouraged the adoption of quality assurance in developing countries where higher education had expanded (Al-Alawi *et al*., 2009). In response to the growing demand for quality assurance of Bahraini higher education institutions, the Higher Education Council (HEC) was established by the Bahraini government in 2006, followed by the National Authority for Qualifications and Quality Assurance for Education and Training (NAQQAET) in 2008.

In addition, a national qualifications framework (NQF) was established by the Education and Training Reform Board (ERB) in 2012. The aim of the NQF was to align the design, consistency, and clarity of Bahrain's qualifications with national and international requirements (NAQQAET, 2013). Stakeholders, such as private and public HEIs, employers, and government bodies, were engaged in its development. These mechanisms played a major role in the development of internal quality assurance (IQA) within Bahraini HEIs.

The University of Bahrain (UoB) was created in 1986 (Amiri Decree No. 12, 1986). At the time it was the only public university in the Kingdom of Bahrain. The university is composed of 10 colleges, reflecting its multidisciplinary nature (Amiri Decree No. 18, 1999). A wide range of academic programmes are offered at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, with about 40 per cent of its academic programmes granted international accreditation (Al-Alawi *et al*., 2009).

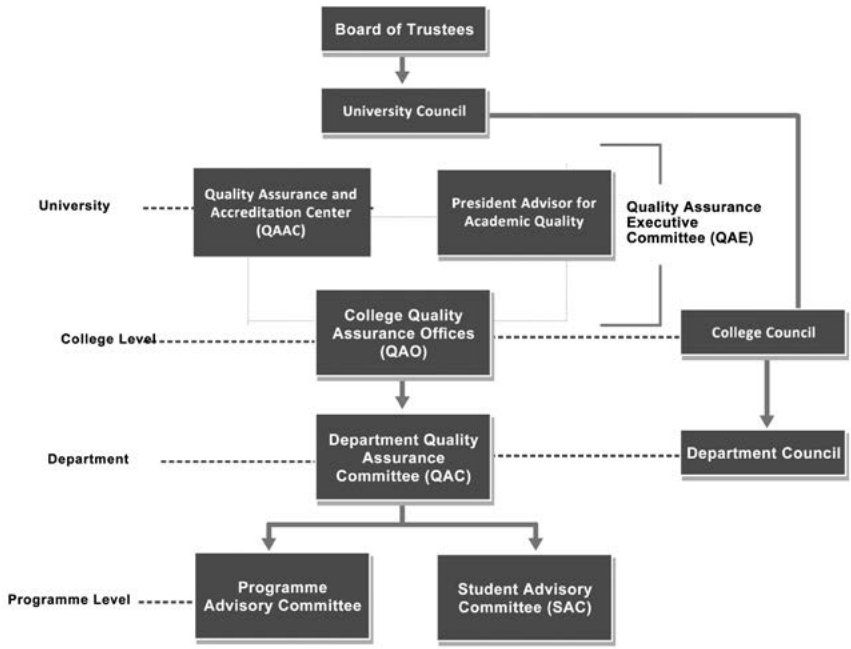
UoB has developed an effective IQA system aimed at creating a balanced distribution of responsibilities for IQA at centralized and decentralized levels. This particular feature of UoB's IQA system, which can be considered quite innovative, will be presented and analysed in terms of its effectiveness in the following sections of this chapter. Data used to assess the system were derived from research prepared for the IIEP research project on IQA.

5.1 Overview on the structure for the IQA system at UoB

Responsibilities for IQA at UoB are located throughout the academic hierarchy of the university. The Quality Assurance and Accreditation Centre (QAAC) and the Quality Assurance Executive Committee (QAE) are based at centralized level in order to coordinate quality-related questions across colleges and departments. At decentralized levels, colleges and departments have full authority and responsibility for the implementation of IQA tools geared to the improvement of academic programmes. This has helped colleges and departments maintain the quality of their programmes autonomously through regular improvement cycles. *Figure 5.1* gives an overview of the IQA structure at UoB, providing detailed descriptions of each structure.

QAAC was established as an executive structure for quality assurance. QAAC is in charge of coordinating and monitoring quality assurance activity at the university. QAAC has three main areas of responsibility: assessment, compliance, and accreditation. Its overall role is to coordinate quality assurance throughout the university and ensure that each unit satisfies all relevant quality requirements, reporting directly to the president's office. Headed by the director of QAAC, the QAE is another university-wide coordination body at the top of the IQA structure. The purpose of the QAE is to monitor and evaluate the impact of the university's approach to quality assurance and improve its operations.

Figure 5.1 UoB quality assurance structure



Source: AlHamad and Aladwan, 2016.

While such centralized IQA structures have helped to maintain quality across the university, decentralization is also emphasized within its IQA structure. In order to implement quality assurance at college level, college quality assurance offices (QAOs) have been created. Day-

to-day issues arising from the operation of programmes within a college are discussed in the QAO. Each college has a quality director who chairs its office. The college quality assurance director is an academic faculty member associated with the concerned college. The college quality assurance director follows up implementation of quality assurance activities through continuous meetings with the heads of the quality assurance committees for every programme.

At programme level, there are quality assurance committees (QAC), members of which are academics drawn from the concerned programme. They are responsible for steering the programme and course assessment cycle. Each QAC works with the chairs of academic programmes to implement quality assurance practices. This involves reviewing programme outcomes and objectives, assessing course portfolios and survey data, and producing self-evaluation reports. Implementation is the responsibility of programme staff, who take on-the-spot decisions.

At the bottom of the structure are two advisory committees: the programme advisory committee and the student advisory committee. While the former committee usually comprises employers, alumni, and other external stakeholders, the student advisory committee consists of enrolled students at different levels. These advisory committees support the development of programmes, providing programme specifications to help ensure the quality of graduates. Meetings with the advisory committees are conducted in relation to every concerned programme. The recommendations of the advisory committees are discussed in the department council, which comprises one or more programmes and takes decisions in specific areas without recourse to superiors.

UoB provides university-wide guidelines on the respective responsibilities and authority for quality assurance in quality policies and manuals. The university's quality assurance and enhancement policy was developed by QAAC. It outlines the university's approach to quality assurance, as well as its main principles and standards in both academic and administrative areas. In addition, quality manuals, such as the *QAAC Manual and College Quality Assurance Director Manual*, outline quality assurance processes in order to guide the QACs at department level, the QAOs at college level, and QAAC at university level.

There is, as yet, no formal documentation of quality assurance processes in the administrative domains of the university. Recently, resolutions were taken to improve the administrative components of

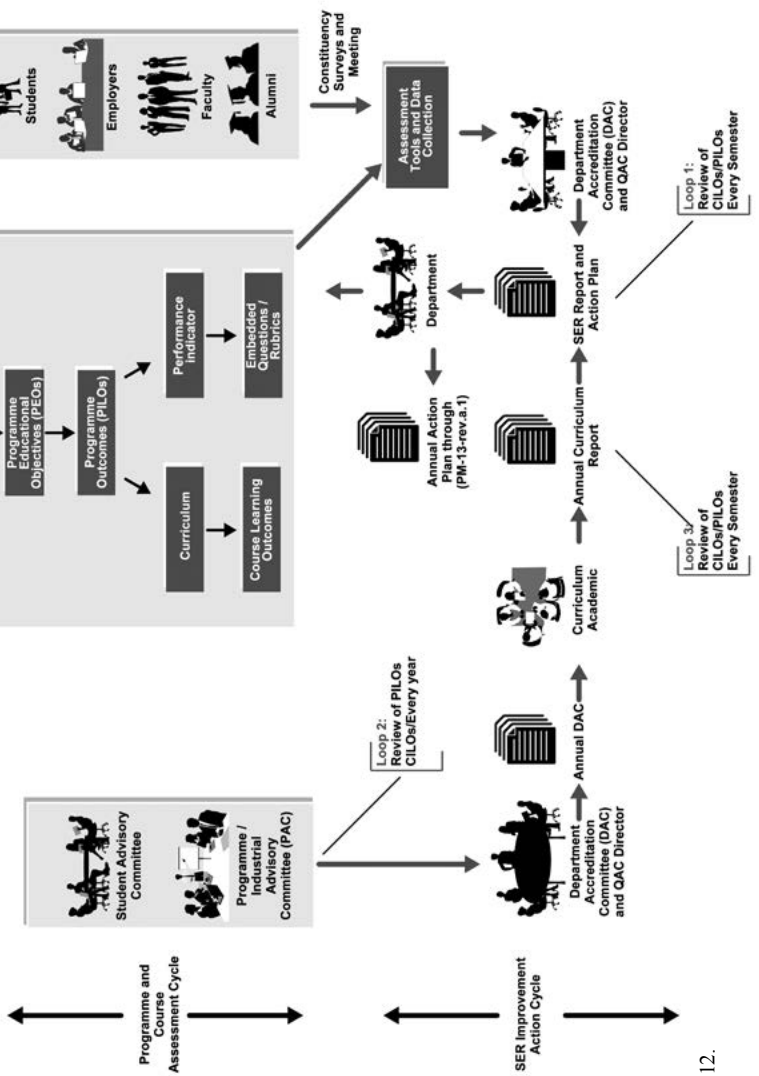
the IQA system. For example, an internal audit charter was approved, describing the quality system as it pertains to administrative units. In order to implement the charter principles, the Internal Audit Office has developed procedures to support the managerial and financial audit of university operations, risk management, and the governance system.

5.2 Main processes for IQA at UoB

Below are three interrelated IQA processes that demonstrate how the balance between centralization and decentralization within the academic domain is achieved in a more dynamic manner. These processes include a programme and course assessment cycle (PCAC), a self-evaluation process, and an improvement action cycle. The overall quality assurance process framework, including these three main processes, is shown in *Figure 5.2*. All three processes are managed in a decentralized manner at college and programme levels, although they are centrally monitored, as stated earlier. QAAC, through its continuous meetings with the college equality directors, ensures commitment and systematic compliance to the three cycles.

A PCAC involves monitoring the progress of students through the assessment of the intended learning outcomes (ILOs) of a course or programme, and the achievement of the programme's educational objectives. Every faculty member is responsible for assessing his/her course's ILOs and submitting a course portfolio every semester. The QAC audits the portfolio and programme ILOs every year to verify the requirements included. The committee also meets annually with the programme and student advisory committees to assess the programme educational objectives and ILOs, thus reviewing the curriculum as well as course delivery. In addition, at the programme level, the QAC conducts alumni and employer surveys every two years to gather information to assess the effectiveness of programmes and their curricula. The results of surveys and meetings are included in a self-evaluation report, the results of which are, in turn, addressed through an improvement action plan. The PCAC requires close attention for quick or on-the-spot decisions. This cycle is entirely decentralized to the level of the programme.

Figure 5.2 Overall quality assurance process framework



Source: QAAC, 2012.

Academic programme reviews at UoB are based on self-evaluation. Every year, each programme is required to collect data on assessment results, curricula, faculty, students, facilities, research, management, and partnerships in order to compare performance levels with programme objectives and intended outcomes. The results of this process are collated in a self-evaluation report (SER). The QACs at programme level coordinate the process of self-evaluation with the department chair, who distributes tasks for the preparation of the SER. The SER is discussed by the department council, which suggests actions for improvement. The SER and improvement action plan are submitted by the department, via the dean, to QAAC. QAAC meets with the college quality directors to ensure that this cycle is observed. QAAC is requested to submit a report on common aspects of the SERs. This provides support to the colleges, on the one hand, and centrally manages the process of self-evaluation, on the other.

After the first year of implementation of an improvement action plan, QAAC centrally initiates the development of an action plan progress report (APPR). The college quality assurance directors request their QAC chairs to submit an APPR for each programme. The QAC assesses progress against the improvement action plan with the department chair in order to produce a progress report, which is then discussed, approved, and submitted by the department council to the dean. The quality assurance structure, including QAAC, the college quality directors, and the QAC, ensures that all steps in the self-evaluation process are executed, including the production of improvement plans and follow-up in the form of an APPR. It should be noted that discussion and approval of the SER, the improvement plan, and the APPR take place in department councils based on their decisions. This is to ensure that all faculty members contribute to programme evaluation and enhancement.

A number of IQA instruments, relating to the enhancement of teaching and learning, graduate employability, and management, have been developed to support the three main IQA processes outlined above (see also *Table 2.3* in *Chapter 2*). The IQA instruments for teaching and learning are programme evaluation, course evaluation, teacher supervision, programme self-evaluation, programme monitoring, and student workload assessment. UoB also uses a number of IQA tools for graduate employability, including graduate tracer studies, employer satisfaction surveys, employer engagement, jobs market analysis, and

student competencies assessments. The IQA instruments for management include unit self-evaluation, unit external evaluation, certification, target-level agreements, and service-level agreements. It is important to note that while IQA instruments at UoB are all implemented by the programmes and colleges, they are monitored centrally by the QAAC.

5.3 Empirical findings on the level of centralization and decentralization

In order to investigate different perceptions as to the extent to which the university's IQA system has achieved an appropriate balance between centralized and decentralized responsibility for IQA, the UoB case study focused on stakeholder perceptions of the university's IQA system and the factors that facilitate or hinder the effectiveness of the IQA system. Two quantitative online surveys[14] were first administered to academic and administrative staff. In terms of IQA tools and processes, the perceptions of academic staff were explored in the areas of teaching and learning and their contribution to students' employability, while those of administrative staff were investigated in the context of management-related IQA tools. In order to triangulate different stakeholders' perceptions, semi-structured interviews[15] and focus group discussions[16] were conducted. This allowed for a more in-depth exploration of the varying perceptions of the university's IQA system and an identification of potential shortcomings and suggestions for its improvement.

For the comparison between different subject cultures, the research collected data from staff members and students from the humanities, the sciences, and the social sciences. Academic departments, including the College of Science (physics, medical physics, and biology), the College of Business (management and marketing), and the College of Arts (English studies), were the focus of the investigation.

14. The survey questionnaire was disseminated to 795 academic staff, of whom 191 (24 per cent) responded, and to 1,119 administrative staff, 204 (18.2 per cent) of whom responded.
15. Individual interviews were conducted with six academic and administrative leaders, including vice-presidents for academic programmes and graduate studies, and information technologies, administration, and finance. Three deans were selected from the College of Sciences, the College of Arts, and the College of Health Sciences. The dean of student affairs was also interviewed.
16. The focus group discussions involved 17 heads of academic programmes and 22 students. The academic focus group participants consisted of five heads from the departments of physics, biology and medical physics, five from the Faculty of English Language and Literature, and seven from management and marketing.

Table 5.1 demonstrates a relatively high level of awareness and appreciation of IQA-related documents at UoB. Just over three-quarters (75.7 per cent) of academic respondents and about 68 per cent of administrative respondents agreed that the quality policies existed, while only 4.5 per cent of academic and 4.3 per cent of administrative staff believed they did not exist. Over half (54 per cent) of academic respondents and just under a third (31 per cent) of administrative respondents thought that they were useful for their work. Although there seemed to be a lower level of awareness of quality manuals among staff at UoB compared with their awareness of quality policies, more than half of academic (60 per cent) and administrative respondents (53.3 per cent) agreed that quality manuals or handbooks existed. Only 12.2 per cent of academic staff and 8.2 per cent of administrative staff thought that they did not exist. Around half (48.1 per cent) of academic respondents and a quarter (24.5 per cent) of administrative respondents thought they were useful for their work. Despite the relatively high awareness on the quality-related documents, a considerable number of both academic and administrative staff still did not know whether quality policies or manuals existed.

Table 5.1 Awareness of quality policies and quality manuals

		Quality policies (%)	Quality manuals (%)
Yes, these documents exist and they are useful for my work	Academic staff	54.5	48.1
	Administrative staff	31	24.5
Yes, but these documents are not useful for my work	Academic staff	10.9	7.7
	Administrative staff	12	11.4
Yes, they exist but I do not have to deal with them	Academic staff	10.3	4.5
	Administrative staff	25	17.4
No, my university does not have such documents	Academic staff	4.5	12.2
	Administrative staff	4.3	8.2
I don't know	Academic staff	19.9	27.6
	Administrative staff	27.7	38.6
Total	Academic staff	100	100
	Administrative staff	100	100

Note: Some figures were rounded off to the nearest decimal place. This explains why the totals do not add up to 100%. This however does not statistically affect the results.

The interview findings indicate that quality policies and handbooks were well known to respondents in leadership positions. The vice-president for IT, administration, and finance highlighted the use of quality policies and procedures to support the quality of teaching and learning systems. The vice-president for academic affairs and graduate

studies suggested that the policies were used for external examination moderation, benchmarking, and accreditation of academic programmes. The guidelines for quality, developed at the university in the form of handbooks, were also more familiar to respondents in leadership positions. The vice-presidents, deans, department chairs, and programme coordinators explicitly mentioned the *IDEAS* handbook (Mohieldin *et al*, 2010) on the assessment of the university's courses and programmes. According to the interviewees, such handbooks were particularly useful for programme self-evaluation and for alumni and employer surveys. These findings suggested that more communication on both the quality policies and manuals was necessary at decentralized level, particularly among academic and administrative staff.

Table 5.2 Academic staff involvement, feedback, use, and usefulness of IQA tools on teaching and learning and employability

	Course evaluation	Programme evaluation	Teacher supervision	Programme self-evaluation	Programme monitoring	Student workload assessment	Graduate tracer studies	Employer satisfaction surveys	Employer involvement	Jobs market analysis	Student competency assessment
Involvement	4.2	3.4	2.7	3.3	2.8	3.0	2.3	2.1	2.3	2.0	2.5
Feedback	3.7	3.5	3.2	3.7	3.5	3.3	3.1	3.0	3.4	3.3	3.5
Use	3.5	3.4	3.1	3.6	3.5	3.3	3.2	3.0	3.4	3.3	3.5
Usefulness	3.4	3.3	3.1	3.5	3.4	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.6	3.4	3.4

Note: Averages were calculated as follows: 1. A numerical value was attributed to response categories with, for instance, 5 = very much and 1 = not at all. 2. Averages were then calculated in the following way: (number of 'very much' responses × 5) + (number of … responses × 4) + (number of … responses × 3) + (number of … responses × 2) + (number of 'not at all' responses × 1) / the total number of responses.

Table 5.2 and *Table 5.3* describe, respectively, academic and administrative staff involvement in IQA tools, the extent to which they received feedback from them, and their perceptions on use and usefulness. The IQA tools with which academic staff were most involved were those directly related to teaching and learning. In general, academic staff were less likely to be involved in IQA instruments for employability, with the averages for all these instruments below an average value of 2.5

(out of a maximum of 5 on the Likert scale). Academic staff also reported receiving more feedback from the IQA tools related to teaching and learning. The perception of use appeared to be influenced both by level of involvement and by the amount of feedback received, showing an overall higher perception of use for teaching and learning-related IQA tools. In terms of perceptions of usefulness, the differences between different types of IQA tools were not as striking. Academic staff viewed employers' involvement in programme revision as the most useful (3.6), closely followed by programme evaluation (3.5). Student workload assessment and some of the employability-related tools, such as graduate tracer studies and employer satisfaction surveys, were reported to be the least useful (all with averages of 3.0).

It seems that administrative staff were less involved in IQA tools for management, with all the averages below 3.0 (see *Table 5.3*). The highest level of involvement was in unit self-evaluation (2.7). Certification was the IQA tool in which administrative staff were least involved (2.0). The instrument from which the lowest amount of feedback was received was also certification, supporting the suggestion of a close relationship between the levels of involvement and feedback received. In terms of the perceptions of use and usefulness, most staff rated IQA instruments for management quite highly. Target-level agreements, unit external evaluation, and unit self-evaluation were well appreciated, with average values around 3.5. Service-level agreements were rated lower in terms of use and usefulness, nevertheless achieving averages of 3.1 and 3.2, respectively.

Table 5.3 Administrative staff involvement, feedback, use, and usefulness of IQA tools on management

	Unit self-evaluation	Unit external evaluation	Certification	Target-level agreement	Service-level agreement
Involvement	2.7	2.4	2.0	2.5	2.2
Feedback	3.5	3.5	3.2	3.5	3.3
Use	3.4	3.5	3.3	3.6	3.1
Usefulness	3.4	3.5	3.2	3.5	3.2

Note: All figures are averages (see *Table 5.2* for explanation).

The survey results were supported by the interviews, which also indicated that academic staff were more involved in IQA instruments relating to teaching and learning. Such instruments included course evaluations and employer involvement in the revision of study programmes. According to the dean of science, all faculty members

were required to evaluate their courses based on the achievement of the ILOs in the course portfolios. But academic staff also noted that they received a relatively low level of feedback from employer satisfaction surveys and graduate tracer studies. Jobs market analysis, however, was not mentioned during the focus group discussions. This was in line with the survey findings, which suggested that staff were little involved in jobs market analysis since it is usually only carried out when a new programme is being introduced. Although it is supposed to be conducted every four to five years in principle, in reality it is less frequently done.

Table 5.4 shows that leadership support was identified by both academic and administrative staff as the most important factor for the effective functioning of the IQA system at UoB. For academic staff, transparent information on IQA procedures was seen as the most important internal factor for the effective functioning of the IQA system, while administrative staff rated leadership support the highest. Leadership support and financial incentives were regarded as important internal factors by both staff groups. Both saw the visibility of measures derived from IQA procedures as less critical for the IQA system, with administrative staff giving this factor their lowest score of 3.6. When it came to assessing the existence of internal conditioning factors, both academic and administrative staff gave ratings consistently lower than those given for importance. They nonetheless rated leadership support the factor with the greatest presence within the university.

The importance of leadership support was also confirmed by the interview findings. The chairs of physics, biology, management, and marketing stated that the implementation of the IQA processes was managed through continuous training and support from central university leadership. They noted, for example, that their QACs attended workshops in writing course ILOs, assessing programme ILOs, performing the self-evaluation process, conducting surveys, and managing the IQA system at department and college levels. Training for academic staff to engage in such processes was provided at central university level to ensure that the persons directly responsible for these processes were qualified. Leadership support from the president's advisor and the president was specifically mentioned by interviewees in leadership positions as important to the effective implementation of IQA tools. The role of QAAC was also emphasized in terms of promoting continuous communication and support, under the supervision of the president's office.

Table 5.4 Academic and administrative staff responses on conditioning factors

		Leadership support	Financial incentives	Student support	Visibility of IQA procedures	Solid data information system	Transparent information from IQA	Scientific evaluation of IQA procedures	Active stakeholder participation
Academic staff	Importance	4.0	4.0	3.9	3.9	4.0	4.1	3.9	4.0
	Existence	3.2	2.1	2.5	2.7	2.5	2.7	2.6	2.6
Administrative staff	Importance	4.3	4.1	3.7	3.6	3.7	3.8	3.8	3.8
	Existence	3.0	2.2	2.7	2.6	2.6	2.5	2.8	2.7

Note: All figures are averages (see *Table 5.2* for explanation).

5.4 Conclusions

The research on UoB demonstrates a good balance of centralized and decentralized responsibilities for IQA at the university. This presumably led to the high level of awareness of IQA-related documents among staff, their high level of involvement in IQA processes, and, thus, the relatively high level of use of information generated from IQA. Certain elements can serve as learnable lessons for other higher education institutions.

A centrally developed basic infrastructure for IQA. The university developed university-wide IQA policies, procedures, processes, and instruments that were approved by the University Council. The overall monitoring of tasks for IQA is also conducted centrally, with the director of the university's QAAC responsible for ensuring the implementation of policies and procedures. Their implementation is ensured through the academic structure (deans and chairpersons), and through the quality structure (director of QAAC and directors of QAOs). The fact that policies and procedures were centrally adopted encourages the commitment of staff members, even though the colleges adhere also to standards used by international accreditation agencies for specific programmes. In other words, while the university encourages a variety of imported accreditation systems related to college needs (decentralization), unification and systematization throughout the university guarantees compliance with the requirements of the quality system.

A professionalized structure for IQA throughout the university supports decentralization. The university selected knowledgeable, specialized, and highly skilled quality teams (directors, heads, and members) at the decentralized level. These teams take full responsibility for the implementation of IQA at their level (faculties, departments). It is essential to transfer authority to the level where decisions are to be made, and to select leaders whose readiness needs to be tested.

Capacity development is a central-level responsibility, but can be complemented by decentralized authority. To ensure that all quality teams are up to standard and have the required knowledge and skills, the QAAC centrally organizes training programmes every semester. However, the quality teams at college and department level have full authority to conduct and manage their own training sessions to satisfy their specific needs. The quality teams can therefore transfer their knowledge and skills within the campus.

Decentralized decision-making for change in the academic domain is necessary for improvement purposes. If centralization involves the concentration of decision-making authority at the upper levels of the organizational hierarchy, then decentralization involves the projection of that authority down through various levels of the organization. This is particularly important when it comes to decision-making for improvement in the academic domain. Decentralized authority provides heads of programme with the opportunity to affect direct changes, in areas related to teaching and learning methods, assessment tools, etc. On the other hand, programme heads do not have full authority to affect changes in the curriculum, such as adding new courses and changing the curriculum plans, which need to be centrally validated.

A university-wide diffusion of good experience and innovation in IQA requires centralization. The university underwent accreditation processes at several stages in its attempts to raise the quality of the programmes. One of its most successful attempts was to achieve international accreditation for the College of Engineering in 2009. This experience was translated into a quality model, which became a quality management system. The centralized quality management system managed to apply IQA tools based on the three main cycles at every college. As stated earlier, to ensure the sustainability of the system, it is important to develop an appropriate culture. This is best achieved by ensuring the implementation of the system is in the hands of the

programmes themselves. However, it is important too that policies exist to ensure its obligatory implementation.

For enhanced effectiveness, IQA needs to adopt an integrated approach, fully covering management and employability. Although policies and procedures at UoB clearly outlined the responsibilities of different stakeholders in the assessment process, they were limited mainly to the academic domain (e.g. teaching and learning). Therefore, the university still lacked formal documentation of quality assurance processes in the management area. This has led to a lower awareness of quality policies and manuals among administrative staff, as well as their lower involvement in IQA instruments and processes, compared with academic staff respondents. The importance of integrating policies, processes, and instruments for IQA was also clear from the responses of academic staff, the majority of whom reported a relatively low involvement in employability-related IQA instruments and processes. Only an integrated approach involving all academic and administrative members in the IQA system will maximize the impact of IQA on teaching and learning, employability, and management.

Leadership support is crucial for the effective functioning of IQA. Leadership support was identified by both academic and administrative staff at UoB as a necessary and present factor in facilitating the integration of centralized and decentralized management of IQA. Leadership support includes designing a clear structure of responsibilities for IQA, establishing policies and procedures, and establishing a calendar for IQA operations. But it also means supporting decentralized levels through the provision of training to promote decision-making at programme and college level, and maintaining implementation and follow-up. This can help central management to ensure a comparable implementation of IQA tools and processes across various structures and units and to promote accountability among decentralized units, thereby achieving the balance between centralization and decentralization in the IQA system at the university.

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Chapter 6

Integrating IQA with academic processes at the University of the Free State

Lis Lange and Lise Kriel

The University of the Free State (UFS) is one of 26 public institutions in a South African higher education system that has close to a million students. Enrolments in the system have nearly doubled since 1994. While the university was a historically white, Afrikaans-speaking university under apartheid, today black African students constitute 63 per cent of total enrolments, a massive improvement on 1993, when this share represented only 40 per cent. But this, while positive, is insufficient, given the relative size of the eligible black student population (HEDA, 2011; HESA, 2015).

Under apartheid, universities were segregated according to race, language, and ethnicity.[17] While the 'open universities' (i.e. white, English-speaking) often admitted black students (i.e. African, Indian, and 'coloured') despite apartheid restrictions, most other universities were strongly segregated. One of the phenomena brought about by the end of apartheid was far greater mobility among black students, who began fleeing 'homeland' universities to find places at historically white 'technikons',[18] first, and, later, at historically white universities. The distribution of black students across the higher education system is, with few exceptions, currently far more representative of the demography of the country than it was 20 years ago (Council on Higher Education, 2015).

17. Thus, until the early 1990s, there were universities that catered exclusively for the white Afrikaner population, universities that catered for the white English population, for the coloured population, and for the Indian population, and universities in the homelands that took care of the education of different linguistic and ethnic groups among the African population.
18. In South Africa, 'technikons' were non-university institutions offering vocational education at post-secondary level. During the restructuring of the South African higher education system from 2002 to 2005 these institutions were either merged with existing universities, which then became comprehensive universities, or redefined as universities of technology.

UFS is located in the Free State Province, the geographic centre of the country, in a fundamentally agricultural area. The provincial capital, where the oldest campus of the university is located, has approximately 420,000 inhabitants (Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality, 2016). UFS has approximately 31,000 students, distributed across three campuses and seven faculties. These faculties include Economic and Management Sciences, Education, Health Sciences, Humanities, Law, Natural and Agricultural Sciences, and Theology (HEDA, 2011). It offers diplomas and degrees as well as postgraduate studies up to doctoral level in all its faculties. The majority of its enrolments are at undergraduate level, and most students are enrolled for general academic degrees.

As in all transitions, UFS has experienced a combination of rapid and slow change: a rapid increase in the number of black students but a slow increase in the number of black academic staff. This has raised a number of tensions at the university concerning issues as fundamental as the language of instruction, the curriculum, and the institutional culture. An IQA system that is fit for purpose must respond to these tensions as well as to other imperatives derived from national policies. UFS's IQA is an attempt to respond to all these challenges, adopting complex notions of quality assurance and transformation.

This chapter focuses on attempts made by UFS to make quality assurance an integral component of the core functions of the university. In particular, it looks at UFS's efforts to integrate IQA into academic processes.

6.1 EQA as a point of departure to build IQA

Internal quality assurance (IQA) has evolved at UFS following the different stages of institutional transformation and different approaches to quality assurance over almost three decades. Already, during the late 1980s, some initial steps were taken to develop self-evaluation at the university in line with requirements for strategic planning and institutional development (Strydom and Holtzhausen, 2001). Later, IQA evolved as a response to national external quality assurance (EQA) requirements, and led to the creation of a dedicated structure and policy at UFS, while faculties continued to develop their own IQA processes independent of the institutional approach to IQA (UFS, 2006).

Since 2014, the university has been working towards an integrative institutional approach to quality, favouring the generation of institutional knowledge for internal improvement purposes. Central to this approach

has been a shared understanding of the strategic, pedagogic, and political importance of knowledge of and for transformation (Lange, 2014). This knowledge is expected to feed into the improvement of the core elements of teaching and learning. As a consequence of this conceptualization, the functional aspect of IQA at UFS has been integrated into the administrative unit responsible for academic planning. However, the integration of IQA into the broader, institution-wide activity of academic planning is an ongoing process. The following section focuses on the conceptualization and constitutive elements of IQA at UFS, stressing its contradictions, problems, and shortcomings as well as those aspects of IQA that seem to be working well.

6.2 IQA 2006–2015: Structures and concepts

By 2006, UFS had developed a formalized, centrally located quality assurance system, together with most of its related policies. At this time, the policies represented a combination of centralization and devolution to faculties. In addition to the quality assurance policy,[19] the institution had a Quality Assurance Committee and a Quality Assurance Office responsible for evaluations, audits, and investigations of any institutional process, as well as of the core functions (UFS, 2006). The vice-rector for academic planning, supported by a planning unit, was responsible for coordinating and refining the development of the quality assurance system. However, faculties were not part of a system of formal accountability, neither vertically to the vice-rector for academic planning nor horizontally to the quality assurance office. Consequently, there was no way of ensuring consistency in quality-assurance practices across the faculties, a feature also remarked on by the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) during its external audit of UFS in 2006 (Council on Higher Education, 2008).

The inauguration of a new vice-chancellor in 2009 created the conditions to rethink the conceptualization of quality assurance at UFS, a project that began in 2011. At this time, the quality assurance function at UFS was located in the newly created Directorate for Institutional Research and Academic Planning (DIRAP), which had replaced the planning unit. DIRAP's areas of work included teaching and learning, programme development and approval, student development and support, institutional research, institutional information for internal and external

19. Like most other universities, UFS used self-evaluation followed by external peer review as the primary mechanism for assuring quality across departments, functions, and programmes.

reporting, and quality assurance. Despite DIRAP's intention of being built around an integrated notion of planning and institutional research in terms of its structure, in practice each unit functioned in isolation rather than as part of an integrated tool for change. In this design of DIRAP, quality assurance existed as an independent, stand-alone function, disconnected in practice from both the academic core and the strategy of the university. Moreover, the kind of approach to quality assurance adopted by the institution put the onus of engagement on the faculties with little institutional input or direction.

A restructuring of DIRAP took place in 2012. The main driver for this restructuring was the integration of the different areas of focus into a single institutional drive for transformation. In 2012, DIRAP's three functions and their relationship to each other were more sharply defined as monitoring and institutional research, academic planning, and institutional information systems. The functions related to student development and success were redefined and moved out of DIRAP through the creation of the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL). While responsibility for coordinating the quality assurance function was located within the academic planning unit of DIRAP, the function itself was gradually being devolved across the institution as a constitutive part of the planning, implementation, and evaluation of all academic processes.

The new conceptualization of quality assurance in general and IQA in particular resulted in the creation of a series of centrally located structures that have to provide consistency in the implementation of policy and in the practices of quality assurance, and act as a means of communication with faculties via faculty representatives and deans. Particularly important in this regard is the Academic Planning and Development Committee (APDC). The APDC is a committee of the senate responsible for enrolment and academic planning, programme approval, quality assurance and enhancement, and policy development.

The specialized knowledge produced by DIRAP and CTL allows management to make strategic decisions at institutional, faculty, and programme level,[20] which makes both of these units key components of the architecture of IQA at the university. Examples of such decisions include: (a) the identification of courses that were underperforming in terms of student success, and the development and implementation of an intervention aimed

20. Besides this, CTL in particular has the capacity to act in direct support of teaching and learning to support staff and students through a variety of capacity-development programmes.

at improving student success in these modules; (b) the decision to increase the university's entrance requirements, and to differentiate the minimum entrance requirements by faculty; (c) the redesign of the UFS tutorial programme; (d) changing the manner in which UFS conducts enrolment planning, starting with a more focused 2016 recruitment strategy; (e) the process of restructuring the curriculum; and (f) the development and implementation of a new language policy for UFS.

While the restructuring and rethinking of IQA at central level did not fundamentally change the tools of IQA used at faculty level, it introduced a mechanism of institutional self-reflection by bringing, for example, the outcomes of reviews to an institutional forum such as APDC for discussion. This played an integrative role by bringing together contextual and/or detailed knowledge of academic processes in order to make sense of the outcomes of reviews or other types of evaluation and to discuss possible interventions.

In this regard two tools of quality assurance have played a particularly prominent role at UFS: the monitoring of performance indicators and the surveys of student engagement. The former is DIRAP's responsibility, while the latter forms part of the work of CTL. DIRAP is responsible for monitoring a number of key performance indicators that have to be submitted for reporting purposes to government. In addition, it monitors and reports on a much-expanded set of indicators for the UFS council. CTL takes care of the administration and analysis of the surveys on student engagement, which are based on the theory that the more engaged students are with the course material, the more they learn.

While CTL, DIRAP, and APDC have played key roles in furthering the integration of IQA at an institutional level, it is the UFS Quality Enhancement Framework and the UFS curriculum review that have served as the most important vehicles to integrate IQA into the academic process at the levels of academic department, programme, and lecturer.

6.3 Integrating quality assurance into academic processes

The UFS approach to IQA has been rooted in the conceptualization of quality assurance proposed by the body for national quality assurance, HEQC, in 2001. It entailed, first, '[t]he development of an analytical and self-reflective approach to quality assurance premised on continuous self-assessment' (Council on Higher Education, 2004: 16), not only

within the higher education institutions (HEIs) which it evaluates, but also within HEQC itself. This was a particularly important point for UFS: the need and possibility to engage critically with one's own work. Second, it included recognition of the role that quality assurance could play in the transformation of HEIs. In its founding document, HEQC explicitly committed itself to advancing the related purposes and goals of *Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education* (Council on Higher Education, 2004), and it defined the concept of transformation as an emancipatory socio-political change process as well as an individual change process. Thus, it argued that the fitness for purpose of HEIs, that is, what institutions do in relation to their core functions, was a 'site' of transformation for the achievement of quality in higher education.

> The HEQC will develop a quality assurance framework that includes an explicit focus on the quality of teaching and learning activities, research and community service in order to deepen and extend the process of higher education transformation. (Council on Higher Education, 2004: 9)

Thus from its very definition, quality (and quality assurance) was not conceived as something external to higher education but as an inherent element of the core functions of a university.

With this as a point of departure, the reconceptualization of IQA at UFS viewed all the descriptors of quality as attributes that helped to define the daily tasks of the university. This has resulted in the organizational choice not to have an independent quality assurance office but rather to locate it within the academic planning section of a bigger institutional unit, such as DIRAP.

As indicated earlier, one of the main preoccupations in the redevelopment of IQA at UFS was to ensure that it supported the implementation of a complex notion of transformation. This notion distinguished knowledge for transformation – i.e. the knowledge that is necessary to effect transformation – from knowledge of transformation – i.e. knowledge of the process of transformation itself (Lange, 2014). Both types of knowledge were deemed necessary as both were constitutive of the academic processes in the core functions of the university and of the identity of academics. This did not imply the redevelopment of all IQA tools but it did imbue them with a clearer intention.

The current UFS Quality Enhancement Framework represented the second stage in engagement with quality at UFS. It has worked towards

changing the notion of quality assurance, from one of answering questions against sets of criteria to one of asking questions of existing practices at the university. It started by recognizing the important role that EQA, as implemented by HEQC, has played in the South African higher education system. However, the document argued, quality assurance systems were not a sufficient condition for the development of quality in the core functions of a university. The framework noted the importance of aligning any quality system with the broader strategic direction of UFS and with the detailed strategies in the core functions. Thus, the point of departure of the document was that quality was an institutional responsibility that can only truly be addressed internally by academics. The implementation of the framework therefore relied on the following six principles: (i) academic freedom, (ii) faculty leadership, (iii) accountability, (iv) student engagement, (v) evidence, and (vi) impact.

The main purpose of the UFS Quality Enhancement Framework has been for departments to examine their implicit or explicit understandings of teaching and learning, and research, in order to identify what works, what does not work, and why. In the area of teaching and learning, this knowledge has been expected to help the institution to improve its curriculum and teaching practices, and therefore the student experience of learning in academic programmes. The framework has looked at quantitative evidence (e.g. student marks) and qualitative evidence (e.g. students' work) as entry points to interrogate teaching and learning practices. The new framework has focused on what enables good teaching in different departments of the university, and on the obstacles that hinder good practice. Similarly, in the area of research, the approach has been aimed at making explicit the extent to which research and scholarship were part of an academic department's culture, how this culture expressed itself in activities and practices, and what research outcomes it produced in terms of both quantity and quality. Such an approach has moved from a compliance orientation to an enhancement focus by creating opportunities to think and re-think why a particular practice or approach produces certain results, and by ensuring that the academic is the agent of change.

The notion of deploying IQA at UFS as a tool for change has required a consistent focus across programmes and departments on areas for evaluation and the evidence underpinning them. Only such an approach could allow UFS to analyse information obtained from

the quality assurance process, and to use it to establish benchmarks and trends that could become directly useful for academics.

With this in mind, DIRAP, in 2012, embarked on an institutional curriculum review against the backdrop of a national process to align the outcome levels of higher education programmes and qualifications with those of the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework. The purpose of this review was to assess the quality of the university's academic offerings relative to benchmarked national and international standards as well as the alignment of the curriculum with the mission and strategic aspirations of UFS. Moreover, the outcomes of the review were presented in an aggregated manner to the APDC as a way of helping the institution take ownership of the findings and the areas for action identified in the review reports. This review, which is ongoing, has already provided very interesting and useful insights.

One by-product of the curriculum review has been a streamlined administrative workflow system for curriculum development. Regular approval checkpoints were built into the system to ensure the participation of all stakeholders throughout the process – from those who developed course content to those who scheduled class timetables and those who reported management information.

With the exception of the institution-wide curriculum review, driven by the need for transformation of knowledge and pedagogy, UFS has not introduced new tools of quality assurance. Instead, it has sought to integrate all institutional knowledge – generated through existing quality assurance instruments and processes, management information systems, and institutional research – into analytical reports to critically identify possible reasons for success and failure in different areas of performance. These reports have been presented and discussed in senate as well as at the highest management level, informing a variety of interventions at faculty and central management level.

Taken as a whole, the IQA system at UFS has three main characteristics. First of all, from the point of view of its support structures, it is well integrated with institutional research and academic planning processes. This demonstrates that quality assurance is not an add-on to the core functions of the university but, on the contrary, is a constitutive part of the planning, implementation, and evaluation of academic processes. Second, the IQA system coordinates decentralized (often isolated) quality assurance structures, activities, and findings from

across the institution. This is achieved through an institutional policy framework for quality enhancement as well as through the synthesis of data and information provided by tools such as student engagement surveys, course evaluations, programme reviews, and quantitative indicators. This makes possible the third main characteristic of the UFS IQA system, namely that it facilitates evidence-based decision-making at faculty and institutional level by developing monitoring systems and generating knowledge about the university – especially knowledge in relation to curriculum and pedagogy.

6.4 What the empirical research says

The empirical research underpinning this chapter looked at different stakeholders' perceptions of UFS's IQA system through both quantitative and qualitative methods. The perceptions of academic and administrative staff were collected through online surveys,[21] while interviews and focus group discussions [22] were used to capture the more in-depth perceptions of other stakeholders at the university, including students and staff in leadership positions. For the purpose of comparing different subject cultures, the case study targeted staff members and students from various academic departments, including the Departments of Life and Health Sciences (LHS), Formal and Natural Sciences (FNS), Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS), Business and Management, Economics and Law (BMEL), and Education.

The analysis of both quantitative and qualitative evidence can be grouped into two broad categories: (i) awareness and understanding of IQA, and (ii) communication about IQA, both of which provide interesting and helpful insights to manage the process of integrating IQA into academic processes.

The analysis of stakeholders' perceptions revealed different levels of awareness and understanding of UFS's IQA system and, more importantly, the extent to which such awareness and understanding

21. The survey questionnaire was disseminated to 917 academic staff, of whom 225 (14.7 per cent) responded, and to 1,270 administrative staff, 389 (21 per cent) of whom responded.
22. 23 participants were involved in interviews and focus group discussions. The individual interviews were conducted with three deans and five teaching and learning managers, while 10 academic department heads participated in three focus group discussions. Student perceptions were explored through a focus group discussion with five students from the student representative bodies at the university.

were internalized at different levels of the institution, from senior management to support services located in academic departments (see also *Chapter 2*). The researchers took awareness of IQA to refer to the extent to which respondents recognized the presence of an instrument. One question, for example, asked whether UFS has a quality assurance policy. Understanding of IQA referred to respondents' ability to identify the purpose of different instruments and their relative weight in terms of involvement, feedback, use, and usefulness. Overall, both academic and administrative staff demonstrated a lack of awareness and understanding of current institutional policies relating to IQA, as well as of specific IQA instruments and processes. Although certain interviewees indicated that they were aware of the existence of institutional documents for IQA, they did not show any proper understanding of such documents, with many reporting either that they had not read them or, if they had, that they found them difficult to understand, describing them as 'too academic'. This was also demonstrated in the survey respondents' varying perceptions of their level of involvement and the feedback, use, and usefulness of IQA instruments and processes at UFS. On average, staff members perceived themselves as relatively uninvolved in IQA instruments and processes. However, those who reported involvement had relatively positive perceptions regarding the feedback, use, and usefulness of these instruments and processes.

Qualitative responses from the interviews confirmed that communication about IQA was insufficient, especially at faculty level, which hindered the effective functioning of the IQA system at UFS. By communication, the researchers understood the extent to which management's perspectives as expressed in frameworks or guidelines were disseminated, discussed, and internalized by respondents. Academic staff members in leadership positions indicated that they believed that an important aspect of communication was the ability to develop a shared discourse and responsibility over quality improvement between senior management and staff. It was also imperative that academic staff made efforts to engage actively in such discourse among themselves, they reported. Currently, there remains some resistance among academics to change at UFS. In some cases, for example, the lack of consistency across and within faculties as to the level of understanding and commitment to IQA had driven academic staff to doubt leadership support at faculty and department level.

6.5 Conclusions

Given the three defining characteristics of IQA at UFS – its structural integration with institutional research and academic planning; its role in coordinating of decentralized quality assurance structures, activities, and findings; and its role in facilitating evidence-based decision-making – the findings of this research have been particularly helpful.

Staff participate in IQA without knowing it. The research showed three important weaknesses in the IQA system at UFS. First of all, many of the people interviewed demonstrated poor awareness of the existence of IQA policies and practices outside their departmental or faculty silos. Second, staff had limited understanding of how the different tools and frameworks of IQA fit together, and most failed to demonstrate a common conceptualization of IQA at UFS. Third, it was clear that, very often, people were unaware of or did not understand IQA because there had been no communication from their line managers as to a change in policy, the outcome of a discussion, or a piece of research. These three weaknesses also revealed a fourth reality at UFS: many academic and administrative staff members participated in the IQA system without realizing that they were involved in IQA. For example, the curriculum review discussed above was a critical IQA tool that involved all stakeholders in the academic process; however, very few staff members associated the review with overt quality assurance.

Changing perspectives of IQA from an occasional, isolated, compliance-driven event to a regular, integrated, transformation-driven activity takes time and effort. It is essential to ensure that appropriate communication and sharing of information takes place in a purposeful way. There should also be appropriate communication at all levels, from the executive of the university to academic staff in the classroom, about the objectives of the UFS academic project, the role of IQA in relation to it, and the tools and policies supporting it.

More attention should be paid to facilitating awareness and understanding of the IQA system among staff. As the effectiveness of IQA largely depends on levels of involvement and perceived usefulness, it is necessary to identify where and how awareness and understanding of IQA at faculty level can be discussed or even introduced. This, in our view, is not only important for consistency, but is also fundamentally important in order to seriously include academics, and possibly students, in the conversation.

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Part 3:
Designing innovative IQA tools in support of quality, employability, and quality culture

Chapter 7

Mainstreaming IQA with university management at the University of Talca

Pablo Villalobos, Francisco Honorato, and Álvaro Rojas

In 1981, Chile introduced a major programme of higher education reform intended to further privatize and deregulate the sector. The reforms provided a new legal basis for the restructuring of the Chilean higher education system's institutional fabric and mode of financing. They relaxed regulations for the establishment of new higher education institutions (HEIs), facilitated the growth of private providers, and shifted the financial burden to individual students and their families. The structural changes led to a marked increase in both student enrolment and the scale of the academic offer. To alleviate the emerging tension between increased access and the need to ensure quality, a higher education quality framework was created at the beginning of the 1990s, featuring: (1) quality control (licensing or authorization of institutions and academic programmes based on a set of criteria); (2) quality assurance through accreditation (checking whether a programme or institution was satisfactorily meeting its objectives and mission); and (3) promotion of quality (fostering self-evaluation and continuous improvement at the level of higher education institutions).

The University of Talca (UT) is a public university, established in 1981 by the merger of two university centres located in Talca: the Universidad de Chile and the Universidad Técnica del Estado. Since its creation, the university has developed from a small teaching-only HEI to a medium-sized university which emphasizes quality teaching, research, innovation, and technology transfer. Based in two main campuses located in the central-southern Region del Maule, the university is focused on serving the human resource, knowledge, and innovation needs of its region, which is disadvantaged in terms of average income, poverty levels, and educational attainment compared with the national average.

In 2015, 8,128 undergraduates and 1,291 postgraduates were enrolled at the university's five campuses, each of which specializes in a

particular academic area. The postgraduate provision of the University of Talca comprises 21 master's programmes and eight doctoral programmes across four specialisms. UT's student population is drawn predominantly from the Region del Maule, and the majority are first-generation students. An important strategic orientation of the university is enhancing the employability of its graduates; it uses a broad range of internal quality assurance (IQA) tools, in association with its quality policy, to comply with the needs of quality enhancement and graduate employability, and so fulfil its mission and strategic objectives.

UT participated in the IIEP research project on IQA, which provided insight into the university's IQA system, and in particular how the university has succeeded in mainstreaming IQA into university management. The study also addressed the level of staff awareness of IQA instruments at the university, and the extent of staff participation in IQA. (Stakeholder awareness and participation of an IQA system are considered important for its effective functioning.) Finally, the study investigated the external and internal conditioning factors that facilitated the effective functioning of the IQA system at UT, and sought to discover the main paradigm of IQA for both academic and administrative staff.

The study adopted a multi-stakeholder approach, with stakeholders including academic and administrative staff, students, and academic and administrative leaders. Two online survey questionnaires were used to investigate the perceptions of academic and administrative staff, and semi-structured interviews were conducted with senior leaders. In addition, programme heads and heads of department from the Faculties of Engineering, Health Sciences, and Business, as well as students, took part in focus group discussions to triangulate perceptions and identify differences in opinion. The three faculties were selected because they represent different academic cultures and so enable an analysis of variations in perceptions of the IQA system.

This chapter presents the main findings of the study in relation to IQA awareness and involvement of actors and the factors that condition the effective functioning of the IQA system. Finally, it puts forward conclusions on the mainstreaming of IQA mechanisms for university management processes, involving academic staff through professional development opportunities, better involving stakeholders in IQA instruments and processes, and organizing a quality dialogue on evidence generated from employability-related tools.

7.1 Overview of the IQA system

IQA has been part of the development of the university since it began operating a comprehensive IQA system in 2009. An important feature of the IQA system is that it is entirely mainstreamed with the other components of the university management system, i.e. strategic management, the operationalization of strategic goals through the development of plans and programmes, target agreements, and management control. IQA is organized at institutional, faculty, and programme levels, and is thus fully aligned with the organizational structure of the university.

The IQA system at UT developed in tandem with the evolution of the institution. There were three stages in its development: the founding phase, the modernization of the quality assurance system, and the consolidation and innovation of the IQA system. At each stage, mechanisms and instruments for IQA were defined, creating a comprehensive quality assurance system which required the involvement of both academic and administrative staff.

In the founding phase (1981–1995), UT focused on integrating the institutional cultures of the two university centres from which it was created. It needed to develop its own system of standards and regulations, thus laying the ground for the following stages. The first set of academic regulations was published in 1986 to standardize academic processes for the quality of teaching, and administrative and regulatory processes were restructured during the same period. In the mid-1990s, new institutional units were established in order to monitor and evaluate the quality of academic processes.

During the second phase, the modernization of the quality assurance system (1995–2010), the university streamlined processes for ensuring quality through the introduction of strategic management, self-evaluation, and accreditation processes. The first strategic plan was developed in 1997, with subsequent plans in 2004 and 2010. Performance target agreements were implemented from 1996 onwards, with the objective of aligning individual academic activities (teaching and research) with the institution's strategic plan. The first institutional evaluation implemented by the European Rectors' Conference in 2000 was followed by an accreditation of master's and undergraduate programmes in 2002 and 2003, respectively. Together with institutional and programme accreditations, self-evaluation policies were introduced

in the university as well as for its programmes. Finally, a comprehensive quality assurance system was introduced in 2009.

The third phase (2010–present), is characterized by the consolidation and innovation of the IQA system. A data warehouse was set up in 2013 to monitor chosen performance indicators and goals of the strategic plan, and offices for quality in undergraduate and graduate studies were created. The system for the monitoring and evaluation of graduates and employers has also been significantly consolidated since 2012. Finally, coverage of institutional accreditation was expanded in 2014 to include undergraduate, graduate, research, outreach, and institutional management.

The consolidation of the IQA system has enabled the development of learning capacities and improved the utilization of the resources and opportunities provided by the national quality assurance system. Today, IQA is supported by an institutional culture oriented towards quality, a commitment to high institutional performance, and an appropriate organizational structure.

UT's quality policy represents the commitment of the entire university community to ensuring quality, making it the focal point of its institutional mission and objectives. The objective of the policy is to develop a quality culture oriented towards continuous improvement in all domains, while responding to the needs and expectations of the university community and external stakeholders, and complying with the highest national and international standards of quality. The quality policy supports the following principles: active participation, continuous evaluation, systematic revision, accountability, and innovation.

The IQA system at UT follows the improvement cycle shown in *Figure 7.1*, across four consecutive phases: strategic management, operationalization of strategy through the development of plans and programmes, target agreements, and management control. During the strategic management stage, senior managers establish guidelines for the commitment to quality by determining the university's mission, objectives, and strategies. The strategies are then translated into plans and programmes which comprise actions related to management, accreditation, and the development of processes and staff.

These programmes and plans are implemented by departments, units, and academic and administrative staff through target agreements. The target agreement is the operational management tool that enables

the translation of objectives into plans to be implemented by units and staff for their later evaluation. Specialized software is used to support the processing of target agreements, the results of which are presented in the form of a balanced scorecard for each unit and staff member. This supports the implementation of the management cycle, aligning units and staff with institutional objectives, constant improvement, adaptation, and strengthening of the strategic orientation of the university.

The main collegiate bodies of the university – the Board of Directors, the faculty councils, and the school councils – are responsible for the development and regulation of procedures and the enforcement of sanctions for underperformance. Administrative authorities, such as the Pro-Rectory, vice-rectories, dean's offices, and school and department administration, oversee the implementation of quality assurance mechanisms and instruments. Sub-committees of the university, including the Institutional Administrative Committee, the Graduate School Academic Committee, the Research Advisory Committee, the Teaching Council, and the Unit Self-Evaluation Committee, manage quality processes.

Operating levels of the IQA system

The university's IQA system operates at three levels: institutional, faculty, and school. At each level there is coordination between academic and administrative staff, with specialized technical staff providing additional support.

Institutional level: Several support units for quality assurance have been established. The main function of the Office of Institutional Planning and Analysis is to perform planning, analysis, control, and monitoring of the university's strategy, ensuring compliance with the Institutional Plan through a quality assurance and management excellence system. This office is responsible for the implementation of the Malcolm Baldrige performance excellence model, the execution of the process management programme, the measurement and analysis of internal information, and the provision of official data to stakeholders.

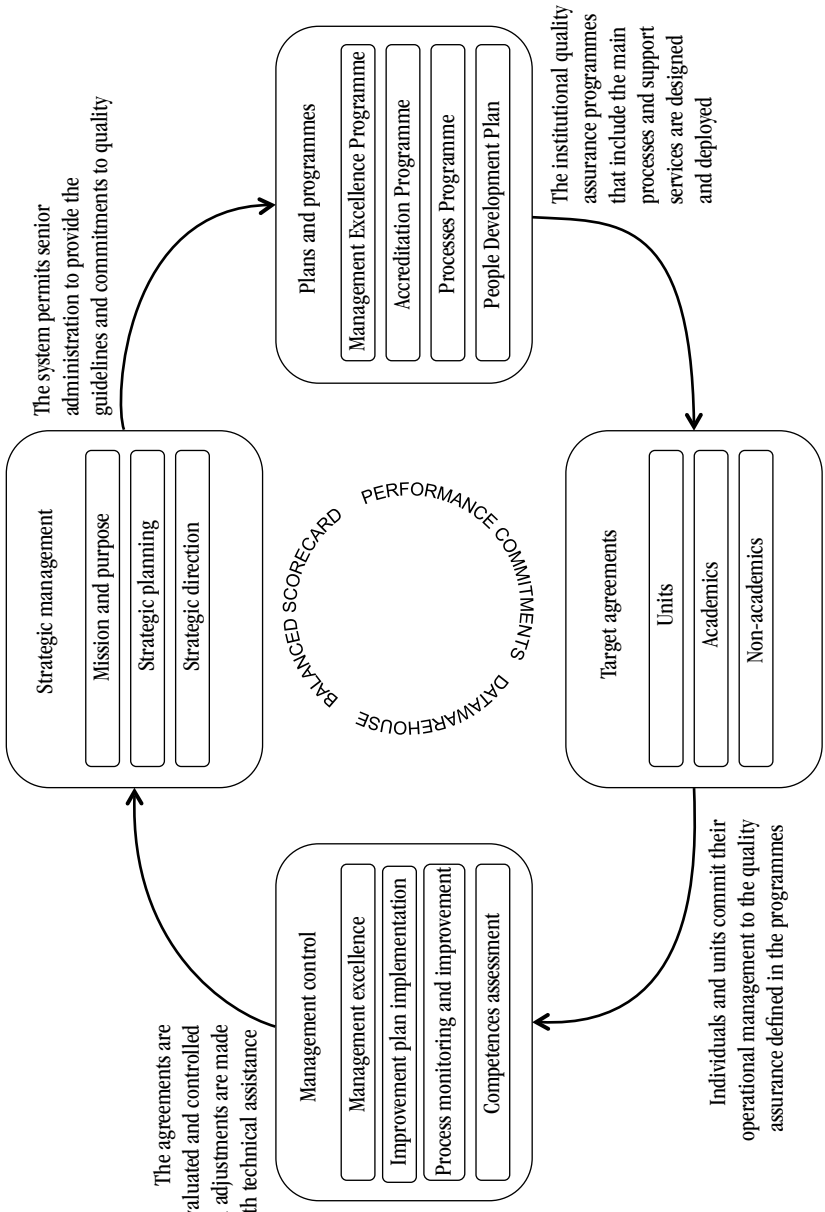

Figure 7.1 Articulation of the IQA system

The Office for Quality in Undergraduate Studies comprises two departments. The Department of Teacher Evaluation and Quality Assurance designs, validates, and applies diagnostic instruments at the undergraduate level, evaluates undergraduate student satisfaction, generates knowledge concerning the institutional monitoring and evaluation of the competency-based educational model, provides academic tutoring for first-year students, and supports the curricular design and implementation of undergraduate programmes of study. The Department of Undergraduate Programme Accreditation provides technical advice to undergraduate programmes on different accreditation stages, assists in the preparation and follow-up of programme improvement plans, and monitors national and international standards for undergraduate programme accreditation processes.

The Graduate School is part of the Academic Vice-Rectory, and is integrated with the departments for quality assurance, curricular administration, and student and graduate administration. The Department for Quality Assurance in Graduate Studies has a technical advisory function in the creation and modification of projects and graduate programmes, self-evaluation and accreditation of graduate programmes, creation and follow-up of programme improvement plans, and systematic monitoring of national and international accreditation processes for graduate programmes (master's and doctoral).

The Sub-Comptroller for Quality is an autonomous and independent unit. It is responsible for internal quality control of all institutional processes through quality audits, following an annual audit plan.

At institutional level there are two decision-making bodies over quality processes: the Institutional Administrative Committee, and the Internal Evaluation Committee. The first is a senior advisory body comprising the rector, pro-rector, and vice-rectors. The second is an advisory body that oversees the implementation of the institutional accreditation process and of improvement plans agreed to by the university.

Faculty level: The faculty council is the highest collegial body, consisting of the dean, school directors, department heads, and academic staff representatives. It is responsible for making decisions concerning teaching in the faculties, the creation of new undergraduate degrees, study plans, and internal regulations. Each faculty is governed by its own council.

There is also an academic council overseeing the Graduate School, presided over by the Graduate School director. The Graduate School Academic Committee consists of master's and doctorate programme directors. The duties of the council are to assist the Graduate School director in meeting objectives and completing tasks; to establish and evaluate general programme regulations; to establish and ensure that the standards of quality are met within each programme; to promote the development of new programmes; to supervise the self-evaluation process for national or international accreditation of programmes; and to propose regulations or modifications for programmes of study, theses, scholarships, and any other item pertinent to the academic vice-rector in order to achieve programme objectives.

Regarding research and process implementation, there is a Research Advisory Commission overseen by the Research Office. The main duties of the commission are to create research policies, regulations, and procedures, and to collaborate in the evaluation of instruments for research development.

School level: School councils are collegiate advisory bodies that support school directors in the management of schools. Their main functions are to study and propose modifications in study plans, evaluate the curriculum, and analyse and recommend solutions to exceptional situations encountered by students enrolled in the programmes. The councils meet regularly, but the frequency of meetings varies across different schools.

The Teaching Council is the body responsible for the quality processes of undergraduate degree programmes. Comprising all undergraduate school directors, its mission is to propose policies and specific teaching standards to the university's Academic Council, collaborate with administrative services, and make decisions concerning exceptional academic situations related to teaching. Similarly, self-evaluation committees have been created within all undergraduate programmes, consisting of academic staff from the school. Their main mission is to implement the programme's self-evaluation process and to develop any subsequent improvement plans.

Institutional research and management information system

IQA at UT is supported by institutional research and an effective management information system. Institutional research deals with the analysis that is necessary in an educational institution to obtain information that supports and facilitates decision-making for management, planning, and institutional policy. UT created a Department of Institutional Research as early as 2000 as a part of its Planning Department. Its main task has been to generate information for strategic decision making. Throughout its development it has been incorporating new tools for information management, in particular business intelligence software that allows unrestricted access to integrated databases to facilitate access to information to support decision-making at all levels in the university.

Along with this, and in response to institutional growth, it became necessary to develop and implement a new information system that integrates and facilitate the handling of data and its subsequent analysis. To this end, in 2014 the university resolved to implement an enterprise resource planning (ERP) system, having already initiated the migration of the accounting, financial, and administrative processes to permit a total integration of information and carry out deeper analyses of financial data.

7.2 IQA instruments for management

A number of IQA instruments related to management have been developed to support IQA processes. The main instruments are internal evaluation, external evaluation, and performance target agreements.

Internal evaluation is a quality assurance practice that has been applied at the university since 2003. Its purpose is to systematically evaluate consistency between the university's mission and existing practice. The internal self-evaluation process begins two years prior to the forthcoming accreditation period. Each unit generates a self-evaluation report and interviews the key informants. Drawing on this, an improvement plan is generated before a report is compiled and appendices generated. An internal evaluation committee comprising the academic vice-rector, the director of institutional analysis and planning, the director of institutional accreditation, and a coordinator from each accreditation area oversees the process. Although there are specific committees and working groups which operationalize the internal evaluation processes, all members of the university community participate.

External evaluation: The main purpose of external evaluation is to measure the extent to which the institution is making progress toward the achievement of stated objectives. A self-evaluation is conducted before external evaluation begins. External evaluation starts with an appraisal of financial sustainability by an external advisor. This is followed by a meeting in preparation for a visit from the evaluators. The visit begins with a meeting with university authorities, followed by meetings with the staff in charge of each area, and with other key actors. To complete the process, the peer evaluators give an oral report, later providing the institution with a written report to which it can respond. Once the reports have been finalized, the National Accreditation Commission (CNA) will make a final decision. If the institution is not satisfied with the result, it can make an appeal. An institutional improvement plan is developed to respond to problem areas identified by the peer observation and the CNA decision.

Performance target agreements: UT has three levels of target agreements: units, academic staff, and administrative staff. The unit performance target agreement is a management tool that aligns the operation of the units with the institutional strategic plan. Target agreements are applied to the following units: the offices of the pro-rector and vice-rectors, faculties, institutes, and general offices. The process begins when each unit formulates its annual target agreement on the university's website. The agreement is then revised by the Office of Institutional Analysis and Planning. Once approved by the Rector's Office, there is a further, intermediate, revision by the Office of Institutional Analysis and Planning. Every December, each unit carries out a self-evaluation and provides evidence as to the outcome of each agreement.

At the academic staff level, the performance target agreement defines the amount of time and work involved in each assigned task, together with the expected outcomes. These target agreements apply to both tenured and non-tenured academic staff, regardless of the number of contract hours. Each academic makes a commitment toward the end of the year concerning activities to be undertaken, assigns a schedule, and defines the expected results on the university's website. Higher-level administration approves the agreement or generates corresponding observations until it is approved. Before the end of the academic year, each academic engages in a self-evaluation and the target agreement process begins again. Both the agreements and the self-evaluations are

further used as resources in various decision-making processes at the level of the university management system.

Individual administrative staff formulate personal targets for their unit. Each member of the administrative unit commits to both general performance targets and a number specific to the unit. A key focus of the agreements is the improvement of personal performance in relation to unit objectives. Both permanent administrative staff and those on hourly contracts are required to engage in the development of target agreements, regardless of the number of hours they are contracted to work.

The process begins in March of each year, when individuals formulate their target agreements on the university's website. Finally, each person conducts a self-evaluation, indicating the percentage of targets achieved. The results and analysis of the agreements are used for decision-making, evaluation of personnel, statistics, and public accounting. Those who meet their targets on time, and as is stipulated in their agreements, receive a bonus.

7.3 Discussion on empirical findings

The focus of this chapter is to report different stakeholders' perceptions of the university's IQA system. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed. Two online survey questionnaires[23] were administered to academic and administrative staff: the areas of investigation for the two staff groups differed. Academics were asked about how they perceived IQA tools in terms of teaching and learning as well as students' employability, while administrative staff was asked about how they viewed IQA tools in the area of management. The perceptions of other stakeholders were also investigated by individual interviews as well as focus group discussions.[24] Staff members and students from the Faculty of Engineering, the Faculty of Health Sciences, and the Faculty of Economics and Business took part in focus groups to enable an in-depth exploration and triangulation of perceptions among different stakeholders at the university.

23. The survey questionnaire was disseminated to 387 academic staff, of whom 120 (31 per cent) responded, and to 73 administrative staff, 60 (81 per cent) of whom responded.
24. Individual interviews were conducted with staff in academic and administrative leadership positions, namely school directors, graduate school directors, and department heads from each of the three selected faculties. Students in their second to fifth year of studies at these three faculties were also invited to participate in focus group discussions.

The study indicates varying levels of awareness of and involvement with IQA policy among stakeholders at the university, depending on their positions and level of responsibility. About two-thirds of the academic and administrative staff were aware of the quality policy, which suggests that more communication on IQA is required to reach all university staff, and in particular all academics. Administrative staff, the majority of whom occupied leadership positions, were more involved in IQA and had a higher appreciation of its usefulness.

Table 7.1 Existence and usefulness of quality policy according to academic and administrative staff

		Quality policy (%)
Yes, the document exists and is useful in my work.	Academic staff	52
	Administrative staff	56
Yes, but the document is not useful in my work.	Academic staff	10
	Administrative staff	7
Yes, it exists but it is not necessary for my work.	Academic staff	4
	Administrative staff	4
No, the university does not have this type of document.	Academic staff	3
	Administrative staff	12
I don't know.	Academic staff	31
	Administrative staff	21
Total	Academic staff	100
	Administrative staff	100

The interview and focus group discussions found that academic staff in leadership positions tended to have a greater awareness of the quality policy and IQA instruments than academic staff who did not hold leadership positions. Student respondents indicated a lack of awareness of the existence of the quality policy, despite their participation in various activities related to quality at the university.

In terms of stakeholder involvement in IQA instruments, academic staff were more engaged in tools related to teaching and learning than those for employability. This may be a consequence of the fact that employability-related tools were either not yet completely in use or not a part of their responsibility. There are specialized units and positions responsible for implementing such tools, such as programme directors and the Office of Planning. The averages in *Table 7.2* were calculated from numerical values associated with response categories ranging from very important (= 5) to not at all (= 1) on a Likert scale.

Administrative staff respondents said they were most involved in target agreements, and that they received more feedback from them than from other IQA tools for management. They also rated this instrument the highest in terms of use and usefulness. Finally, while they generally viewed management instruments as having an overall positive effect on strategic planning, they considered external evaluation to be the IQA instrument with the greatest effect on the enhancement of strategic planning.

Table 7.2 Academic staff involvement in IQA tools for teaching and learning and employability

	Module evaluation	Programme evaluation	Teacher supervision	Programme self-evaluation	Programme monitoring	Student workload assessment	Graduate tracer studies	Employer satisfaction surveys	Employer involvement in study programme revision	Jobs market analysis	Student competences assessment
Involvement	3.1	2.6	1.7	3.1	2.6	2.0	1.9	1.7	1.5	1.5	3.2
Feedback	3.6	3.3	2.9	3.9	3.6	3.3	3.3	3.3	3.1	3.3	3.6
Use	3.6	3.5	3.0	4.0	3.7	3.5	3.3	3.5	3.4	0.7	3.7
Usefulness	3.4	3.7	3.5	4.2	3.8	3.7	3.6	3.9	3.7	3.9	3.7

Note: 1. course evaluation (by students), programme evaluation (by staff) and graduate tracer study are the IQA instruments used by academic staff, while target-level agreement is only applied to administrative staff. 2. Averages were calculated as follows: a) A numerical value was attributed to response categories with, for instance, 5 = very much and 1 = not at all. b) Averages were then calculated in the following way: (number of 'very much' responses × 5) + (number of … responses × 4) + (number of … responses × 3) + (number of … responses × 2) + (number of 'not at all' responses × 1) / the total number of responses.

Turning to conditioning factors, both academic and administrative staff agreed that leadership support was the internal conditioning factor most present at the university, while financial incentives were the least present. Interestingly, neither group of staff respondents viewed financial incentives as an important factor conditioning effective functioning of the IQA system. Student feedback, visibility of measures derived from IQA processes, and solidity of information systems were considered highly important yet were less present at the university. In the focus groups and interviews, leadership support was again highlighted as an important factor in promoting a quality culture within the university.

Table 7.3 Administrative staff involvement with IQA tools on management

	Internal evaluation	External evaluation	Certification	Target agreement
Involvement	3.1	2.8	1.5	4.0
Feedback	3.4	3.6	2.3	3.7
Use	3.3	3.5	2.5	3.9
Usefulness	3.8	3.9	3.1	4.2

Note: All figures are averages (see *Table 7.2* for explanation).

Table 7.4 Classification average of the importance and existence of internal factors

		Leadership support	Financial incentives for contributions from personnel	Student feedback	Visibility of measures derived from the IQA processes	Solidity of the information systems	Transparency in IQA processes	Assessment of the IQA processes	Active participation of the interest groups in the IQA processes
Academic staff	Importance	4.26	3.80	4.48	4.39	4.57	4.72	4.66	4.48
	Existence	3.34	2.87	3.23	2.96	3.10	3.26	3.28	3.10
Administrative staff	Importance	4.62	3.92	4.52	4.65	4.85	4.79	4.83	4.65
	Existence	3.56	2.93	3.09	3.04	3.06	3.29	3.30	3.21

Note: All figures are averages (see *Table 7.2* for explanation).

However, participants also emphasized the role of individuals at the university in this process, suggesting that a quality culture can be achieved by both top-down and bottom-up processes. One participant suggested the introduction of a permanent training programme on quality management for personnel and other stakeholders, and the inclusion of quality-assurance activities in individual target agreements to improve individual accountability for IQA. Academic staff in leadership positions also recognized that follow-up actions and feedback processes were essential for the effective functioning of the formalized IQA system. Academic staff identified institutional accreditation, a regulatory framework for quality assurance, and competition between institutions for status and funds as external factors that affect the university's IQA system.

Finally, both academic and administrative staff thought that the dominant paradigm of the university's IQA system was improvement, followed, at quite a distance, by compliance with external standards. This finding supports the idea that IQA at UT is seen as an internally driven process which is well aligned with the needs for self-regulation.

In terms of workload and benefits of IQA, administrative staff indicated a higher appreciation of the benefits relating to IQA instruments and processes, despite their higher workload. This further aligns with their positive evaluation of the IQA system in terms of improved management decisions and the overall effectiveness of the university.

Table 7.5 Overall paradigm of the IQA system

	Compliance with external standards (%)	Accountability towards stakeholders (%)	Enhance organizational learning (%)	Improvement (%)	Control (%)	Other (%)	Total (%)
Academic staff	15.1	3.2	3.2	68.8	7.5	2.2	100
Administrative staff	11.8	5.9	9.8	70.6	2	0	100

Note: Some figures were rounded off to the nearest decimal place. Hence some totals do not add up to 100%.

7.4 Conclusions

The analysis of IQA at UT demonstrates three good principles for the functioning of IQA.

Mainstreaming IQA mechanisms for university management processes. IQA mechanisms and instruments are entirely mainstreamed into university management processes. The organizational structure of the university has been transformed in the last two decades, creating new administrative structures responsible for improving and assuring university quality standards. These structures are present at all levels of the university to support IQA processes and tools, including in academic and administrative units, departments, collegial bodies, and committees, supporting the work of individuals responsible for quality assurance. The activities of each structure are governed by the university's strategic plan, which is translated into institutional strategic goals and then into unit and individual target agreements. The application of these

individual target agreements is monitored by university management. This indicates close integration of the IQA system with the management system at the university.

It is important to involve academic staff through professional development opportunities. There is a culture of self-evaluation and continuous improvement, as demonstrated by the university's provision of training workshops on quality assurance activities for academic staff. These workshops are organized around aspects related to self-evaluation processes, the design of evaluation guidelines, and syllabus design and improvement. Such institutional efforts have resulted in academic staff's relatively high level of awareness of and involvement in quality assurance processes. It has also contributed to curricular innovations, as well as the achievement of nationally and internationally comparable and recognized standards of quality.

Better involvement of stakeholders in IQA instruments and processes should be ensured. Despite these good features of the university's IQA system, there remain areas which could be improved for the effective functioning of the system, and lessons which could be applied to HEIs in similar institutional contexts. First, quality culture could be further strengthened through a more equal participation of all stakeholders in IQA instruments and processes. The study identified differing understandings of the IQA system among administrative staff, academic staff, and students. For instance, in terms of knowledge of the degree of development of quality assurance, administrative staff considered it to be lower in almost all areas, though they had a higher awareness and a greater sense of the usefulness of quality policy than did academic staff. Even among academic staff, different perceptions of the IQA system existed according to whether academic staff held a leadership position or not. Students mentioned that they were excluded from the process of developing the quality policy and from receiving relevant feedback from IQA instruments. In order to make the quality culture a lived reality for all stakeholders, various feedback loops should be introduced, together with the articulation and integration of some IQA mechanisms.

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Chapter 8

Developing a quality culture through internal dialogue at Vienna University of Economics and Business: 'The medium is still the message'

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Founded as the 'Imperial Export Academy' in 1898, Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien (WU) is Europe's largest higher education institution (HEI) focused on business and economics, with more than 22,000 undergraduate, masters, and doctoral students, and 11 academic departments in areas such as business and management, economics, social science, business law, natural science, and foreign languages. It employs some 750 academic staff, carrying out teaching and research, who produced over a thousand works for publication in 2014 (WU, 2015). Students and academic staff are supported by some 550 administrative staff members (WU, 2015).

The strategic mission and orientation of WU stem from its legal obligations, laid down in the Universities Act of 2002. Its mission is to 'contribute to the personal development of the individual, and to the welfare of society and the environment' (UG, 2002: §1). WU is a public university, mostly financed by the state, and although it has full autonomy over its staffing and academic programmes, agreements between the Ministry of Education and the university are subject to triennial performance contracts.

WU is a long-standing member of various international networks of business schools, such as PIM (Partnership in International Management) and CEMS (Community of European Management Schools and International Companies) and is a member of EQUIS (European Quality Improvement System accreditation, awarded by the European Foundation of Management) and AACSB (the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business).

The university law of 2002 requires all public universities to develop internal quality assurance (IQA) systems, although they are free within generous limits to choose any approach that fits their own structures and cultures. Public universities are also obliged under the Quality Assurance Act (QS-HRG) to conduct institutional quality audits to review the status of their IQA. They are allowed to choose any agency in the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies (EQAR) for external quality assurance (EQA). For WU, the audit is effectively equated with its EQUIS accreditation.

Austria follows the Bologna Process, a commitment by European governments 'to pursue complementary higher education reforms in order to establish a 'European Higher Education Area' of compatible national higher education systems' (Keeling, 2006: 207), and this has meant that WU has been and remains strongly influenced by European higher education policies. The Bologna Process was set up with the goals of strengthening the attractiveness and competitiveness of European higher education and of fostering student employability and mobility within the region. The process has grown and changed, and now touches upon almost all aspects of higher education. From its inception, the Bologna Process recognized quality assurance and quality enhancement as critical to the achievement of its goals (EHEA, 2015); it was even framed in many member states as the 'quality reform' (EUA, 2007). The process has come increasingly to direct attention to issues such as student engagement in quality assurance processes, feedback mechanisms for teaching and learning, and staff awareness of quality enhancement processes (Gvaramazde, 2008). On the European level one of the most important policy documents on quality assurance is the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG), which functions as a framework of politically agreed principles of good practice to provide guidance on quality assurance for HEIs and quality assurance agencies.

European higher education policy is not the only international influence on WU's strategies and processes: over the course of the last decade, WU has achieved the so called 'triple crown' of major international business school accreditations – EQUIS, AMBA, and AACSB. EQUIS and AACSB are accreditations at institutional level and cover all areas of an institution, including strategy and governance, resource management, quality and development of academic staff, research and teaching, and learning. AMBA (the Association of

MBAs) accredits individual executive education programmes. These accreditations have brought about several crucial developments in the governance and organizational structure of WU, and have also made a major contribution to fostering dialogue on quality issues within the institution. This focus on dialogue is one of the most prominent features of WU's IQA system and a cornerstone of its quality culture approach.

In recent years, the European University Association (EUA) has proposed using the concept of quality culture as a tool for reflection on quality assurance from a cultural perspective (Vettori, 2012). Portraying and describing the IQA system of WU as an application of the concept of quality culture directs attention towards aspects that are less procedural and instrument-oriented than might be expected. Quality culture needs to be understood as 'context' rather than as a set of procedures (cf. Harvey, 2009).

This chapter is based on a case study developed as a part of the IIEP research project on IQA. Drawing from the case study findings, it aims to reflect the current development of the IQA system at WU and its effects on various aspects of the university (i.e. teaching and learning, employability, and management) from the angle of quality culture. It focuses on the social (in particular, communicative) environment in which such procedures have to be embedded in order to become effective.

8.1 IQA at WU – quality culture as a culture of communication

The University Act 2002 granted full institutional autonomy to all Austrian public universities in the establishment and development of their institutional quality management systems, and so led directly to the introduction of major reforms in quality assurance in Austrian higher education. The design of a quality management system, the choice of quality management instruments and procedures, the definition of the competencies of the IQA units, and decisions as to which processes should be implemented at what organizational level were now all left to the universities (Hanft and Kohler, 2007). Public universities were required by the Quality Assurance Act (QS-HRG) to review the status of their IQA by conducting institutional quality audits. They were allowed to choose any agency from EQAR for EQA.

WU's quality assurance framework is based on the 'quality culture' concept developed by the EUA,[25] focusing on aspects such as communication and organizational learning. In essence, the quality culture concept aims at reframing quality assurance as a core value of HEIs instead of an externally imposed chore: 'A culture of quality is one in which everybody in the organization, not just the quality controllers, is responsible for quality' (Crosby, 1986 cited in Harvey and Green, 1993: 16). The approach puts a strong emphasis on the behaviour of stakeholders rather than the on operation of a quality system (Harvey, 2007: 81), or, differently phrased: 'The existence of an in-house quality assurance system does not guarantee a quality culture' (Yorke, 2000: 23). Consequently, quality at WU is thought of as a value that has to be supported by the whole institutional community and nurtured on many levels and by various means.

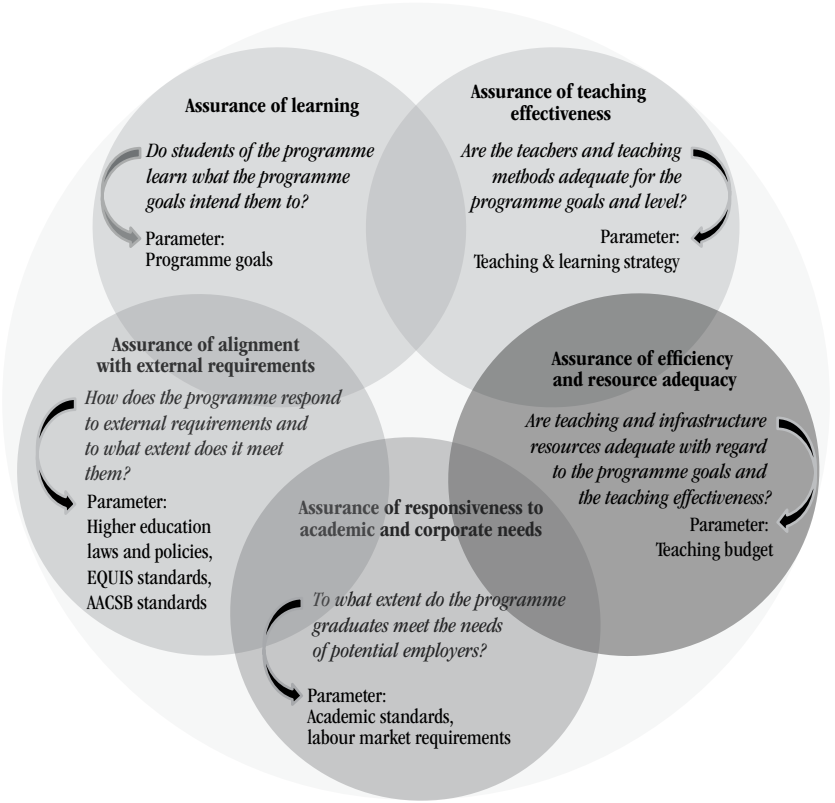
Putting this idea into practice, however, is not easy: quality assurance – in particular the managerial hopes attached to it – leans heavily towards top-down approaches and centralization, and is always threatening to sway the entire culture in this direction. The only way to counter this tendency is through stakeholder involvement, although there is a strong inherent danger that any attempt to 'engage' different actors in the quality endeavour will make them feel that they are acting out an externally imposed script instead of feeling true ownership of their own efforts.

Overall, WU's IQA system operates on five different dimensions: learning effectiveness, teaching effectiveness, efficiency and resource adequacy, responsiveness to academic and corporate needs, and alignment with external requirements (see *Figure 8.1*).

The last two dimensions can also be regarded as the link between WU's internal and EQA processes. IQA and EQA are regarded as two sides of the same coin, meaning they are closely aligned but offer completely different views on the same phenomenon, and so demand different approaches, on the strategic *and* operational levels.

25. WU acted as network coordinator for Round II of EUA's Quality Culture project from 2003 to 2005.

Figure 8.1 Main quality dimensions of WU's IQA system



The instruments and activities on each dimension can be grouped into three broad processes: quality analysis, quality development, and quality dialogue. And each of these three processes operates through active communication between actors at all levels. In terms of quality analysis, WU's quality assurance experts have developed and assembled a toolbox of analytical instruments that cover all of the five dimensions and are designed to ensure maximum usability of the data. Reporting of data is therefore recognized as a key element of each analytical tool. Regular analytical tools and methods at WU include programme evaluations, course evaluations, peer feedback processes, learning analytics, workload analyses, study progress analyses, and assessment analytics, as well as initiatives such as Student and Graduate Panel monitoring (where each student cohort of each programme is surveyed at the beginning of, during, and after their studies) or WU's labour market tracking (where graduates' labour market performance is monitored based on their social security data).

Wherever possible, quality assurance processes at WU are an integrated part of actual management or developmental processes – though not always flagged out as such. This corresponds to one of the key principles of WU's quality culture approach. Borrowing from Raymond Williams' (cultural studies) definition of culture (Williams, 1989), quality culture at WU is perceived as a way of life, signalling that quality assurance systems should be less preoccupied with technicalities than with adding value to the sense-making and improvement efforts of individual actors. In a nutshell: quality in teaching and learning is not created by a quality assurance system but in the interactions between teachers and students. The system just needs to ensure that these interactions are as fruitful and productive as possible. Central instruments for quality development at WU include a complex yet at the same time very efficient curriculum review and development process, awards for innovative teaching, excellent teaching, and e-teaching (Vettori and Blüml, 2010), comprehensive tutoring and mentoring programmes, online tutorials for teachers and students (in the form of an open-access Teaching and Learning Academy and a student support area), and one of the best-used institutional e-learning and communication platforms in global higher education – Learn@WU.

Finally, as was indicated by the importance placed on an effective and resource-efficient reporting process and the overarching communication principle within WU's system, considerable time and effort is put into dialogue with internal and external stakeholders about quality, not just in terms of obtaining feedback, but in discussing and deciding changes to make that arise from analytically generated findings. Consequently, generating the right kind of data in a timely fashion is one part, but only one, of a functioning IQA system. Making sure the data are both useful and widely used is of equal importance. In order to ensure the data's usefulness, programme directors give regular feedback on the development of the reporting system. Yet, the structure of the overall system ensures that the approach to problems and challenges does not become too 'socio-technical'. There is general acceptance of the need for joint sense-making sessions among the involved parties, where they can interpret findings and negotiate interpretations, while also establishing agreements on future steps and actions.

Programme evaluations are an example of an IQA activity that leads to internal dialogue. Study programmes and their contexts are constantly

changing, driven by shifts in the number of applications, labour market need, legal conditions, and so on. WU's programme evaluations, conducted approximately every six years, are designed to improve the curriculum using indicators and feedback from relevant stakeholders, such as employers or representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), professional associations, and social partners.

The annual programme evaluation reports used by programme management, supplemented by additional benchmarking and contextual data, are the foundation of WU's regular programme evaluations (see *Figure 8.2*). Moving away from the traditional format of self-assessment/peer review, a one-day workshop is at the centre of WU's programme evaluations, involving a variety of relevant actors and stakeholders (programme management, university management, students, alumni, teachers, labour market representatives, and academic peers from abroad). The evaluation workshops are designed to recruit and juxtapose different perspectives on the same problem and to negotiate the most relevant claims, concerns, and issues. Responsibility for the evaluations lies with the respective programme directors (PDs), but close collaboration with WU's Programme and Quality Management (PQM) department ensures that the most important findings are followed up. Similar procedures have been built into most of WU's quality assurance instruments and processes.

Such internal dialogue activities at WU are complemented by various communicative activities with the world and the stakeholders outside the university. A key element of WU's quality assurance system is regular dialogue with employers, the Federal Ministry of Science, Research, and Economy, the EQUIS and AACSB communities, graduates, and peers from other institutions. This is evidenced by the two externally oriented quality assurance dimensions already mentioned: responsiveness to external requirements, and responsiveness to academic and professional needs and standards. Labour market representatives are, as has been described above, a part of any programme development and evaluation process, as are members of professional associations and, in some cases, representatives from Austrian social partner institutions. This is complemented by the engagement of WU's quality assurance experts in national and international discourse, and their contribution to the development of quality assurance via publications and presentations.[26]

26. WU is the coordinating institution of the Austrian universities' Network for Quality Management and Quality Development.

Figure 8.2 WU's programme evaluation process

Analysis of WU's communicative efforts in developing its internal quality culture (as the foundation of the IQA system) has been a pivotal aspect of the IIEP research. As has already been mentioned, WU's IQA system is rooted in the belief that the role of language and communication is pivotal when setting up an IQA system that is effective in terms of stakeholder engagement and satisfaction. Every organization relies on communication, and the effectiveness of building trust and participatory structures through regular stakeholder communication is universally emphasized in international quality assurance discourse (cf. Vettori and Loukkola, 2013). Social meaning has to be created by the actors themselves; it cannot be given or attributed to them by others. Meaning itself is conceived as fluid rather than static, and as a process rather than an outcome (cf. Vettori and Warm, 2015).

8.2 Assessing WU's quality culture

The views of the different internal stakeholders on the usefulness of WU's IQA elements – and the actors' awareness of their existence – were at the centre of the empirical research that this chapter is based on. Different data sources were triangulated for an in-depth exploration of stakeholder perceptions of the university's IQA system. The perceptions of academics from three departments – finance, accounting, and statistics; socio-economics; and foreign language business communication – and administrative staff from all over the university were investigated using two online surveys[27] specifically adapted to those IQA instruments most familiar to academic and administrative staff at WU. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions[28] were also conducted with senior management, academic and administrative staff, and students in order to capture their perceptions in greater depth. In addition, data drawn from an internal analysis of strengths and weaknesses conducted by WU's Department for Programme and Quality Management, and information from various internal documents (such as the strategic development plan, annual reports, and accreditation reports), were used in the study.

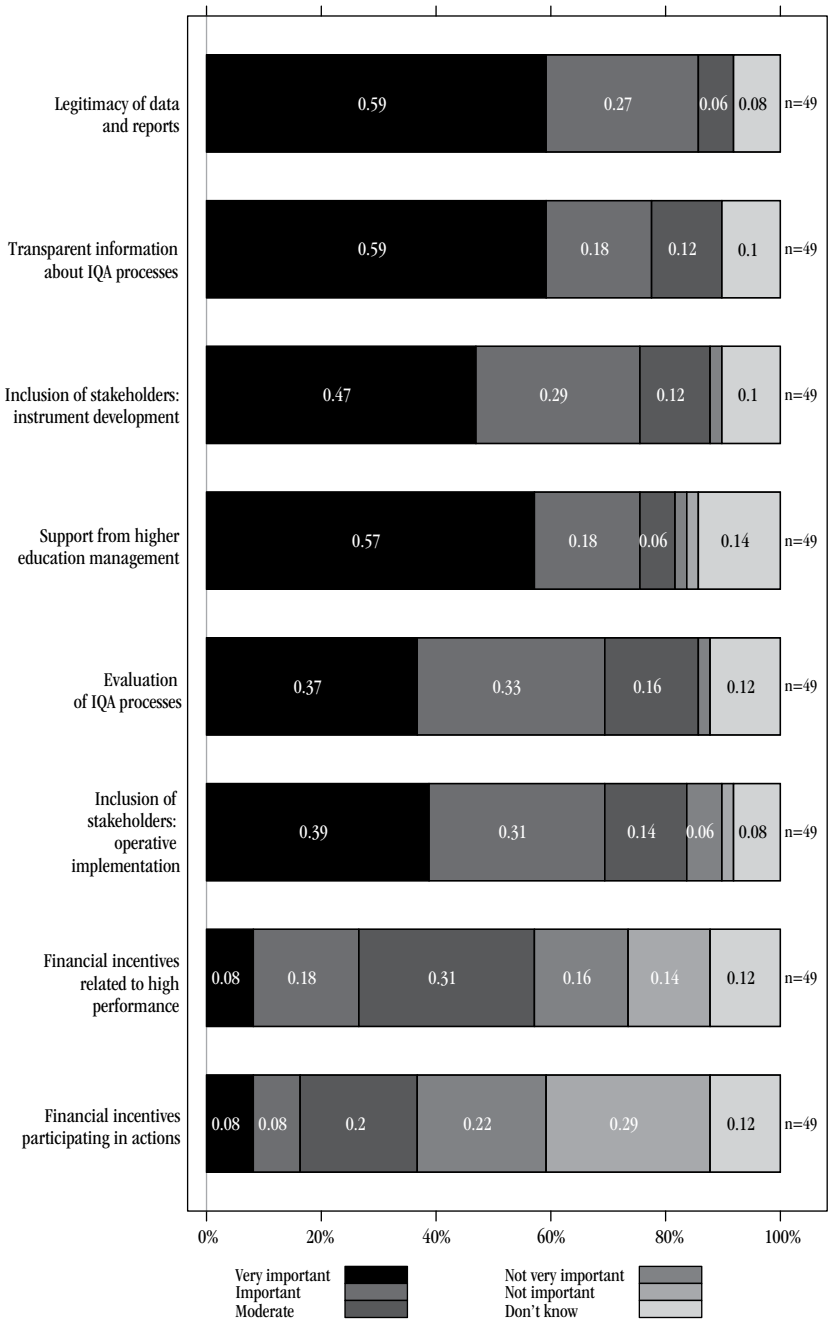
27. The survey questionnaire was disseminated to 451 academic staff, of whom 70 (15.52 per cent) responded, and to 86 administrative staff, 39 (45.35 per cent) of whom responded.
28. Eleven senior and middle-level academic and administrative decision-makers (such as department chairs and programme managers) were selected for individual face-to-face interviews or focus group discussions.

Overall, all staff rate WU's IQA approach and the system into which it is translated as highly effective and reflexive, particularly in the area of teaching and learning. One department head identified the main strengths of the IQA system at WU as the high level of innovation and the large pool of available IQA instruments and processes.

The quantitative data clearly showed that even though academic staff experience intense IQA activities in teaching and learning, they are not reluctant to engage with them, and there is a comparatively high level of demand for further measures and activities, although the majority are satisfied with the current level (Vettori *et al.*, 2017). Administrative staff would like to see more efforts made in their working areas, as well as additional training to improve their work. Overall, however, there is little evidence of resistance to more quality assurance, indicating that quality culture is already rooted within WU. This was demonstrated convincingly by one of the interviewees, an academic quality promoter at departmental level. He wanted to see IQA integrated into daily work: no formal IQA system would be needed if everyone internalized the relevant aspects and applied them to their everyday practice; the main task of the quality assurance unit should be to set a framework and provide the necessary infrastructure, such as reports, or an online teaching support area.

Another quality promoter proposed that the implementation of quality assurance instruments and processes should largely be decentralized, as the variety of situations and challenges in individual departments made it necessary to manage them locally. Although keeping a balance between centralization and decentralization is an ongoing challenge, WU seems to have found an effective equilibrium: the decentralized programme units and central administration share responsibilities for day-to-day programme management; every academic programme director is supported by an administrative programme coordinator who is in in regular contact with the vice-rector for academic programmes and student affairs and the Programme and Quality Management Department; monitoring processes support programme management in identifying problems and areas for development such as providing regular data on admission numbers, student performance, retention, and satisfaction, and the jobs market integration of graduates.

Figure 8.3 Success factors of IQA from the perspective of academic staff



Most WU academics felt that the legitimacy of the data and reports generated by the system and the transparency of information about IQA (see *Figure 8.3*) were the most important factors in the success of WU's IQA. This is only to be expected: if the methodology behind the instruments is sound and the data are trustworthy, decision-making based on them will command acceptance in an academic community where high academic and scientific standards are accepted as the basis for discourse and progress. Correspondingly, almost every interviewee from the university's management praised the professional and efficient way in which data are gathered and analysed at WU. One programme director saw a particular strength in the strong empirical evidence that IQA provided (for instance, alumni and student surveys) as a starting-point for any discussion – encouraging and supporting informed discussion is one of the foundational principles of WU's IQA system. Another programme manager emphasized the professional processing of large amounts of data, the gathering of indicators, and, again, a sound empirical basis as key strengths of the system.

It also became clear, however, that the generation and analysis of data is not sufficient: effective communication is crucial – transforming data into information and delivering it to the actors who need it. Growing professionalization in reporting over the past few years was seen to be a vital development in this respect. According to one programme manager, compiling the key indicators of the programme director's report in the central Programme and Quality Management Department enables the programme director and programme coordinator to analyse relevant trends without their having to create a specific reporting system.

These findings indicate the importance of an effective formal communication architecture as the structural foundation of a quality culture. Reporting processes need to be a part of this architecture. Individual responsibility within an IQA system built around a quality culture does not mean, though, that there is no need for informed decision-making; rather, shared sense-making efforts have to be a part of the overall communication design.

Although WU's information system for IQA, the backbone of its managerial processes, was held in high regard by all actor groups (with exception of the students, who rarely come in contact with it), the authors' analysis of the system found there was room for improvement. First, we found too many isolated reports that simply followed the logic

of the survey or data query upon which they were based. A management information system needs to be more than a data warehouse that collates data sources; it should bring the right kind of data to users, and make sense of the findings. There has to be a structured environment in which people can exchange their views on problems and challenges, and a climate in which they are willing to do so, defining a problem and developing acceptable solutions (both at the heart of any IQA cycle in higher education). In this process, aligning different stakeholder perspectives is a key function – and a key challenge – for an IQA system. This has to be applied across disciplines and roles within an institution – and in awareness of the need to balance centralized and decentralized responsibilities.

According to one senior manager at the rectorate level, WU has a long tradition of constructive dialogue, something which seems to be a sine qua non for a communicative culture. Such a culture of mutual understanding and discourse about quality, which WU has been cultivating for more than a decade now, has encouraged actors at every level to engage with quality improvement efforts. As a result, WU's academic staff regard incentives and rewards as largely irrelevant to the success of IQA, as was shown by the survey results (Vettori *et al.*, 2017).

WU's clear communication structures and constant dialogue, however, is also appreciated by a completely different actor group – students. In their focus group interviews, students defined the success of the IQA system not in terms of its processes but by its impact on their learning gains. To them, the quality of education is characterized by clear responsibilities, effective contact persons who support them, an adequate staff: student ratio, and regular communication between administrative and academic staff and students.

The student focus group interviews revealed a potential weakness of the current system. By their own accounts, students are only familiar with some small parts of the overall system; they lack any 'backstage insights', and are rarely informed about its achievements. As with other groups, students comprehend quality via proxies, but their proxies differ from those of the other groups. For students, the proxies are the image of the university, the duration of their studies, and their prospects of employability. As long as feedback loops are only implemented in one direction (i.e. with the students providing feedback but not knowing what happens afterwards), neither the students nor the university's

management can benefit fully from cooperation on quality development. In other words, the communicative quality culture at WU needs to be extended to include students and graduates in a more meaningful way. Infusing processes with meaning and helping actors to make sense of the organization and its environment are, in our view, two of the most intriguing (and important) challenges for quality assurance systems – at WU and in general.

8.3 Conclusions

This chapter reflects the role of quality culture in the IQA system at WU. The case study findings indicate that this concept provides a strong foundation for IQA processes to be integrated into the work of different units and stakeholders in the university. However, the achievement of a quality culture is incomplete, notably in the matter of the restricted involvement of students in IQA processes. The following are some of the recent institutional efforts and approaches to further strengthen quality culture at the university:

True dialogue and frequent negotiation of different perspectives and interpretations are necessary. Such an approach does not only fulfil a social function. Feedback obtained through different instruments is usually contradictory and does not offer clear, precise information on the causes of a problem or the potential solutions – deriving actions from such mixed feedback is not as easy as is implied in political or scholarly discourse. Consequently, WU is constantly experimenting with the format of its analytical studies and reports in efforts to make them connectable to different actors' realities and ensure that the information is actually taken up and fed into intra- and inter-institutional discourses. Recent developments in this regard include the development of 'theme reports' that compile data and information from various sources and integrate them into assessments of one complex yet relevant topic (such as an employment report, or a social status report); or the production of 'info bits' – short e-mails containing one particularly timely or new piece of information that are directed to the university's senior management and service units. In order to bridge the sense-making gap between quality assurance professionals and students, and to complete the information loop as described above, an improvement report is currently being finalized that informs students of steps that have been taken based on their feedback (and thus also signals to them the impact of their contributions to the IQA system).

Communications are difficult to manage or control. It is fatally easy to create serious unintended consequences. We have already argued that information is rarely interpreted in the way the communicator intends it to be. Even communication channels are usually imbued with meaning and treated accordingly. Putting the latest quality assurance achievements in the official institutional newsletter might stir the interest of external stakeholders, but can also lead to the internal view that this is 'just another marketing trend' (cf. Vettori and Loukkola, 2013). The fact that social meaning is predominantly created and conveyed through language leads us back to the important question of how issues, changes, and innovations are labelled and framed. Whether an activity is characterized as 'a get-together for developmental purposes'; or 'an annual performance appraisal' makes a huge difference. Announcing a new process as 'a necessary new quality assurance instrument' signals something completely different than calling it 'a way of making the curriculum development process more efficient'. At WU, for example, the term 'internal quality assurance' is hardly ever used in internal communications. Exploiting the strong link between IQA and programme management, most issues that would be viewed as part of the former (at least from an outside perspective) are framed as being part of the latter. Academic programmes have been a part of the structure and routine of HEIs for decades, hence the language related to them is far more familiar, unthreatening, and compatible with the institution's historically grown cultures, structures, and processes. In this way, a quality culture is not so much 'developed' as it emerges. Ultimately, it is the actions and interactions of the people, within and outside the institution, that constitute a university (much in the same way as the quality of teaching and learning is a co-production of teachers and learners; managers and quality assurance professionals have a merely contextual role). Consequently, any successful system builds on these relations and strengthens them. In this regard, understanding IQA as the management of relationships is certainly an approach to be recommended to any higher education institution.

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Chapter 9

Integrating stakeholders' perspectives for improving quality at Xiamen University

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Since 1999, higher education in China has grown in leaps and bounds, in parallel with the nation's economic growth. The development of higher education has been considered crucial for the economic and social development of the country, with the former National Planning and Development Commission and the Ministry of Education jointly announcing a plan in 1999 to increase higher education enrolment. Moreover, in its Programme for the Reform and Development of Education in the Medium and Long Term (2010–2020), the Chinese government envisaged that by 2020 the nation's education system would be largely modernized and that a learning society would take shape, with the enrolment rate reaching a target of 40 per cent. Under such government initiatives, China's gross higher education enrolment rate has surged from 10.5 per cent in 1999 to 34.5 per cent in 2015, with total enrolment increasing from 8,504,900 students to 25,477,000. Accordingly, the total number of higher education institutions (HEIs) also grew, from 1,071 to 2,845. With the upsurge in the overall number of HEIs, the sector's composition has become more diverse, leading to a coexistence of central government-affiliated institutions, regional government-affiliated institutions, and private institutions.

As part of the legacy of centralized economic planning, higher education quality assurance was initially an activity driven externally by the Chinese government. The Chinese government sits at the apex of the nation's higher education system, controlling the allocation of funds and other resources required for the development of higher education, and taking charge of the operations, administration, and quality assessment of the institutions. During the 1990s, in response to public demand for greater accountability and better quality, the Chinese Ministry of Education instituted a system to assess HEIs every five years. Under this system, institutions of different types, at different levels and in different stages of development, are subject to compulsory institutional evaluation.

HEIs in China can also submit themselves to voluntary programme accreditation. In 2016, a new methodology combining periodic external evaluation with regular quality monitoring was developed. This system represented the first step towards the establishment of assessment standards and systems for the quality of higher education in the country. It has significantly increased institutions' commitment to quality.

While speeding up the development of internal management systems, individual HEIs face several challenges to improve their human resource base and physical infrastructure. Moreover, while the development of IQA in universities is encouraged by the Chinese government, the inner impetus for IQA remains weak, and the paths for advancing IQA are often unclear in many institutions. Many of their internal units are still insufficiently aware of the importance of quality assurance and are only modestly committed to it. The low institutional capacity for IQA in many institutions reflects the continuing dominance of externally driven quality assurance in the Chinese higher education landscape.

For the purpose of enabling universities to build effective IQA systems that fit their local conditions, this chapter concentrates on the issue of stakeholder involvement in IQA. Since its formulation, the quality assurance concept for higher education has been closely linked with the stakeholder concept. In its glossary,[29] the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) defines quality assurance in higher education as the process of enhancing stakeholder trust and providing measures as expected in order to meet the minimum requirements of stakeholders (HEQC, 1994: 61). In order to ensure quality, it is thus crucial for institutions to build an IQA system involving all stakeholders and characterized by the joint governance of all of them. Stakeholders can include administrative and academic staff, students, government representatives, employers and third-party assessment agencies involved in the university's IQA, and others who have responsibilities for or who will be affected by the quality of the higher education system.

29. This definition was taken from the Analytic Quality Glossary available on the INQAAHE website: http://qualityresearchinternational.com/glossary/qualitymanagement.htm

This chapter focuses on IQA at Xiamen University (XMU), where strong stakeholder involvement is one of the innovative features of IQA. XMU is among China's most prominent research universities. It offers a comprehensive choice of disciplines, including arts, humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, engineering and technology, management sciences, and medicine. In 2014, 35,759 students were enrolled at the university, including 19,379 undergraduates, 10,761 master's students, and 3,001 doctoral students.

In order to investigate the level of stakeholder involvement at XMU, the chapter exploits data from a case study, conducted as part of the IIEP research project on IQA, concerned mainly with the perceptions of stakeholders in terms of quality-related documents, IQA instruments and processes, and internal conditioning factors.

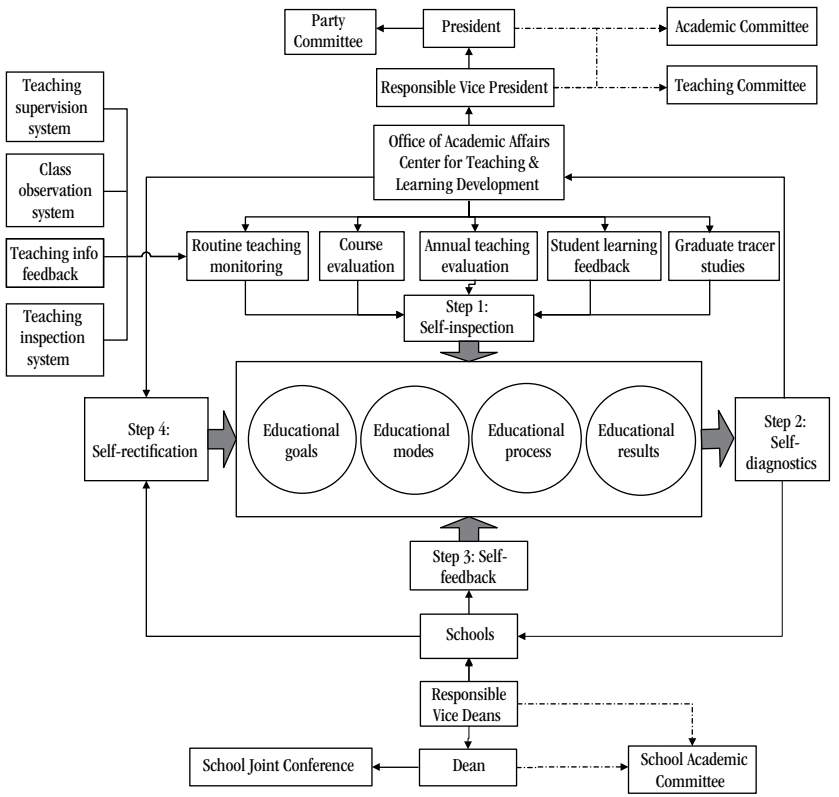
9.1 XMU's model of IQA based on accountability towards stakeholders

XMU has developed an efficient and effective IQA system for teaching and learning over the past 20 years, through which it has collected data from various internal and external stakeholders. One of the innovative elements of the university's IQA system is its integration of various stakeholder perspectives on the quality of education. These stakeholders include students, alumni, academic and administrative staff, and employers, all of whom have been actively engaged in the provision of information for IQA at the university.

Following a number of exploratory efforts, the university has developed a university-wide system involving the four main elements of self-inspection, self-diagnosis, self-feedback, and self-modification (see *Figure 9.1*) to monitor routine teaching activities and evaluate teaching quality.

Self-inspection: This component usually comprises regular and special self-inspection led by the university's Office of Academic Affairs. Regular self-inspection involves compiling data from teaching supervision, teaching observation (class auditing), teaching feedback (from students), and mid-term teaching inspection, as well as routine work responding to problems that arise during teaching. Special self-inspection includes annual undergraduate evaluation, annual teaching inspection (by experts), and annual course evaluation (by graduates and undergraduates).

Figure 9.1 Workflow of IQA activities at XMU



Self-diagnosis: The university's Office of Academic Affairs issues reports from the compilation of data generated from self-inspection. These reports, which are based on factual evidence and data, help to summarize and analyse achievements and challenges in teaching, as well as providing suggestions and opinions. The reports are forwarded to the vice-president in charge of academic affairs, with copies sent to deans and other college-level leaders in charge of academic affairs. These, in turn, conduct self-diagnosis on specific problems.

Self-feedback: The Office of Academic Affairs holds a university-wide undergraduate evaluation feedback meeting or workshop each semester. Attendees typically include deputy deans of academic affairs from various colleges, directors of various departments, and staff in charge of undergraduate education, as well as staff from the Office of Academic Affairs, the Teachers' Development Centre, the teaching inspection

team, and the Teaching Committee. Drawing on the feedback provided by participants, the head of the Office of Academic Affairs summarizes achievements, highlights any problems, and provides relevant guidance. Students are invited to attend these workshops.

Self-rectification: In following up on recommendations from the feedback meeting or workshop, colleges must organize relevant activities of self-analysis and self-criticism and come up with self-modification plans. The Office of Academic Affairs must also propose general modification plans and measures with reference to the requests of experts at the feedback meeting.

The involvement of other stakeholders in the IQA system is also well demonstrated in a number of IQA tools at XMU, as described below (see also *Table 2.3* in *Chapter 2*).

Student course assessment was introduced at XMU in 1999, and is one of the oldest IQA tools in use at the university. It collects information from students on teachers' punctuality, attitude towards students, course preparation, mastery of subject knowledge, classroom activities, student performance assessment, time allocation, interaction with students, feedback to questions, and classroom management. This is followed by an open-ended question inviting suggestions for course improvement. Special working groups have been set up to process and analyse the data obtained from course assessment at different levels of the university. The groups identify problems and give feedback to relevant colleges and teachers. Colleges are encouraged to reward high-performing teachers and to support those who need to improve their teaching quality through face-to-face meetings, hands-on direction, and guidance.

The university set up **a teaching supervision system involving staff and students** in 1997 to oversee undergraduate education. This system involves retired teachers who help investigate relevant issues, enforce the rules of exams, and facilitate timely reaction to feedback from students. Their presence has done much to promote quality education. Since 2005, the university has also required administrators and leaders at all levels to engage in classroom observation and to develop a deeper understanding of the quality of teaching. Senior leaders must observe a lecture at least four times a year, administrators in the Office of Academic Affairs at least 12 times, other mid-level administrators six times, and college officers at least 10 times. Students also take part in teaching supervision. Class leaders collect feedback from other students for mid-term evaluation and

report it to the counsellors and deans in charge of academic affairs. A mid-term teaching inspection meeting is convened in each college. The dean of teaching, the deputy secretary of student affairs, and counsellors are required to attend the meeting in order to respond to issues identified by students and deliver feedback to relevant teachers.

The university conducts **programme evaluation by student surveys** every year. This consists of educational experience surveys for both new students and graduating students. The surveys measure the level of student satisfaction with programme curricula and assessment methods. The former has been conducted every autumn since 2008, while the latter has been given to students each spring since 2009. The educational experience survey for graduating students further investigates their level of satisfaction in relation to professional development and academic growth. Results of the surveys are compiled in the student educational experience report. The results give the university empirical information that helps departments and university leaders assess undergraduate programmes.

Since the launch of the student educational experience survey in 2008, XMU has conducted **student workload assessments** to examine the total number of classes each student attends, the number of English-taught courses they take, the amount of coursework they are assigned, and the requirements for completing those assignments. Student workload assessment thus gathers information on each course and monitors its work schedule as well as its students' workloads (XMU Career Centre, 2011). This enables the university to better understand the workload of students in order to increase the effectiveness of education in the classroom and facilitate a better environment for study.

Graduate tracer studies involve recent graduates evaluating the relevance of the education offered at university by tracking their career status and professional progress. This is done using two-part questionnaires. The first part of the questionnaire asks graduates to indicate their employment status, the nature and prospects of their position (if they are employed), and the location of their employment. The second asks them for their opinion of the education and professional development they received at XMU. They are also asked to provide suggestions as to how the university's job-placement services, development system, professional guidance, and entrepreneurial training might be improved (XMU Career Centre, 2011).

The employer satisfaction survey aims to understand the needs of employers on the basis of their evaluation of XMU graduates and to use the suggestions they make to improve the university's education and professional development. This survey was first conducted in 2011. Sent to employers attending the campus jobs fair, the survey included questions about overall satisfaction with XMU graduates, their reasons for choosing XMU graduates, their assessment of the abilities and work-readiness of XMU graduates, and the workplace performance of recent XMU graduates.

In 2012, XMU involved **employers in the revision of its undergraduate academic programmes**. This revision allowed the university to identify employers' needs and take on board their suggestions concerning preparation for the labour market. Their involvement has resulted in a series of reforms to strengthen the employment orientation of various programmes. For example, the School of Management established a general education programme for industrial and commercial management, while the College of Architecture and Civil Engineering introduced a curriculum focusing on 'civil engineering application and materials'. The School of Management also began inviting executives from various companies to give guest lecturers in order to improve its academic programme plans and teaching methods.

Unit self-evaluation is based on the self-assessment of colleges and departments at XMU. It aims to encourage colleges and departments to improve their educational, research, and social outputs, and to make the management of these tasks more scientific and standardized. For example, in 2013, each college at the university evaluated its final examinations and student performance levels, its use of educational funds, and the status of its unified major programmes. In 2014, XMU assessed teachers' PowerPoint presentation materials, student assignments, exam papers, and the graduation thesis quality of each course at each college. The evaluations resulted in the introduction of a number of improvement plans focused on university management goals for annual work planning and resource allocation.

Service-level agreement is conducted by the administrative staff of XMU under the personnel management system. It is based on a set of regulations concerning employment conditions. These regulations cover employment opportunities, employee contracts, employee evaluations, and dismissal procedures (XMU, 2005). Personnel management is

undertaken by the university's Office of Human Resources and the Appointment Committee (of which the university's president is director), based on these regulations. The office summarizes, reapproves, and decides whether or not to continue employing an individual. The results are then recorded and filed. The notice for assessment is provided by the Office of Human Resources, and the paper assessment by the official in charge. This enables them to assess the employee's performance, fulfilment of responsibilities, and development.

9.2 Empirical analysis of stakeholder involvement

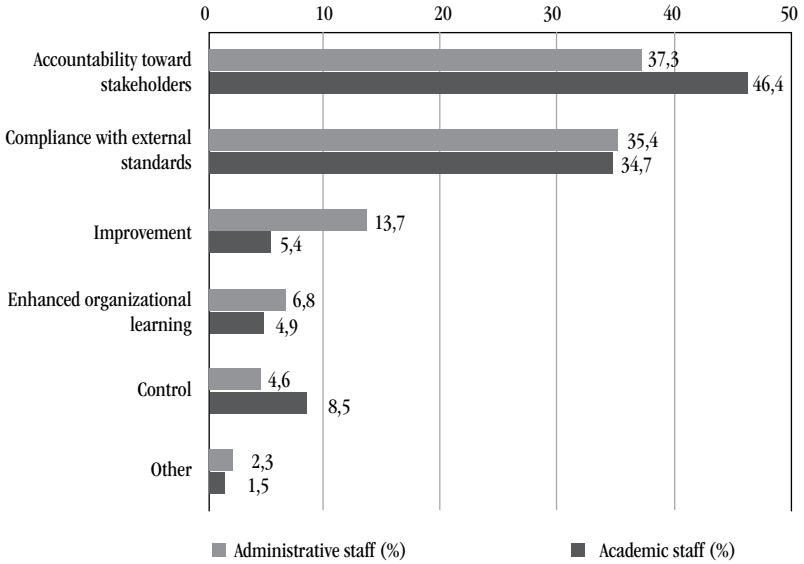
In order to investigate the perceived extent to which the university's IQA system ensured stakeholder involvement, this study focused on stakeholder perceptions of different aspects of the university's IQA system, including the IQA paradigm, the IQA policy and manual, IQA tools, and factors that facilitate or hinder the effectiveness of the IQA system. Stakeholders' perceptions were examined through both online survey questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Two quantitative online surveys[30] were first administered, to academic and administrative staff. Academic staff perceptions were measured in relation to IQA tools in the field of teaching and learning, on the one hand, and employability, on the other, while the investigation of administrative staff perceptions was limited to IQA tools in the area of management. In order to capture in greater depth the viewpoints of different stakeholders at the university, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were also conducted with academic and administrative leaders in senior and middle-level leadership positions[31] as well as with students.[32] Participating staff and students were selected from five XMU colleges – the College of Humanities, the School of Management, the School of Architecture and Civil Engineering, the College of Foreign Languages and Cultures, and

30. The survey questionnaire was disseminated to 2,703 academic staff, of whom 853 (31.56 per cent) responded, and to 399 administrative staff, 88 (21.9 per cent) of whom responded.
31. The vice-deans of academic affairs in five XMU colleges were interviewed for the case study, along with 12 heads of departments and research institutes within these colleges. Similarly, the heads of five administrative units – the Office of Academic Affairs, the Office of Student Affairs, the Office of International Cooperation and Exchange, the Office of Human Resources, and the Office of Development and Planning – were interviewed.
32. The 28 students interviewed for the case study were student representatives from the university's Siming and Xiang'an campuses, representing 15 different colleges and all years of study. In addition, focus group interviews were conducted with 17 student representatives.

the School of Physics and Mechanical and Electrical Engineering – to further differentiate subject cultures.

Both academic and administrative staff were asked about their perceptions of the main paradigm for IQA at the university. The results of the survey showed that the main paradigm of the IQA system was considered by both academic and administrative staff to be accountability to stakeholders, with 46.4 per cent and 37.3 per cent, respectively (see *Figure 9.2*).

Figure 9.2 Main paradigm of IQA at XMU



An IQA policy and manual are both important references for a university's IQA system, but they can be only effective if internal stakeholders are aware of them, and if they view them positively. The study findings (see *Table 9.1*) show that both academic and administrative staff understood and recognized the university's IQA policy and manual, reporting that the IQA policy and manual were useful in guiding their work. In comparison, students indicated in focus group discussions that they had a lower level of understanding of the university's IQA system. They were, however, aware of certain IQA processes or tools, such as course evaluations, teacher supervision, and meetings with staff. Students also expressed a wish for greater access to the information generated by these tools.

Table 9.1 Staff awareness of quality policy and manual

		Quality policy (%)	Quality manual (%)
Yes, these documents exist and they are useful for my work	Academic staff	55.2	63.36
	Administrative staff	64.3	76.05
Yes, but these documents are not useful for my work	Academic staff	13.9	14.13
	Administrative staff	8.4	7.22
Yes, they exist but I do not have to deal with them	Academic staff	15.7	11.26
	Administrative staff	12.9	7.60
No, my university does not have such documents	Academic staff	0.9	1.99
	Administrative staff	0	1.14
I don't know	Academic staff	14.3	9.27
	Administrative staff	14.4	7.98
Total	Academic staff	100	100
	Administrative staff	100	100

Academic and administrative staff were asked which IQA tool they were involved with, whether they received feedback from it, whether they used the feedback, and whether they found the tool useful. The survey findings (see *Table 9.2*) reveal that XMU's academic and administrative staff had a medium to high level of involvement in the university's IQA activities, and that the level of involvement was usually related to their duties. For example, teachers were most involved in course evaluation by student surveys and least involved in employer satisfaction surveys.

In addition, the study found that there are significant differences in the levels of involvement in different IQA activities by members of academic and administrative staff in different disciplinary fields, with different ranks, with or without a leadership function, with different lengths of service, and with different educational backgrounds. For example, teachers in the humanities and social sciences were more often involved in course evaluation by student surveys than were teachers in science, engineering, agriculture, and medicine. Furthermore, teachers with less than five years of experience received more feedback, used the data from student workload assessment more often, and considered the data to be more useful than did those with longer experience. Administrators with higher educational attainment were more often involved in administrative service quality programmes, while heads of academic units used the data from certification more often and considered the data to be more useful than did heads of administrative units.

Table 9.2 Academic staff involvement in IQA tools on teaching and learning and employability

	Course evaluation	Programme evaluation	Teacher supervision	Programme self-evaluation	Programme monitoring	Student workload assessment	Student competencies assessment	Graduate tracer studies	Employer satisfaction surveys	Employer involvement in study programme revisions	Jobs market analysis
Involvement	3.90	3.24	2.98	3.25	3.10	2.33	2.43	2.15	1.96	2.00	2.00
Feedback	3.11	2.94	2.96	2.96	2.92	2.55	2.66	2.48	2.32	2.32	2.46
Use	2.93	2.87	2.93	3.25	2.88	2.52	2.69	2.50	2.36	2.37	2.47
Usefulness	3.20	3.06	3.07	3.03	3.05	2.72	2.98	2.81	2.61	2.65	2.81

Note: Averages were calculated as follows: 1. A numerical value was attributed to response categories with, for instance, 5 = very much and 1 = not at all. 2. Averages were then calculated in the following way: (number of 'very good' responses × 5) + (number of … responses × 4) + (number of … responses × 3) + (number of … responses × 2) + (number of 'not at all' responses × 1) / the total number of responses.

Similarly, *Table 9.3* shows that the level of administrative staff involvement was generally related to whether they took part in IQA operations. For instance, administrators were most involved in unit self-evaluation.

Table 9.3 Administrative staff involvement in IQA tools on management

		Unit self-evaluation	Unit external evaluation	Certification	Target-level agreement	Service-level agreement
Administrative staff	Involvement	4.08	2.66	2.39	2.67	3.51
	Feedback	2.66	2.72	2.68	2.77	3.15
	Use	2.39	2.77	2.68	2.78	3.17
	Usefulness	3.51	3.37	2.72	2.82	3.44

Note: All figures are averages (see *Table 9.2* for explanation).

The research was also concerned with academic and administrative staff perceptions of the internal and external factors that supposedly condition the effective functioning of the university's IQA system. Academic and administrative staff were asked whether they found the factor important, in general, and whether they thought it was present

at the university. Eight internal factors relevant to the effectiveness of IQA instruments and procedures at HEIs were presented in the survey questionnaires. Surprisingly, active participation of all stakeholder groups in IQA procedures was ranked lowest by both academic and administrative staff, while leadership support was seen as the most valued and most present factor supporting the effective functioning of IQA at XMU (see *Table 9.4*). Of the different stakeholder groups, the surveys suggested that support from students had a significant influence on IQA implementation, second only to leadership support. Support from teachers was also considered important, though fewer staff thought it was present.

Table 9.4 Perceptions on internal factors of IQA at XMU

		Leadership support	Support by students	Visibility of measures deduced from IQA procedures	Support by teachers	Scientific evaluations of IQA procedures	Active participation of all stakeholders groups in IQA procedures	Solid data information system	Transparent information on IQA procedures
Academic staff	Importance	4.42	4.25	4.30	4.25	4.25	4.20	4.25	4.30
	Existence	4.02	3.80	3.58	3.72	3.54	3.52	3.62	3.58
Administrative staff	Importance	4.52	4.27	4.26	4.34	4.28	4.26	4.37	4.29
	Existence	4.28	4.00	3.95	3.93	3.90	3.90	3.90	3.95

Note: All figures are averages (see *Table 9.2* for explanation).

9.3 Conclusions

With the expansion of higher education and the emergence of new types and levels of education in China, the forms and activities of HEIs have become more and more diverse. The human, financial, and material resources required by higher education have far exceeded what the institution alone can afford, hence the increased contribution of private resources to the funding of higher education. As a consequence, the management of higher education quality has become an endeavour involving all

individuals, organizations, and social groups. It is therefore important for HEIs to build an IQA system in collaboration with stakeholders on the basis of full recognition of the importance of stakeholder involvement in IQA. The analysis of the IQA system at Xiamen University highlighted the following key principles and learnable lessons for IQA in relation to stakeholder involvement.

IQA must be accountable to multiple stakeholders. XMU has created an IQA model that holds the university accountable to stakeholders such as students, students' parents, teachers, alumni, businesses, and markets, and systematically collects information from all of them. This model ensures that the IQA system becomes institutionalized and cannot be easily changed, even when leadership changes.

IQA should be supported strongly by senior and college-level leaders. The support of university leadership is the most critical factor conditioning the success of the university's IQA system. This is the case at XMU, where the backing of senior leaders maintains the university's IQA philosophy and supports the concentration of IQA resources, while, in the long run, helping foster a strong IQA culture within the university.

Students should be seen as important contributors to IQA. XMU acknowledges the role of students in supervising IQA as a stakeholder group. The questionnaire surveys found that both academic and administrative staff believe that students have the second-greatest influence on the university's IQA work, behind university leadership. A student-centred academic and administrative management philosophy is long established at XMU and represents the essence of the university's IQA culture.

Alumni and peers should be involved in IQA to support efforts to enhance graduate employment. IQA at XMU is widely geared to the enhancement of the employability of graduates. To provide maximal information to students via its career counselling services and to increase the relevance of its curriculum, XMU carries out graduate tracer studies, employer satisfaction surveys, and jobs market analyses, and involves employers in study programme revision. This allows the university to fine-tune curricular structures and course plans to reflect market needs, thereby enhancing graduate employability.

IQA should also be linked with opportunities for staff development. Student evaluation of courses is the most important IQA instrument in XMU for the improvement of teaching performance. The university pays particular attention to the results of the evaluation of courses delivered by teachers with less than five years of teaching experience. Based on the evaluation results, the Office of Academic Affairs, the relevant school, and the Centre for Teaching and Learning Development will sometimes jointly organize 'study plan groups' to improve young teachers' performance. They also arrange for top-performing teachers to provide 'mentoring' for young teachers. The Centre for Teaching and Learning Development creates and maintains 'growth files' for young teachers to keep track of their improving performance and accumulation of experience.

These research findings suggest that HEIs in China could intensify the involvement of stakeholders in IQA, in order to enhance its outcomes. There are a number of actions institutions can take. First, they should view the results of quality assessment and monitoring in a candid, constructive way. Second, they should allow stakeholders to take part in the planning and execution of IQA activities to the largest extent possible. Third, they should take into consideration the demands of different groups of stakeholders when collecting, analysing, interpreting, and discussing IQA data. Admittedly, there is a risk that conflicts of interest between different groups of stakeholders will hamper implementation of IQA, or that stakeholders will lack interest in constructive collaboration for quality enhancement. Therefore, IQA managers need to prepare to speak out on behalf of the less powerful stakeholders groups within the institution. Furthermore, the institution needs to provide stakeholders with proper training to enhance their understanding of IQA concepts, tools, and processes, improve technical capabilities for quality monitoring and assessment, and raise the stakeholder awareness of the importance of self-assessment and self-improvement.

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Chapter 10

Supporting employability with IQA at Daystar University

Mike Kuria and Simmy M. Marwa

Kenya's development blueprint, *Vision 2030* (Kenya, 2007), aims to produce a 'newly industrializing, middle income, globally competitive and prosperous country' by the year 2030. Demographic change and expanded access to primary and secondary education has brought about a growing demand from a young population for post-secondary education opportunities. As a consequence, Kenyan university enrolment has increased rapidly. However, the quality of Kenyan tertiary education has come under serious question. In response, the Commission for Higher Education (CHE) – now the Commission for University Education (CUE) – was established by the Universities Act 1985 to strengthen the regulatory framework and provide mandatory quality assurance, first for private university providers and, since 2012, for the university sector as a whole. All university programmes are required to be accredited under the regulation of the CUE.

Despite the government's quality assurance efforts, employers frequently claim that graduates of Kenyan universities lack the skills and knowledge required by the labour market (World Bank, 2016). Private-sector companies, in particular, complain that graduates lack appropriate skills (McKinsey Global Institute, 2012). The problem is frequently attributed to the outdated and irrelevant programmes offered by the higher education sector, failing to respond to the shifting demands of the labour market (Mburu, 2014; World Bank, 2016). The expansion of the sector and the mismatch between the education it often provides and the labour market demand have led to a high and growing unemployment rate among university graduates in Kenya.

As a private university without state funding, Daystar University (DU) has made great efforts to provide academic programmes aligned with labour market demands, reflecting the interests of students and their families. The university specializes in the study of communication,

education, computer science, community development, clinical and counselling psychology, and business administration and management. It began as a small communications college operating in Nairobi in 1974 and became a chartered university in 1994. It now offers a wide range of programmes at all levels to more than 5,000 students, drawn from more than 34 nations within and outside Africa. With its practically orientated academic programmes and a liberal arts approach to education, the university has maintained a higher than average employment rate among its graduates. The establishment in 2006 of a Centre for Quality Assurance (CQA), through which internal quality assurance (IQA) tools and processes have been developed, implemented, and monitored, further strengthened the employment orientation of the university.

This chapter focuses on the ways in which DU enhances employability, including through IQA. It examines the effects of selected IQA instruments used to enhance employability, though other supporting mechanisms for employability are also discussed. Data for the analysis have been drawn from the case study prepared for the IIEP research project on IQA.

10.1 National and institutional contexts

The higher education sector in Kenya has undergone tremendous growth in recent years. The number of higher education establishments doubled between 2010 and 2014, to reach 66 institutions (World Bank, 2016). According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2014), the total number of university students also nearly doubled between 2010 and 2013, reaching 330,000 in 2013. The private sector has grown significantly over the past 10 years and now caters for 26 per cent of all higher education students.

These increases in both the number of institutions and student enrolment have created challenges for the employability of graduates in the country. According to the World Bank Enterprise Survey for Kenya in 2013, 29 per cent of Kenyan firms complained about an 'inadequately educated workforce' in the country, and reported difficulties in recruiting workers with appropriate skills. A survey by Corporate Staffing Services (2015) reported that only about half of Kenya's annual crop of university graduates were deemed to be employable. A British Council study (2014) revealed that, on average, new graduates in Kenya took about five years to get a job.

The low graduate employment rate seemed to be attributable to a mismatch of higher education provision with the labour market demands. In a survey by the Inter-University Council of East Africa (IUCEA, 2014: 25), while higher education institutions (HEIs) in East Africa rated the preparedness of their graduates for the labour market as high, most employers reported low confidence in the preparedness of graduates for the labour market, (see *Table 10.1*). In particular, graduates were reported as lacking innovation, independence, critical thinking, and writing skills. It has also been pointed out that the country's education system is failing to produce graduates with the knowledge and skills crucial for *Vision 2030*'s projections on economic growth and human resource development among other areas (Kenya, 2007).

Table 10.1 Confidence level on graduate preparedness for employability in East Africa

	Confidence level on graduate preparedness for employability %	
Country	**HEI**	**Employer**
Burundi	72	45
Kenya	78	49
Rwanda	80	48
Tanzania	76	39
Uganda	82	37

Source: IUCEA, 2014: 25.

In addition, the current labour market information system (LMIS) in Kenya, used for tracking the dynamics of the labour market, is reported to be weak and poorly coordinated. The World Bank pointed to the need to strengthen the LMIS in order to ensure that information on the labour market is shared with universities and students in timely manner (World Bank, 2016: 25).

As graduate employability became a growing concern in the Kenyan higher education sector, quality assurance was adopted by individual institutions as a strategy to enhance both the quality and employability of their graduates. The government legalized the quality framework of higher education, with the CHE being established in 1985 and then restructured into CUE in 2012.

Alongside these national quality assurance initiatives, most Kenyan universities are required to engage private-sector firms to review their curricula with the aim of improving the alignment of academic programmes with labour market demand. However, it has been reported

that these aims are only rarely achieved in practice, and the process did not work in most cases (World Bank, 2014).

In addition, many HEIs in Kenya adopted and adapted a regional quality assurance framework for the partner states of East African Community (EAC), developed under the aegis of the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA). The major achievement of this framework was the development of subject benchmarks, involving key stakeholders such as employers, subject experts, and universities. Subject benchmarks have been developed in the fields of business studies and computer science and information technology (IUCEA, 2015). In order to bridge the gap between HEIs and industry, the IUCEA initiated a series of annual higher education forums to enable dialogue between academia and the private and public sectors. Such efforts reflect a recent trend in Kenyan higher education of emphasizing employer involvement.

An employer survey by the Nairobi recruitment firm Corporate Staffing Services (Ng'ang'a, 2015) rated DU as the second-best university in Kenya in terms of graduate employability, with a 57 per cent preference rating. Strathmore University had the highest rating among private universities (78 per cent), followed by DU and then the Catholic University (49 per cent). Employers' preference has often led to a higher employment rate among DU graduates. DU's own tracer study reports that most of its graduates find a job within six months. A 2015 tracer study found that 51.9 per cent of graduates were employed within one year, while 17.3 per cent managed to find jobs before graduation. More than one in 10 (12.2 per cent) started their own enterprises, and only 13.6 per cent were still unemployed. Bearing in mind that the British Council's 2014 report showed that graduates in Kenya take, on average, five years to secure a job, it is clear that DU maintains a higher than average employment rate among its graduates.

The good employment rate of the university's graduates is attributable to the practical orientation of the academic courses it offers. DU was set up in response to practical requirements: for example, one of its earliest programmes was communication studies, which catered for the need at the time of its establishment to produce communication materials. Currently, any proposal to set up a new programme must provide a market analysis report demonstrating a social and/or commercial need for the programme. Most of DU's programmes also require practicum or internship experience before graduation, with the aim of ensuring

that each student gets on-the-job, hands-on training as part of their learning experience.

DU's emphasis on employability is also reflected in its commitment to a liberal arts philosophy of education. Students are exposed to various fields of knowledge through general education, mandatory for all students irrespective of their specialized studies. General education courses cover a wide range of topics such as communication and culture, public speaking, philosophy, writing, environmental science, mathematics, history, and political science. This approach is intended to produce intellectually well-rounded graduates, able to operate within and outside their specific fields of study.

The university supports the employability of graduates through a Job Placement Office dedicated to the career development of students and graduates. The placement office has developed networking relations through memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with companies to provide for internship opportunities for students, and organizes career days and seminars where students can interact with potential employers. The office has also run the Daylink Employment Bureau where alumni can share job opportunities with students, as well as mentorship programmes where employed alumni can provide guidance on employment, innovation and start-ups for prospective graduates. It plays an important role through a range of career services in providing students with job market information and relevant advice to help them actualize their career aspirations.

Finally, the higher employment rate of DU graduates is closely related to the university's effort to improve the quality of its academic and non-academic offerings through its IQA system and procedures, which will be discussed in greater depth in the following section.

10.2 DU's IQA system

Like the majority of universities in East Africa, DU introduced a formal institutional quality assurance structure just over a decade ago. The CQA unit was established in 2006, while the university was participating in the IUCEA initiative to introduce a regional quality assurance framework for the partner states of the EAC in collaboration with the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). The centre was designed to improve the quality of academic and non-academic offerings at all levels at the university: it has developed IQA instruments, such as policies, standards, guidelines, and procedures, and ensured their implementation. It has also

carried out or coordinated audits of the university's teaching and learning through, for example, internal and external assessment of academic programmes, external examinations, student evaluations, teaching and learning environment audits, tracer studies, graduate exit surveys, and employer satisfaction surveys. The CQA links DU to CUE responsible for both institutional and programme accreditation in Kenya.

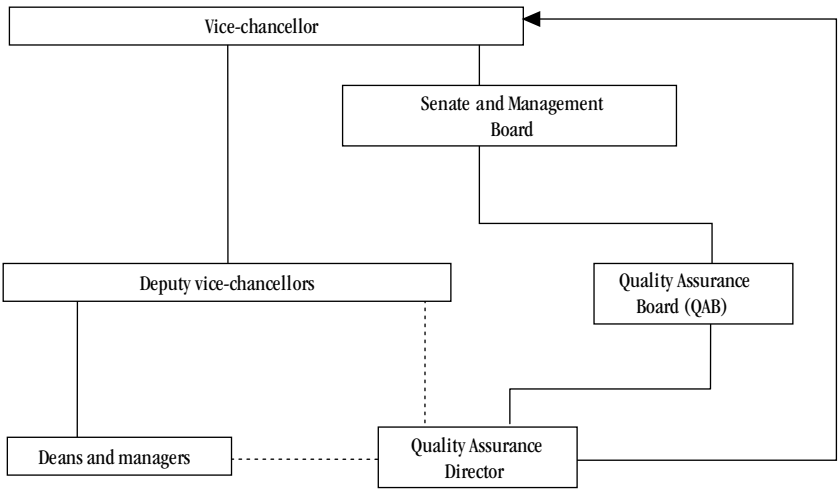
The quality assurance structure was embedded in the university's governance system. The Quality Assurance Board (QAB) advises the vice-chancellor on quality assurance issues and sets the university's quality agenda. The quality assurance director of the CQA works closely with the QAB, the deputy vice-chancellors, academic deans, and managers in dealing with quality assurance issues related to all departments, as reflected in *Figure 10.1*.

The university's quality assurance policy, approved by senate in 2011, demonstrates DU's commitment to quality assurance. The policy's main goal is to ensure that relevant and appropriate standards are achieved to provide high-quality education, research, and community service. It states that, through adhering to its guidelines, the university community 'will develop and sustain a culture of quality seeking and quality assurance'. The specific objectives of the university's quality assurance policy (DU, 2014) are to:

- safeguard and improve academic standards and the quality of education at the university,
- ensure the integrity of academic awards at the university,
- ensure that all programmes are of a high standard and of continued relevance to the church and society in the country and beyond,
- improve continually the quality of consultancy and community services offered by the university,
- enhance the constant improvement of all support services for the university community,
- develop and refine IQA mechanisms systematically to be applicable to all programmes and services at the university.

The establishment of the CQA and the development of the quality assurance policy were two recent developments which align with national, regional, and international trends in higher education.

Figure 10.1 DU IQA structure



Source: DU, 2014: 18.

10.3 IQA instruments to enhance employability

The CQA has developed various IQA tools with the aim of improving the quality of education provided by the university. In order to identify effective IQA tools, the centre conducted online surveys of academic and administrative staff, and semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with other stakeholders (such as students and personnel in leadership positions), to triangulate perceptions and identify differences in opinions. In terms of effects on employability, the following four IQA instruments were investigated in the academic staff survey questionnaire:

- student (course) evaluation,
- programme evaluation,
- graduate tracer studies,
- employer surveys.

Student (course) evaluation is one of the oldest, most frequently and widely used IQA instruments in DU. The term 'student evaluation' is used synonymously with course evaluation. Students are given a chance to evaluate their learning experience in specific courses at the end of every semester. They take into account 1) questions concerning students, including readiness for class, participation in class, seeking help from teachers, enjoyment, and sense of achievement; 2) questions

about the course, concerning, for example, the provision of a clear course outline, the relevance of reading materials, the alignment of assignments with course objectives, the inclusion of current developments in the field, and satisfaction regarding the stated course objectives; and 3) questions concerning instructors – for example, preparedness for class, promotion of learning, encouragement of student participation, use of suitable evaluation methods on student learning, and availability for help. Although student evaluations are administered by the Registrar's Office, data analysis is done at the CQA and results are sent directly to individual lecturers. However, deans and heads of department also receive the results, and they may take follow-up measures based on them.

Programme evaluation is based on a process of self-assessment at programme level, followed by validation by external reviewers. Programme self-evaluation is carried out by academic staff and students to measure the extent to which expected learning outcomes are being met and to ensure the quality of each programme. The findings are compiled in a self-assessment report (SAR). The second step involves (external) peer reviewers evaluating the programme, based on the SAR and their own observations during a site visit. DU usually invites experts in the field, labour market representatives, or alumni to act as external reviewers. Following these two steps, the university develops an improvement plan based on the recommendations in the SAR and the peer review report.

Tracer studies have been recently introduced to evaluate the relevance of DU academic programmes to students' needs and challenges after graduation. The quality assurance policy requires that only recent graduates (within two or three years of graduation) participate in graduate tracer studies. The university now requires teaching units and the CQA to conduct tracer studies every five years, with the first graduate tracer study having been conducted in 2010. However, the frequency of graduate tracer studies varies, depending on the needs of schools, centres, institutes, and departments. The university has sometimes asked individual units to carry out tracer studies on graduates of particular teaching programmes. The results from tracer studies are used to review curricula and improve approaches to teaching and learning.

Employer surveys are another relatively new IQA instrument at DU. Surveys were conducted in 2010 and 2015, with employers being asked to rate DU graduates against other university graduates, indicate their strengths and weaknesses, and recommend essential skills for

the labour market. The surveys are closely linked to the practicums or internships required by most academic programmes, and are usually conducted informally at department level, or sometimes through private arrangements between employers and staff in relevant departments. In-depth interviews with employers are also conducted, particularly in mass media industries in which large numbers of DU graduates are employed.

10.4 Empirical findings from the DU case on IQA

DU participated in the IIEP research project on IQA, which aimed, among other things, to investigate the effects of the IQA system on employment orientation. It collected primary data through two online surveys of academic and administrative staff of the university, in-depth interviews and discussions with university leaders and managers (at central and decentralized levels) to capture the perceptions of stakeholders in greater detail, and focus group discussions with senior academic leaders, senior administrative leaders, and student representatives.

Table 10.2 shows the findings of the academic staff survey questionnaire on the effects of IQA tools on employability. The survey findings indicated that student evaluation was considered to be highly effective by academic staff respondents, followed by programme evaluation and employer surveys. It seems that tracer studies were felt to be less effective in terms of enhancing the employability of graduates.

Table 10.2 Effects of IQA tools on employability (academic staff)

	Student evaluation	Programme evaluation	Tracer study	Employer survey
Enhanced employability of graduates	3.4	3.2	2.1	3.1

Note: Averages were calculated as follows: 1. A numerical value was attributed to response categories with, for instance, 5 = very much and 1 = not at all. 2. Averages were then calculated in the following way: (number of very good responses × 5) + (number of … responses × 4) + (number of … responses × 3) + (number of … responses × 2) + (number of not at all responses × 1) / the total number of responses.

The interviews with other stakeholders replicated the findings from the survey. In interviews, students considered that student evaluation was highly effective. They believed that it gave credibility to the education provided by the university and that it contributed to the positive impression that the university's graduates made on the labour market. The idea that student evaluation improved graduate employability was supported by the deans of schools and departmental heads during in-depth interviews. They stated that student evaluations have contributed to the review and

improvement of academic programmes, teaching methods, and student assessment, in line with market trends.

Interview findings also demonstrated that programme evaluation contributed to the improvement of graduates' performance in the labour market. One of the reasons cited by academic staff was the involvement of employers and alumni in the programme evaluation process; their input helped to identify the strengths and weaknesses of programmes, hence aligning the programmes with labour market requirements, and so improving graduates' employability prospects. As the current programme evaluation does not cover all the programmes offered by the university, and the currently reviewed (that is, the first comprehensively reviewed) programmes have not yet completed the evaluation cycle, data from programme evaluation were not widely available to stakeholders in the university. This lack of data may explain why programme evaluation was seen as less effective than student evaluation in contributing to graduate employability.

During interviews, heads of department noted the impact of employer surveys on graduate employability. Academic staff thought employer surveys were highly effective in the sense that they received direct feedback from employers regarding the performance of students on practicums or internships. However, it was pointed out that concrete data (statistics) were not immediately available – a consequence of the informal status of employer surveys as IQA tools at the university. DU may, therefore, need to consider introducing a more formalized and systematic approach to carrying out and disseminating the findings of employer surveys, such as through reports and workshops.

On the other hand, it seems that, for a variety of reasons, the effectiveness of tracer studies is yet to be established. The negative factors identified in the study include low levels of staff involvement, lack of dissemination of results to students, and the low frequency of tracer studies. Academic staff indicated that they had not been involved in either carrying out tracer studies or implementing their results. This has resulted in a low awareness of graduate tracer studies among student interviewees. Only the top leadership among academics seemed to be aware of tracer studies, possibly a reflection of the fact that the university only carried its first tracer study in 2010 with a second one carried out in 2015, and even they conceded that the current five-year study cycle was not sufficient to provide meaningful data for students, further arguing

for the implementation of programme-specific tracer studies. Most interviewees did agree that tracer studies had the potential to improve graduate employability if recommendations from alumni and employers were properly taken into consideration.

Other institutional mechanisms – not parts of DU's IQA apparatus – were cited as providing a strong link between the university and employers. Internships and practicums were considered to be effective in improving employability, as students were sometimes employed as full-time workers after the internships or practicums. Departmental heads also reported that open days provided opportunities for students to interact with employers and for the university to gather data related to labour market expectations. Academic staff said information could be collected through employer surveys during open days, which was then used to develop and or review the curriculum. All these mechanisms were regarded as providing opportunities to implement IQA tools and therefore improve graduate employability.

10.5 Conclusions

The expansion of Kenyan higher education has led to challenges for the employability of graduates in the country. Employers have been criticizing higher education graduates for lacking innovation, independence, critical thinking, and writing skills. As graduate employability has become a growing concern in Kenyan higher education, individual HEIs have begun to adopt quality assurance as a strategy to bridge the gap between themselves and the labour market. A regional quality assurance framework for higher education was recently introduced in the EAC partner states, with subject benchmarks being developed accordingly.

DU, with a strong focus in the field of communications, has developed a CQA unit in order to improve the quality of academic and non-academic offerings. Together with the IQA instruments developed by the CQA, the university supported graduate employability through a Job Placement Office, which provides prospective graduates with various opportunities to interact with employers (e.g. through internships and open days). As a result, the university has maintained a higher employment rate of its graduates than other Kenyan HEIs, with its graduates strongly preferred by employers in the country. The following are the implications drawn from the case study findings in terms of IQA and employability (see also *Chapter 3*), which may be applicable not

only to other Kenyan universities but also to other HEIs beyond the Kenyan context.

Employers need to be involved in IQA tools and processes. IQA tools enabling the interaction of HEIs and employers were highly effective. The tools that required employers' involvement were programme evaluations and employer surveys. The feedback from employers helped to identify the strengths and weaknesses of programmes, and was also used to align programmes with labour market requirements.

Disseminating information collected from IQA is important. It seems that effects on employability largely depend on the dissemination of information collected from IQA. Low dissemination of results leads to low awareness of and involvement with IQA tools, as shown in the interview findings. Although tracer studies were perceived as having the potential to improve graduate employability, their effectiveness was yet to be established among stakeholders due to the lack of dissemination of results inside the university. Similarly, it was reported that data from employer surveys were not readily available due to the informal status of these surveys as IQA tools. As suggested by interviewees, the university may introduce a more formalized and systematic approach to disseminating the findings from employer surveys.

IQA tools can have multiple functions. An IQA tool can serve multiple functions and sometimes produce unexpected outcomes. For example, while the original purposes of both student and programme evaluations were primarily to improve the quality of teaching and learning, students perceived them as highly effective in developing their employability. The graduate tracer study, however, even though it was developed to cater for prospective students' needs to prepare for the labour market, was not deemed as useful in terms of enhancing employability. Considering the various, unpredictable effects from different IQA actions, the university should not limit IQA tools by their function. Instead, it should take a more flexible approach, focusing on how to utilize and disseminate results among all the stakeholders at and beyond the university. The informed dialogue between students and academic staff that can be generated through effective dissemination is likely itself to have a positive effect on the development of a quality culture.

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Chapter 11

Supporting employability with IQA at the American International University – Bangladesh

Carmen Lamagna, Charles C. Villanueva, and Farheen Hassan

Over the last decade, demographic pressure and growing social demand for higher education have resulted in a significant increase in student enrolment and the number of universities in Bangladesh. The presence of private universities and branches of international universities in the system has improved access to higher education in the country, but it has also created greater need for monitoring and regulating the quality of higher education programmes and services. Ensuring the quality of higher education has thus become one of the main priorities of the Government of Bangladesh, which has established a Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) within the University Grants Commission (UGC). In addition, individual universities are required to establish institutional quality assurance cells in order to ensure rigorous quality control and assessment at institutional level (UGC, 2013, 2010).

Against this background, the American International University – Bangladesh (AIUB) participated in the IIEP research project on internal quality assurance (IQA). Established in 1994, AIUB is a leading private university in Bangladesh with well-developed IQA mechanisms and tools. The university has served as a role model for the development of quality assurance in the country's higher education sector. The university has been particularly focused on the employability of its graduates, and reflects this in its academic offer, with its IQA tools aiming to improve graduates' employment outcomes, as well as their teaching and learning.

11.1 National and institutional contexts

Bangladesh is a lower middle income country with a total population of around 160 million. In recent decades, Bangladesh has made significant economic progress, moving from an agriculture-based economy to a

more industrialized, service-oriented society (Kashem, 2016; Kashem and Rajib, 2016; Tuhin and Rahman, 2016). Average growth in gross domestic product reached a peak of 6.1 per cent in the period between 2011 and 2015. As demand for skilled graduates increased in an ever more diverse labour market, producing talented graduates became one of the key objectives of higher education institutions (HEIs) in Bangladesh.

Economic development over the last decade has brought about a significant increase in both the number of HEIs and student enrolment. In 2016, according to Bangladesh's Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS), there were 75 private universities and 37 public universities in the country (MoE, 2002, 2006, 2014). In addition, total tertiary enrolment has almost tripled since 2000, reaching 2 million students in 2012, a 13.2 per cent gross enrolment ratio. The proportion of female students and teachers reached 30.23 per cent and 25.24 per cent, respectively, in 2014.

As the number of HEIs in Bangladesh increased, various problems emerged. Private universities have highlighted the absence of proper governance structures, a lack of infrastructural facilities, high tuition fees, and high dependency on part-time teachers (Alam, Haque, and Siddique, 2006). Public universities have faced similar issues, including teacher absenteeism (Hossain and Naeema, 2013). Inadequate infrastructure was recognized as posing a threat to the quality of education provided by these institutions (Hossain, Hoque, and Uddin, 2014). Most importantly, the mismatch of higher education provision with the labour market demands had become a growing concern in both public and private HEIs in Bangladesh (Chishty, Uddin, and Ghosh, 2007). This resulted in organizations preferring to recruit foreign applicants as well as a low employment rate among graduates of Bangladeshi HEIs. UGC's *Strategic Plan for Higher Education 2006–2026* (UGC, 2007) and the government's *2010 National Education Policy* (MoE, 2010) highlighted the relationship between these problems and the lack of quality assurance mechanisms, prompting the government to seek to strengthen quality assurance at a national level.

To implement policies on quality assurance based on common standards, the Ministry of Education established a Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) within the UGC. The UGC has acted as a link between government and the universities of Bangladesh. The QAU was introduced to ensure effective quality control across HEIs in Bangladesh. In addition,

as part of the Higher Education Quality Enhancement Project (HEQEP) (UGC, 2014*a*), launched in 2009 with financial support from the World Bank, individual universities were required to establish internal quality assurance cells (IQACs) (AIUB, 2015*a*). More than 30 HEIs in Bangladesh have developed their own IQA mechanisms and initiated actions to address quality assurance concerns (UGC, 2014*b*).

In 1994, AIUB opened its doors as a private university with the intention of producing skilled graduates in various fields and a mission to provide quality academic programmes. To cater for the technological and development needs of the country, academic offerings at the university have been mainly geared towards engineering, technology, and business education (AIUB, 2011–2014). The Faculty of Business Administration, for example, offers degree programmes such as the Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA), with majors in fields such as accounting, finance, and marketing; the Master's in Business Administration (MBA), with similar majors to the BBA; and the Executive MBA. The faculty is the largest in the university, with around 4,175 students and 79 academic staff. The Faculty of the Arts and Social Sciences, on the other hand, is the smallest and most recently established faculty with a student population of about 500 and degree programmes such as its BA in English, BSS in Economics, Bachelor of Laws, and Master's in Public Health. AIUB also offers academic programmes in the field of engineering, with a strong focus on electrical and electronic engineering and architecture, and enrolment of about 3,100. The Faculty of Science and Information Technology is a pioneer programme offering five bachelor degree programmes and one master's programme with enrolment numbers of around 3,500. These academic programmes are regularly enriched in terms of content, strategies, facilities, instructional tools, and equipment to respond to emerging demand from industry and the jobs market.

In order to support its academic programmes and ensure the quality of education, the university has invested in physical infrastructure for its students. The university now runs 20 modern engineering laboratories and 10 architecture design studios for Bachelor of Architecture students. AIUB students also have access to a modern Macintosh lab for graphic design, a digital imaging studio, and a film studio. Considerable investment has been put into the development of ICT facilities (AIUB, 2013*b*). The IT department has been provided with the latest computer hardware and software. Its network comprises 20 powerful servers and more than 1,350 workstations in 18 state-of-the-art computer laboratories and

offices. The network has used fibre-optic cable for optimum bandwidth, supporting more efficient information-sharing and data management.

Given the private status of the university, and its employment-oriented academic offer, the employability of graduates has been a natural orientation for AIUB. The university has established various mechanisms to enhance employability. One of them is the Office of Placement and Alumni (OPA), through which the university has built strong links between students/alumni and the labour market (AIUB, 2015*c*). It has informed students of jobs market trends by providing them with details of job openings and internships, as well as through career counselling. OPA has also arranged career workshops and seminars attended by staff from professional bodies/organizations. An annual jobs fair is organized by the office, attended by leading national and international companies in the fields of technology, science, business, and commerce. The fair provides an opportunity for students and alumni to have one-to-one discussions with potential employers. OPA has also conducted regular tracer studies through which it tracks the professional trajectories of employed graduates (AIUB, 2015*b*).

Another mechanism is to encourage the participation of professionals in a number of activities at the university. Professionals and practitioners have been actively engaged in evaluating and reviewing study programmes and courses in order to enhance the relevance of their curricula to labour-market demand. The revision of academic programmes in the business faculty has been made by the chief executives and human resource managers of selected companies, for example (AIUB, 2014*a*). This is closely associated with the IQA instruments employed by the university, which will be discussed in greater detail in the following section. Industry representatives, and professionals/practitioners, are also regularly invited to give students talks and/or seminars on how to boost their employability. The university, in turn, has shared its expertise with private-sector partners in capacity building and recruitment. This reciprocal approach has created more opportunities for graduate employment and internship.

11.2 Overview on the IQA system at AIUB

AIUB is committed to ensuring the quality of its academic offer and the employability of graduates through the continuous development of its IQA system and procedures. The IQA system at AIUB was supported by

both the university's IQAC and a range of quality policies and manuals (AIUB, 2014*c*, 2012*b*, 2012*c*; PAASCU, 2007).

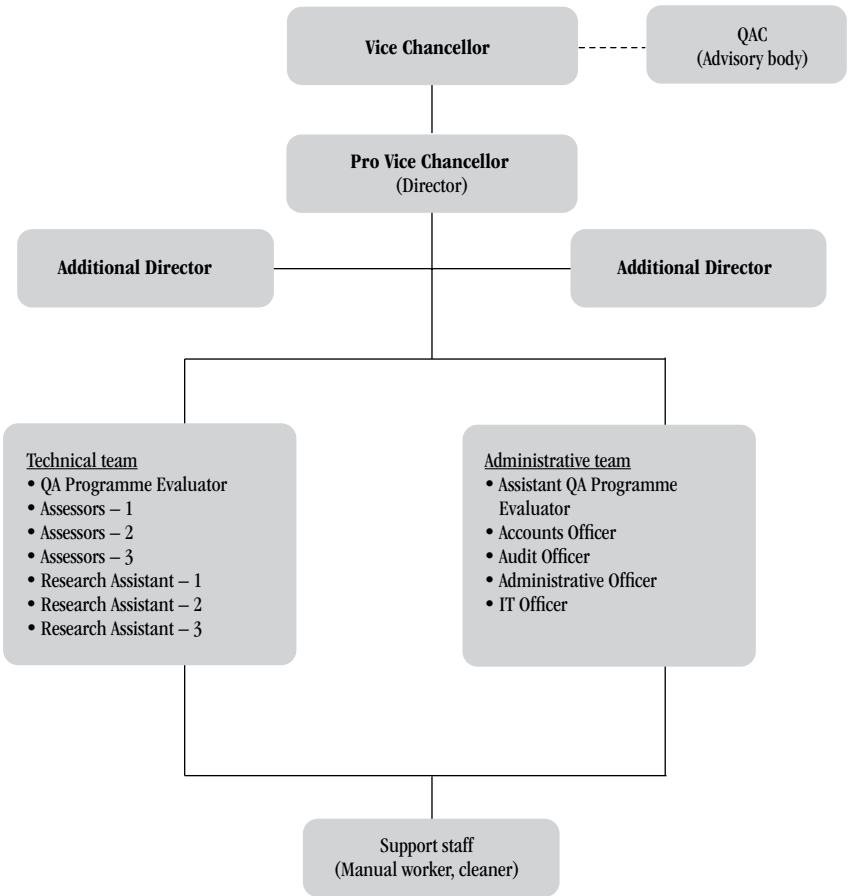
The university established the AIUB Quality Assurance Centre (AQAC) as early as 2008. It became an IQAC in 2015, in line with HEQEP's national requirements. The aim of HEQEP's IQACs is to promote quality assurance within individual universities, in accordance with national and international quality assurance guidelines and practices. IQACs are expected to develop standards/benchmarks for the various academic and administrative activities of the university. They must also provide the necessary support for academic units in conducting self-assessment and external peer review (Villanueva and Haque, 2013). IQACs provide guidance on quality assurance activities for administrative staff, helping them prepare quality assurance documents and procedures. Moreover, IQACs facilitate institutional assessment as they monitor the implementation of quality assurance policies, systems, and procedures at individual universities on a regular basis. Their responsibilities include ensuring that all quality assurance-related activities within the university are in line with the standards and procedures of the UGC's QAU and external quality assurance (EQA) agencies. IQACs also organize workshops, seminars, and training for capacity-building with a view to promoting the concern with quality within their university. They prepare detailed budgets for quality assurance activities and conduct impromptu audits where necessary.

The quality assurance structure is embedded in AIUB's overall governance system. Overall supervision of the university's IQAC is exercised by the vice-chancellor, whose responsibility extends to the appointment of qualified senior academics as directors (see *Figure 11.1*). There is also a Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) which acts as IQAC's advisory body to the vice-chancellor (UGC, 2014*a*). The lead director is responsible for the overall administration of the IQAC unit, with two additional directors in charge of financial and quality matters. Technical and administrative teams, reporting to the two additional directors, support quality assurance activities at AIUB. Within the technical team, three programme assessors provide support for the internal assessment of programmes, while three research assistants carry out data-collection activities. Within the administrative team, an assistant programme evaluator supports data collection and processing. An administrative officer coordinates administrative work and prepares reports for UGC

and HEQEP, while an account and audit officer maintains financial and accounting records.

The Quality Assurance Board (QAB) advises the vice-chancellor on quality assurance issues and sets the university's quality agenda. The quality assurance director of the IQAC works closely with QAB, deputy vice-chancellors, academic deans, and managers in dealing with quality assurance issues related to all departments, as reflected in *Figure 11.1*.

Figure 11.1 AIUB-IQAC organizational chart



Source: AIUB, 2015*a*.

AIUB has adopted a quality policy which supports the IQA system, stating that 'Quality shall be adhered to in conformity with the prescribed national and international standards of quality and excellence including those provided by the professional bodies and organizations'. The following principles guided the formulation of the quality policy (UGC, 2014*a*):

- sustainability of quality standards from international accrediting/ certifying bodies;
- continuous capacity-building of human resources within the organization;
- participation of all stakeholders (students, alumni, parents, and others) in strengthening leadership, management, and academic programmes and services;
- regular updating of data and information, facilities, equipment, and physical resources to ensure they function properly in support of the overall university operation;
- ensuring a supply of high-quality and skilled graduates for local and global markets;
- promoting a research culture for academic enrichment, discovering cutting-edge knowledge and identifying vital areas for improvement and development;
- encouraging university–community engagement through socio-civic, technical, and academic interventions.

The systems and procedures for quality assurance at AIUB are described in a variety of quality manuals, including the *IQAC Operations Manual*, the lab manual, and the self-assessment manual. These manuals were developed to guide the university's departments/units in following the rules of quality assurance. For instance, the self-assessment manual at the university describes the concept and objectives of self-assessment, as well as the processes to follow (AIUB, 2014*c*; UGC, 2014*b*). Developed by QAU, UGC, HEQEP, and the Ministry of Education, it includes guidelines and templates for conducting the data-collection surveys, which were part of the self-assessment process. The manual has been revised periodically using feedback from practitioners to ensure it reflects changing circumstances. It has also been open to further improvement using experience drawn from international good practice.

11.3 IQA instruments to enhance employability

AIUB has translated its quality-related institutional documents into actions in the form of programmes, instruments, and activities. Supported by the IQAC, a number of IQA instruments have been developed over the years to ensure the quality of education and therefore enhance the employability of graduates (AIUB, 2014*b*, 2015*a*).

In order to measure the extent to which different IQA tools and mechanisms are perceived to have contributed to the employability of graduates, this study focused on the effects of AIUB's IQA system on employability, as viewed by various stakeholders at the university. For the purpose of exploring different viewpoints, both quantitative and qualitative data were triangulated. Online survey questionnaires[33] were administered to academic and administrative staff. The perceptions of academic staff were explored in the areas of teaching and learning and their contribution to students' employability, while those of administrative staff were investigated in terms of management-related IQA tools. Consequently, academic staff perceptions were dominant in the quantitative findings on the effects of IQA tools on employability. The data generated from this survey were complemented with semi-structured interviews and focal group discussions[34] with various stakeholders at the university.

Below are the results of the case study, with effective IQA tools identified in terms of their impact on employability. For full descriptions of the employability-related IQA tools used at the university see *Table 2.3* in *Chapter 2*.

According to the survey results (see *Table 11.1*), teacher supervision was viewed by academic staff as the most effective means of enhancing the employability of graduates, with an average of 3.60. This was followed by programme evaluation. Graduate employability was also thought to be increased through course evaluation. Among those IQA instruments specifically designed to promote employability, student competences assessment was thought to have the biggest impact on the employability

33. The surveys were sent to 298 academic staff, 193 (64.76 per cent) of whom responded, and 160 administrative staff, 69 (43.13 per cent) of whom provided responses.
34. Fourteen academic and administrative heads were interviewed individually. In addition, 24 department heads and programme directors and 40 students participated in focus group discussions.

of graduates, with an average of 3.44. This was followed by employer involvement in study programme revision. Surprisingly, graduate tracer studies and employer satisfaction surveys were not considered to be as effective as other instruments in enhancing employability.

Table 11.1 Effects of IQA tools on employability (academic staff)

	Course evaluation	Programme evaluation	Teacher supervision	Programme self-evaluation	Student workload assessment	Graduate tracer studies	Employer satisfaction surveys	Employer involvement in study programme revisions	Student competences assessment
Enhanced employability of graduates	3.36	3.45	3.60	3.46	2.34	2.94	2.43	3.16	3.44

Note: Averages were calculated as follows: 1. A numerical value was attributed to response categories with, for instance, 5 = very much and 1 = not at all. 2. Averages were then calculated in the following way: (number of 'very good' responses × 5) + (number of … responses × 4) + (number of … responses × 3) + (number of … responses × 2) + (number of 'not at all' responses × 1) / the total number of responses.

Findings from the interviews and focus group discussions supported the survey questionnaire data, indicating the overall positive effects of IQA tools on employability. In particular, employer involvement in study programme revision was mentioned in focus group discussion as a means of enhancing the employability of students. Heads of department and programme directors identified a number of changes that had resulted from such employer engagement. Courses in biomedicine, rural marketing, investment management, and human resource information systems were introduced in response to market demand, while the content of existing courses was significantly modified. The computer science course curricula was updated to include a programming language, while courses on management information systems were redesigned and restructured. Students in their focus group discussions identified changes to course curriculum, such as the inclusion of more case studies (to increase analytical ability) and presentations (to increase communication skills), as an output of curriculum development.

It is interesting to note that these instruments were either directly or indirectly related to teaching and learning. This result confirmed the university's approach to employability (see also *Chapter 3*), which was

mainly through the provision of quality academic programmes (Ahmed and Crossman, 2014; Chishty, Uddin, and Ghosh, 2007; Edge Hill University, 2016; Hossain and Naeema, 2013; Kashem, 2016; Tuhin and Rahman, 2016; University of Kent, 2013). It can be concluded that the university aimed to improve the employability of graduates mainly through the following IQA instruments:

- teacher supervision,
- course evaluation,
- programme evaluation,
- student competencies assessment,
- employer involvement in study programme revision.

Teacher supervision at AIUB has utilized a range of instruments to evaluate teachers' performance: classroom observation, teacher schedule form (TSF), teacher performance evaluation (TPE), and faculty performance evaluation (FPE) (AIUB, 2013*a*, 2012*a*, 2012*d*, 2011). Classroom observation has been mandatory for new teachers. The results are made known to the teacher and, if deemed necessary, teacher and observer take part in a post-observation conference. TSF evaluates the class schedule and teacher counselling hours at the beginning of each semester. The form is posted outside the teacher's office and online for students. It is regularly checked, both by teachers and by departmental heads and building officers. TPE is conducted after mid-term during each semester. Students evaluate their teachers anonymously on a scale of 1 to 5 for each item in the following areas: knowledge of the subject, instructional strategies, motivation techniques, personality traits, student–faculty relationships, and routine matters. FPE covers nine areas using the same scales as TPE. However, the results are used for the management purpose of supporting teacher retention or to incentivize performance. Teacher supervision has therefore enabled teachers to identify areas for improvement in their performance.

Course evaluation is a regular activity of each academic department. The curriculum committee, which comprises members of the academic council and the student representative body, as well as alumni, and non-academic and employer delegates, reviews the course offer every academic year. The review is focused on objectives, content, teaching strategies, faculty competence, resources, tools, and enrichment activities. It is based on feedback gathered through surveys, group discussions, interviews, and trend reviews from stakeholders (students,

faculty, academic and administrative staff, employers, and experts). The outcomes of the review must be taken into account in the revision of a course, the introduction of a new course, the improvement of the delivery system or a change of mode, the development of additional resources and sources of information, or changes to the way academic programmes are packaged. From this activity, students and teachers have been informed of new developments and current trends in their chosen disciplines.

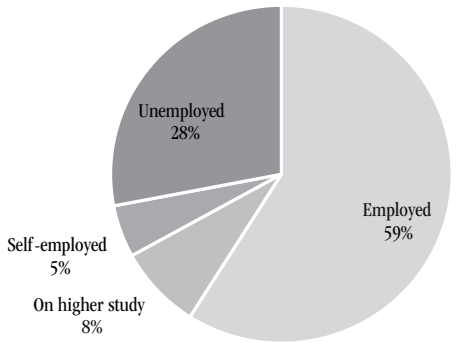
Programme evaluation reviews the relevance and responsiveness of academic programmes to the needs of students and employers, as well as to technological advancement, and national and global trends. Review committees, therefore, consist of academic and administrative staff, students, alumni, industry representatives, and professionals/ practitioners. Consultation, interviews, and surveys are undertaken as part of the review process. Programme evaluation is usually conducted every two or three years or when a special need or demand arises. UGC is responsible for final approval of a new programme, on the recommendation of the academic council.

Student competences are measured regularly during courses through quizzes, assignments, projects, presentation in case studies, mock plan/design competitions in the classroom, and software development and programming. Mid-term and final-term examinations are also used to assess student competences. The results of assessment are analysed to produce a cumulative grade point average (CGPA). Students who fall short of the required CGPA are eligible for special assistance and counselling. While the reputation of the university and a good CGPA mark are relatively more objective factors in choosing graduates for employment, the practice of recruiting graduates based on this aspect has become more and more significant and widespread in the country.

Employers are involved, either formally or informally, in the revision of study programmes. As part of its official process of programme revision, the university created a committee to review programmes and courses, comprising employers, faculty members, student alumni, and practitioners/professionals. Employers' suggestions regarding students under their supervision as interns have helped to identify the knowledge, skills, and attitudes graduates need. Their formal or informal feedback on student performance is conveyed to the university and discussed by members of the programme review committee, supporting both the revision of existing courses and the introduction of new ones. Major

new courses in marketing were introduced in the Faculty of Business Administration, for example, sponsored by an international NGO, while a new course in investment management received technical and financial support from the International Finance Corporation (IFC)-World Bank. This indicates active engagement from employers in the review of study programmes at AIUB.

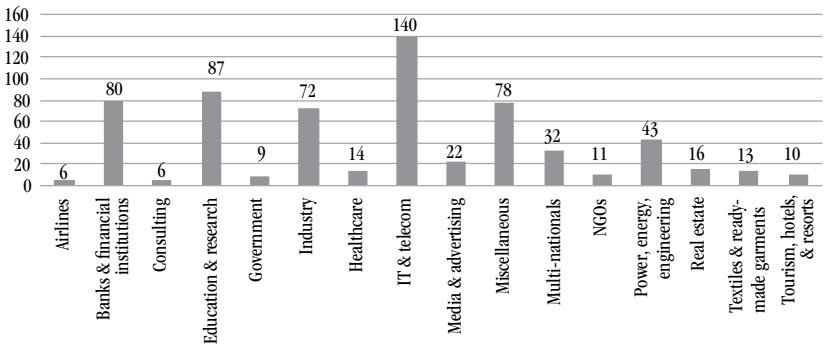
Figure 11.2 AIUB alumni status



Source: AIUB, 2015*b*.

As a result of the use of IQA instruments and other supporting mechanisms, students reported in the focus group discussions that they thought that their capacities had been increased in terms of subject knowledge, English language skills, physical and mental fitness, ethical behaviour, and community spirit. They believed that this would improve their chances of employment.

Figure 11.3 Employers of AIUB alumni (by sector)



Source: AIUB, 2015*b*.

According to *Figure 11.2*, 59 per cent of graduates or alumni were employed, while 28 per cent were engaged in higher study. The rest were either self-employed or unemployed. The distance from home to the workplace, low salary, a mismatch between education and employer demand, and socio-cultural beliefs were identified as reasons for unemployment.

IT and telecom was the sector in which AIUB graduates were most likely to be employed, followed by education and research, and banks and financial institutions (see *Figure 11.3*). By comparison, graduates were little interested in working in the airline industry or for consulting firms (AIUB, 2015*b*).

11.4 Conclusions

AIUB has responded to growing demand from employers and students by establishing various institutional mechanisms to enhance graduate employability. The university made considerable efforts to be the first university in Bangladesh to set up its AQAC, subsequently expanding this to become an IQAC under UGC's mandate. These developments have added value and reputation to the university in general and the students in particular, making them more attractive in the jobs market.

Initially, the university's approach to employability was rather indirect: it is through the provision of quality academic programmes that the university aims to fulfil its mission of producing skilled graduates. The IQA system and associated instruments were introduced in this context, followed by other, more direct, mechanisms for the enhancement of employability, such as the establishment of the Office of Placement and Alumni.

The case study findings show that the university's IQA system had, overall, positive effects on the employability of graduates, with more than half of the alumni currently employed. Several IQA instruments were found to be effective, including course evaluation, programme evaluation, and employer involvement in study programme revision.

The findings of the case study highlight some learnable lessons as to how IQA enhances graduate employability at AIUB:

The formation of multi-sectoral committees. Multi-sectoral committees usually consist of employers, faculty members, student alumni, and practitioners/professionals. They are actively engaged in some of the core IQA instruments contributing to the enhancement of graduate

employability, such as course evaluations, programme evaluations, and study programme revisions. Courses and programmes at AIUB are regularly reviewed and evaluated by the multi-sectoral committees in order to increase their relevance to labour market demands. The issues raised in these committees are taken into consideration in improving the content of courses and/or programmes provided at the university. For instance, there was feedback from some employers that BBA graduates were weak in Microsoft Excel. As a result, this was made the central focus of the course on computing and business. Comment was also made that the professionalism and ethics of students engaged in research and project development could be better developed. As a consequence, engineering students now have to take a course on engineering ethics in BSEEE, in addition to research methodology.

Poor communication skills among students of English were highlighted by supervisors in affiliated enterprises when they assessed the performance of students. In fact, the common means of communication of most students is Bangla, and not all students accepted in the university come from English-medium schools. As a result of this criticism, spoken and written English abilities are now evaluated through an admission test, including an essay portion and interview. Study programmes have also been enriched by the introduction of technical language courses tailored to English use in different faculties. For instance, engineering students study English for engineering, while computer science students study English with a focus on science and technology. In order to further enhance communication skills, an interactive approach is taken in teaching to allow students to speak and interact with their classmates and the teacher. Team teaching is also encouraged so that students can participate in group work and express their ideas more freely. Presentation activities are emphasized to help students to develop self-confidence and to support strong personality development.

The frequent interaction between students and the labour market through OPA. AIUB's OPA has played a critical role in providing students with exposure to the labour market. It organizes a variety of events for students and alumni to interact with employers, such as annual jobs fair, career workshops, and seminars. Students can build up their professional knowledge and experiences directly through internship programmes or indirectly through one-to-one discussions with potential employers at various events organised by OPA.

The diverse feedback route from different stakeholders. One of the main characteristics of AIUB's IQA system is its use of various feedback mechanisms within the process. While course evaluations are typically undertaken mainly through survey questionnaires or other quantitative methods, course evaluation at AIUB is based on feedback gathered through surveys, group discussions, interviews, and trend reviews from stakeholders (students, faculty, academic and administrative staff, employers, and experts). Similarly, academic programmes are reviewed through consultation, interviews, and surveys. The various feedback loops give a wider perspective than the use of a single method would permit. This enabled the university to take into account stakeholders' demands and perspectives more accurately, thereby increasing the relevance of the education and services provided by the university and further enhancing the employability of graduates.

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Part 4:
Conclusions on good principles and transferable lessons

Chapter 12

What are the effects of IQA on teaching and learning, employability, and management?

Michaela Martin, with Jihyun Lee

Quality assurance has been a feature of the higher education sector in most countries for several decades. While there is now an abundant academic literature on quality assurance, researchers and practitioners in the area deplore the lack of impact assessment. Leiber, Stensaker, and Harvey (2015) in particular have pointed out that 'methodologically more comprehensive and empirically more reliable knowledge about the effects and mechanisms of action of QA measures' is missing. Newton (2013) alludes to the fact that the measurement of effects is 'under-theorized' and 'under-researched', and he argues for longitudinal and case study research as well as comparative, cross-context studies. At present, the analysis of effects of quality assurance systems mainly relies on after-procedure judgements typically made by quality assurance officials; the experience of stakeholders such as administrative and academic staff and students is rarely taken into account (Westerheijden, Hulpiau, and Waeytens, 2007).

In seeking to address this shortcoming in impact assessment, the IIEP research project on IQA aimed at identifying the effects of quality assurance in eight case universities, as well as the effectiveness of IQA tools implemented in them. The analysis of effects was focused on the areas of teaching and learning, employability, and management. Effects and effectiveness of IQA were investigated through two online surveys submitted to both academic and administrative staff, and perceptions on effects were further examined through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with a wide range of university stakeholders (for a full description of the methodology see *Introduction*). When preparing the research instruments to be submitted to academic and administrative staff, two assumptions were made. First of all, an IQA instrument in a particular domain (i.e. teaching/learning, employability, or management) would have effects predominantly in the same domain. Secondly, some

effects of IQA can be anticipated, from an analysis of the literature, while others would need to be investigated through open-ended questions.

12.1 The effects of IQA on teaching and learning

This section will present the effects of IQA on teaching and learning as they were identified by a comparative analysis of the eight international case universities. It was assumed that IQA tools would affect the coherence and content coverage of courses and study programmes, teaching performance, student assessment, and learning conditions of study programmes. In the survey questionnaire, academic staff were asked whether IQA instruments had effects on teaching and learning, based on the assumption that academics would be best placed to judge effects in this domain. Interviews and focus group discussions allowed participants to respond in a more open way, so that it was possible to identify additional effects and other effective institutional practices in teaching and learning.

IQA tools and their effects on teaching and learning

The survey data demonstrated that IQA tools designed for teaching and learning as well as graduate employability were perceived as having largely positive effects at the course and programme levels. *Table 12.1* shows the perceived effects of these tools on the content coverage of study programmes by academic staff across the eight case universities. The appreciation of IQA tools varied across the universities, with the staff in some universities viewing IQA tools in general more positively than others. When comparing the perception of the different IQA tools, programme evaluations were viewed as most effective for improving the content coverage of study programmes. Surprisingly, course evaluation by students, which was the most commonly and longest used IQA tool, was rated only at a medium level of effectiveness. Employability-related IQA tools were also viewed as effective for enhancing the content coverage of study programmes (see *Table 12.1*), with most of the instruments having relatively high effects. The detailed effects of each instrument were, however, different across case universities, which are further analysed in reference to the interview and focus group data below.

The interview data confirmed this overall positive appreciation of selected IQA tools, although limitations of some of the instruments were also pointed out. **Programme evaluations** were viewed as quite effective in terms of changes that they brought about, depending on the modalities

that were used to implement them (for the full description of programme evaluations, see *Chapter 2*). Programme evaluations at DU are based on graduate exit surveys through which students in the final year of their studies are asked to rank departments and their services, and to provide reasons for their ranking. The aim of this exercise is to estimate their satisfaction with all aspects of their education, including infrastructure, pedagogy, and curriculum (Kuria and Marwa, 2017). Considering the nature of programme evaluations, it is not surprising to see that academic staff acknowledged the effects on curriculum improvement.

Table 12.1 The effects of IQA tools on the content coverage of study programmes (academic staff)

	Teaching and learning IQA tools						Employability IQA tools				
	Course evaluation	Programme evaluation	Teacher supervision	Programme self-evaluation	Programme monitoring	Student workload assessment	Graduate tracer studies	Employer satisfaction surveys	Employer involvement in study programme revisions	Jobs market analysis	Student competency assessment
AIUB	2.7	4.0	4.0	4.0	–	3.4	2.9	3.2	3.6	–	3.5
DU	3.4	3.5	–	–	–	–	2.1	3.0	–	–	–
TU	2.5	4.7	4.5	2.1	4.0	3.2	4.1	4.5	3.9	3.6	3.4
UDE*	1.7	1.6	–	2.3	2.3	1.0	2.4	0.9	–	–	1.9
UFS	2.7	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	3.0
UoB	3.3	3.6	3.3	3.6	3.7	3.1	3.5	3.1	3.6	3.1	3.5
WU	3.3	2.8	–	2.8	–	–	3.1	–	–	3.1	4.4
XMU	3.2	3.2	3.1	3.2	3.2	3.1	3.2	3.2	3.1	3.3	3.2

Note: Averages were calculated as follows: 1. A numerical value was attributed to response categories with, for instance, 5 = very much and 1 = not at all. 2. Averages were then calculated in the following way: (number of 'very good' responses × 5) + (number of … responses × 4) + (number of … responses × 3) + (number of … responses × 2) + (number of 'not at all' responses × 1) / the total number of responses. *The small size of the sample for the survey at UDE does not allow reliable conclusions.

At WU, programme evaluations are newly organized through a one-day workshop bringing together various stakeholders (Vettori *et al.*, 2017). This has enabled programme evaluations to improve the content of study programmes and enhance their alignment with different

stakeholders' demands. Similarly, programme evaluations were conducted through quality conferences at UDE, introduced in 2014/2015 (Ganseuer and Pistor, 2017). Interviews indicated that improvement measures at study programme levels were taken in all concerned departments as a result of these conferences. However, it was recognized that programme evaluations tended to have effects on the wider curriculum level, not necessarily triggering significant changes in specific courses or teaching performance.

Course evaluations were reported as influencing teaching and learning through course design, teaching style, or content at several universities, again depending on the modalities through which the tool was implemented (for the full description of course evaluations, see *Chapter 2*). At UoB, course evaluation takes place every semester through the assessment of intended learning outcomes (ILOs) by academic staff at the course level (AlHamad and Aladwan, 2017). Heads of department mentioned that they introduced group projects and presentations, exercises and assessments, as well as more practical training and more focused courses, as a result of the course evaluations. Similar improvements were made to courses at UDE, including the regular provision of scripts and additional literature on a moodle platform, informing students more thoroughly about learning outcomes and corresponding course work at the beginning of the semester, reducing the number of student presentations and implementing interactive group work, and putting more effort into finding suitable spaces for the class (Ganseuer and Pistor, 2017).

In the case of UDE, both quantitative (through paper-based student surveys) and qualitative course evaluations (through teaching analysis poll, TAP) are used to evaluate courses. Both instruments were viewed positively, since they were designed to enhance discourse between teachers and students, and thus supported the improvement of interaction within course boundaries. In particular, interviewees described the new TAP (for the full description of a TAP, see *Chapter 4*) as being of very high value for improving teaching, since information about what to improve was obtained in mid-course (whereas results from the standardized surveys were often reported by the interviewees to be available too late), counselling was given by experts from CHEDQE as a follow-up to the information-collection process, and improvement measures were discussed with students directly. The information provided by TAPs was

also said to be more detailed and focused than the information collected by standardized survey questionnaires.

Similarly, information produced by DIRAP and the CTL at UFS helped to identify modules (courses) that were under-performing in terms of student success, and to develop and implement an intervention aimed at improving student success in these modules. Also, it helped to make decisions to increase the university's entrance requirements, differentiated by faculty (i.e. to increase the academic point score required for students to be accepted at UFS). However, staff members from all the faculties at UFS expressed negative opinions on the usefulness of course evaluation by students for improving teaching and learning (Lange and Kriel, 2017).

A faculty member from the Natural and Agricultural Sciences Department commented:

> We also have the same concerns about having a student evaluating the course content and things like that. So we tend not to look as much on to that part. We see what they say, but we don't really act on that. We use that more to react on the method of things they experienced.

The limitations of current course evaluations were mentioned by other stakeholders in other institutions (Villalobos *et al.*, 2017). During focus group discussions some students at UT highlighted a lack of feedback from existing IQA instruments regarding teaching and learning. Some of them said that although they were involved in the IQA instruments and received feedback they had doubts about the transparency of the results or their impact on the teaching performance of academics. To maximize the benefits of IQA instruments they wanted more dialogue on topics related to teaching. Such sentiments may be related to the widespread practice of conducting course evaluations at the end of a semester. The majority of students at UDE were not aware of the improvements derived from the TAP since changes were only visible the following semester (Ganseuer and Pistor, 2017). Students from XMU also pointed out that course assessment by students was usually sought too late in the year to be able to rectify certain shortcomings, and students were therefore sometimes not motivated to provide reliable feedback. Also, it was reported in interviews at XMU that course assessment had become a routine procedure, a chore that was not systematically exploited to identify necessary improvement (Daguang *et al.*, 2017).

A student from the School of Medicine commented:

> The two course evaluations in each semester cause some waste of time and paper. Moreover, students receive no feedback from the evaluations. Consequently, most students believe course evaluations are mere formalities and have no substantive effects. Therefore, they don't take such evaluations very seriously.

According to student respondents at WU, course evaluations were deemed to be more effective if they were conducted in the course of a semester rather than at the very end (Vettori *et al.*, 2017).

Some employability-related IQA tools were also considered to be effective for the enhancement of teaching and learning, although their effects were less appreciated than teaching and learning-related tools (AlHamad and Aladwan, 2017; Ganseuer and Pistor, 2017; Kuria and Marwa, 2017; Villalobos *et al.*, 2017). **Employer involvement in study programme revision** was one such tool. This was well appreciated by interviewees at UoB, who mentioned that the involvement of external stakeholders helped to improve the professional orientation of programmes through the alignment of curriculum design and methods of teaching and learning with labour market demands and expectations. Also, a less relevant course was replaced by a new course to meet the needs of the labour market.

Other instruments for employability such as **graduate tracer studies**, **employer satisfaction surveys** and **job market analysis** were reported at UT as having positive impacts on courses and programmes, since the results from these instruments were usually taken into account for the continuous improvement of education opportunities, mainly in the form of courses and programmes provided by the university. In interviews with deans and heads of programme at UDE, graduate tracer studies were said to be helpful in supporting the employment orientation of study programmes at the university, as it has aimed to obtain information about the career trajectories of recent graduates (i.e. those who graduated within 18 months or two years) for the ongoing development of its study programmes. University leaders, heads of department, and academic deans at DU also reported that tracer studies informed their strategic decisions, including curriculum review and academic resource allocation. Overall, findings indicated that when the results derived from employability-related IQA tools were used to improve the content and teaching methods of courses and programmes, they contributed positively to teaching and learning as well as management.

Despite the positive contribution of employability-related IQA tools, it seemed that they had limited effects on teaching and learning compared with IQA tools for that domain (Kuria and Marwa, 2017). Few academic staff at DU were aware of and involved in tracer studies, and students also had low awareness of this instrument. On the other hand, employer satisfaction surveys had relatively higher effects than tracer studies on teaching and learning at DU, as academic staff benefited from close relationships between individual departments and employers and thus were well aware of decisions made following their interactions with employers. This suggests that the low awareness and involvement of stakeholders in employability-related IQA activities may result in lower impact on teaching and learning.

Other institutional practices[35] and their effects on teaching and learning

Student panels at UDE collect information about students in different stages from entry to graduation (for the full description of student panels, see *Chapter 4*). In particular, information on the characteristics of students currently enrolled in study programmes was reported to be useful in identifying individual and institutional determinants of study success, and therefore had a positive effect on teaching and learning (Ganseuer and Pistor, 2017). This information is usually taken into account for improving study conditions in the field of teaching and learning, and has further helped to create an environment that has enabled students, whatever their personal circumstances, to continue their studies up to graduation.

Institutional evaluation at UDE was said to have made positive contributions in the field of teaching and learning, since it is based on the assessment of every functional area of the university (teaching and learning, research, service, and management) firstly by stakeholders from each organizational unit and then by external experts (Ganseuer and Pistor, 2017). It helped to provide a framework for assessing the information generated by different data collection tools and thus improving study programmes along the lines of recommendations by external experts. As an outcome of institutional evaluations, new study programmes were developed and an intra-faculty student support service, so called 'LUDIs' (learning and discussion centres), was extended.

35. This refers to all the institutional activities, including IQA processes not included in survey questionnaires (see *Table 2.3* in *Chapter 2*), which promote the respective area of concern in the study: teaching and learning, employability, and management.

Annual quality conferences – discussions that take place on the basis of results of the quality assurance tools (surveys etc.) and higher education statistics – led to the revision of module handbooks and changes in the structure of study programmes.

A curriculum review at UFS was reported as another effective institutional practice in enhancing the practices of teaching and learning. It looked at the structure of the curriculum (i.e. majors, module combinations and progression, and the integrity of programmes) as part of a requirement arising from the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF)[36] in South Africa (Lange and Kriel, 2017). Interviewees further indicated that, with its effects on programme content, exit-level outcomes, and overall structure (i.e. within-programme alignment), it improved the communication between faculties; facilitated better alignment between modules, between programmes, and between academic departments; stimulated engagement with external stakeholders; and provided much-needed support to academics attempting to make changes and improvements in their departments.

Other institutional practices, such as **teaching awards for innovative and excellent teaching,** were identified through interviews as a major driver for quality development in teaching and learning (Vettori *et al.*, 2017). These findings suggested that the effects of these institutional practices should be promoted as much as IQA tools, since such practices contribute to improved teaching and learning.

12.2 The effects of IQA on employability

This section summarizes the effects of IQA on the employability of graduates in the eight case universities. As in the previous section, the effects of IQA tools are presented, followed by other institutional practices with similar effects on employability. The survey questionnaire was put only to academic staff, on the assumption that they would be best placed to judge the effects of IQA instruments on employability. Since the quantitative surveys were administered to measure only the extent to which the respective IQA tools at each university enhance graduate employability, the reporting of effects of IQA tools and other institutional practices will be largely referred to in the reviews of interview and focus group discussion data.

36. One of the objectives of HEQSF was to reduce and simplify the cluttered menu of academic offerings at the university. HEQSF also provided a legislative basis for articulation across different types and levels of programme offerings (Lange and Kriel, 2017).

IQA tools and their effects on employability

The survey questionnaire to academic staff asked a question about the effects of IQA tools on the employability of graduates. The survey data show that employability-related IQA tools were perceived as having generally positive effects on employability of graduates (see *Table 12.2*). As was the case with the study of effects on teaching and learning, some universities viewed IQA tools more positively than others in relation to the effects on employability. Although perceptions on the most effective tools varied across the case universities, the following instruments were perceived by survey respondents as highly effective: graduate tracer studies, employer involvement in study programme revisions, and job market analysis. Among teaching and learning-related IQA tools, programme evaluations were seen in most case universities as contributing considerably to the enhancement of graduate employability.

Table 12.2 The effects of IQA tools on the enhanced employability of graduates (academic staff)

	Teaching and learning IQA tools						Employability IQA tools				
	Course evaluation	Programme evaluation	Teacher supervision	Programme self-evaluation	Programme monitoring	Student workload assessment	Graduate tracer studies	Employer satisfaction surveys	Employer involvement in study programme revisions	Jobs market analysis	Student competency assessment
AIUB	3.4	3.5	3.6	3.5	–	2.3	2.9	2.4	3.2	–	3.4
DU	3.4	3.2	–	–	–	–	2.1	3.1	–	–	–
TU	1.7	3.7	3.3	1.6	3.1	2.4	4.2	3.9	4.1	4.1	3.8
UDE*	1.5	0.9	–	1.3	1.0	0.6	1.7	0.8	–	–	1.3
UFS	1.8	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	2.5
UoB	2.9	3.3	2.9	3.0	3.3	2.8	3.4	3.1	3.7	3.5	3.2
WU	–	2.4	–	2.4	–	–	2.3**	–	–	2.3	–
XMU	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.1	3.0	3.0	3.2	3.2	3.2	3.3	3.3

Note: All figures are averages (see *Table 12.1* for explanation). *The small size of the sample for the survey at UDE does not allow reliable conclusions. **Graduate tracer study is used here as a term referring to student panel labour market tracking at WU.

There was some consensus among academic interviewees at UDE that the results of a study of a single cohort of graduates were often not providing useful information at the study programme level due to the low response rate. They suggested combining the results of more than one cohort in order to make the results relevant at the study programme level. Interviews at DU suggested that taking into account suggestions on ways to improve employability from alumni and employers would maximize the potential of tracer studies.

Involving employers in study programme revisions proved to be very effective in some universities, in particular when employers were part of the consultative structure (Lamagna, Villanueva, and Hassan, 2017; AlHamad and Aladwan, 2017). At AIUB, study programmes are revised formally by a committee of employers, faculty members, student alumni, and practitioners/professionals, and informally by employers during internships. It was reported that employer involvement in study programme revisions had improved the employability of graduates through the introduction of new courses and the restructuring of existing course contents and curriculum in response to market demands. For instance – and understandably, given that the common means of communication of most AIUB students is Bangla, and not all the students accepted in the university come from English-medium schools – supervisors in affiliated enterprises identified that students and graduates lacked communication skills in English. As a consequence, study programmes have now been enriched to introduce English language courses for the technical language used in the different faculties. Students in their focus group discussions reported that their capacities had been increased in terms of subject knowledge, English language skills, physical and mental fitness, ethical behaviour, and community spirit.

Employer engagement at UoB was conducted through annual programme advisory committee meetings in which employers' opinions were obtained on the effectiveness of the programme in relation to the performance of graduates. In the committee meeting, intended learning outcomes (ILOs) in programmes in several faculties were regularly updated in accordance with the graduate competences stipulated at national level by the National Authority of Qualifications and Quality Assurance for Education and Training (NAQQAET). This was indicated in interviews as helping to integrate the knowledge and skills desired by employers into the outcomes and objectives of programmes and thus improve the employability of graduates.

It was, however, seen as problematic at the university that employers on the programme advisory committees tended to be in leadership positions in their company and therefore were not those who supervised UoB graduates during internships. Some interviewees suggested that they were not the best judges of their performance and not best-fitted to make suggestions for improvement in UoB's educational programmes.

Lastly, despite the overall positive effects of **job market analysis**, specific effects varied widely according to the way it was used. Job market analysis at UoB is based on analysis of the extent to which study programmes align with the demands of the labour market and employment opportunities, hence its effects on study programmes. The same instrument at UT is focused more on identifying generic and technical skills demanded by the job market, which information is presented in a report to school administration. However, interview participants at UoB reported that the changing nature of the jobs market meant that suggestions from IQA instruments were invariably neither fully reflected in university programmes in time nor necessarily effective in enhancing graduate employability.

The research findings showed that there was a perception that graduate employability can also be improved through IQA tools for teaching and learning, in the same way that IQA tools for employability enhance teaching and learning (Lamagna, Villanueva, and Hassan, 2017; Kuria and Marwa, 2017). For example, since **course evaluations** at AIUB are based on feedback from different stakeholders (students, faculty, academic and administrative staff, employers, and experts), new criteria for assessment have been developed in some of the courses according to the various stakeholder needs and emerging national and international demands, such as the evaluation of presentation and communication skills. Interactive teaching styles have also been introduced into classrooms. Also, the positive effects of **programme evaluations** were mentioned by students at DU: they remarked that evaluations contributed to the improvement of graduates' performance in the labour market as both students and employers were involved in the evaluation processes. Regardless of the nominal purpose of the IQA tool, these findings demonstrate that IQA instruments can support graduate employability provided that the involvement of key stakeholders (e.g. employers, staff, and students) is ensured and their feedback is taken into account for the review of programme contents.

Other institutional practices[37] and their effects on employability

It was reported that **student panels** at UDE – a longitudinal, cross-sectional student study – had an effect on graduate employability since the exercise tracked students from entry to graduation. Of various surveys on students at different stages, two postgraduate surveys particularly focused on tracking graduates' transition into the job market (Ganseuer and Pistor, 2017).

In addition, **institutional evaluations** at UDE were seen as having positive effects on employability as the evaluation processes were accompanied by the involvement of job market representatives (Ganseuer and Pistor, 2017). Overall, whatever the IQA mechanism, the organized interaction between academic staff and employers seemed to be crucial to enhance employability.

Graduate employability was improved through other institutional activities (Villalobos *et al.*, 2017; Daguang *et al.*, 2017). UT's **curricular harmonization project**, developed in 2013 for all undergraduate programmes, was identified as an effective tool for enhancing employability. The project involves receiving feedback from employers about curricula and from alumni about their current profiles. This has resulted in reducing the number of years of study required to acquire a degree, the inclusion of new foreign language requirements in all undergraduate courses, and updating of the basic competences. Interview participants from all three academic units under study for IIEP case study research noted that the region was beginning to recognize the quality of education provided by the university, and appreciated its impact on graduate employability.

Some participants from the Faculty of Economics and Business at UT mentioned **job fairs** as an effective tool for enhancing employability. Interviews mentioned other similar supporting structures and practices such as **counselling centres, a joint student training programmes, and graduate talks** (Daguang *et al.*, 2017; Ganseuer and Pistor, 2017). For more information on employability, see *Chapter 3*.

37. This refers to all the institutional activities, including IQA processes not included in survey questionnaires (see *Table 2.3* in *Chapter 2*), which promote the area of concern in the study: teaching and learning, employability, and management.

However, some of the students at XMU pointed out the limitations of communicating information about graduate career trajectories through routes such as graduate talks:

> Some schools invite alumni to share their experience with current students, but they are all the very best, and their number is very limited; their experience is not typical of graduates in a tight job market. (Student, Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences, class of 2015)

The lack of resources available to UFS's careers office and discipline-based career services was also indicated as hindering the effects of such support structures on employability, resulting in unevenness of interaction with the labour market between faculties.

12.3 The effects of IQA on management

While most IQA tools are directed towards teaching and learning or employability, certain tools are specifically aimed at the enhancement of management capacity and practices, which in turn affects the quality of service delivery of university core activities. This section presents the findings from the survey administered to the administrative staff of the eight case universities. They were asked, among other things, whether they considered selected management-related IQA tools to have improved strategic planning, brought about more evidence-based decision-making and more service orientation, and increased the effectiveness of administrative operations. The survey was submitted only to administrative staff on the assumption that that they would be best-placed to judge the effects of IQA instruments on management. Other institutional practices with similar effects on management were also explored in interviews and focus group discussions.

IQA tools and effects on management

As shown in *Table 12.3*, the case study findings suggested that management-related tools were perceived as having a generally strongly positive effect on management, indicating that these instruments were highly useful in improving the effectiveness of administrative operations. The appreciation of their effects was particularly high at AIUB compared with other case universities. However, no management-related IQA tool particularly stood out as being widely more effective than others. The lower appreciation of effects at UDE needs to be interpreted with caution due to the very small number of respondents.

Table 12.3 The effects of management-related IQA tools on the effectiveness of administrative operations

	Unit self-evaluation	Unit external evaluation	Certification	Target agreement	Service-level agreement
AIUB	4.4	4.3	4.4	–	4.2
DU	3.4	3.4	–	3.5	3.6
UDE*	–	–	2.0	1.1	1.0
UFS	3.4	3.3	–	3.6**	–
UoB	3.4	3.3	3.2	3.3	3.2
UT	3.6	3.6	4.1	3.7	–
WU	3.5	3.7	3.7	3.5	–
XMU	3.7	3.4	3.4	3.4	3.5

Note: All figures are averages (see *Table 12.1* for explanation). *The small sample size for the survey at UDE does not allow for reliable conclusions. **In this table, target level agreement at UFS refers only to the one conducted at the individual level. Unit performance target agreement was excluded for ease of interpretation and comparison across the universities.

Although survey respondents rated all management-related IQA instruments as highly effective, the same tools had varying effects on management according to the institutional context. **Target (or goal) agreements** were one such IQA instrument seen as having positively contributed to management (Vettori *et al.*, 2017; Ganseuer and Pistor, 2017). This instrument involves units and the university leadership setting performance targets, typically based on the strategic development goals of the university (for a full description of target agreements, see *Chapter 2*). The qualitative findings indicated that target agreements helped to professionalize planning and prioritizing, and to support evidence-based decision-making at WU. According to the Rectorate's representatives at UDE, codifying the management decision-making process, for example through regular target agreements, also made the process more comprehensive for all stakeholders and promoted evidence-based management decisions. Moreover, it was pointed out that the provision of regular opportunities for discussion of quality in all functions of the university (teaching and learning, research, service/support structures) through target agreements contributed to fostering an organizational attitude oriented towards quality or a 'quality culture' at UDE.

However, the effects of this instrument are reported to have varied depending on the scope of its application. For instance, target-level agreements are applied to both academic and administrative staff at DU, affecting all university management. On the other hand, their use is limited to academic staff at UoB and WU, hence improving management only

in academic units. Regardless of the scope of the effects, it can be said that administrative staff had higher appreciations of target agreements in terms of improving the management of the university in general.

Unit self-evaluation or internal evaluation is another common IQA instrument with a positive effect on university management (Lamagna, Villanueva, and Hassan, 2017; AlHamad and Aladwan, 2017). It is usually employed to evaluate and improve the performance of administrative units. Unit self-evaluation at AIUB was said to facilitate the effectiveness of administrative operations by evaluating each unit/department's level of compliance with operational requirements. UoB uses the same instrument in a slightly different manner: the performance of administrative units is assessed in terms of goals, effectiveness, and resource allocation, though without any explicit compliance criteria imposed by the university. Such use of unit self-evaluation resulted in a higher appreciation of its use among administrative staff in terms of improving strategic planning, evidence-based decisions, service orientation and administrative operations.

Interviewees perceived **certification** positively in terms of enhancing the effectiveness of administrative operations, particularly when national quality assurance requirements were not present or clearly defined. In the absence of national quality assurance requirements, certification helped administrative operations and tasks at AIUB to become standardized and in line with the formal operating process required by the university (Lamagna, Villanueva, and Hassan, 2017). Most respondents at AIUB mentioned that ISO certification provided a formal standardized structure for administrative operations in most units of the university, leading to significant improvements in performance and coordination of different departments as well as strategic planning. Administrative staff in leadership positions at the university noted that certification also contributed to more effective resource allocation due to improved decision-making processes.

Other IQA tools with effects on management were mentioned in the semi-structured interviews. The interview data from DU, a private university, indicated that **student (course) evaluations** had resulted in the discontinuation of part-time academic staff contracts and the reassignment of permanent staff from courses where students had raised complaints. Similar decisions were taken in other universities, such as the promotion or suspension of academic staff at XMU.

> As the director of the centre, I call tell from course evaluations which teacher teaches a certain course better, which teachers are not fully committed to teaching, and how the teachers' course is structured. (Director of the Centre for Teaching and Learning Development)

> As the head of the Office of Human Resources, I use IQA information and data a lot. For example, in evaluating academic staff members for awards and promotion, we look at their teaching performance. Anyone who has been involved in a teaching irregularity is disqualified. (Director of the Office of Human Resources)

Another effect of course evaluations on management was the introduction of staff development activities. Student (course) evaluation identified that academic staff lacked pedagogical skills. DU took a number of initiatives to address the issue. The university developed a course for teaching staff, known as the Professional Certificate in Higher Education Teaching (PCHET), and organized 'Focus on Faculty' workshops weekly to allow staff members to discuss and learn about innovative teaching methods. The university also took part in the Association for Faculty Enrichment in Learning and Teaching (AFELT) in order to improve pedagogical skill deficiencies among academic staff. The introduction of a vice-chancellor's forum with staff and students was another initiative on the part of the university mentioned during the interviews.

At UDE, a member of academic staff is typically in a tenured position, and staff can therefore only be recommended to undergo staff development. It may be concluded that course evaluations had effects on staff allocation and management, but the type of change depends largely on the employment status of academic staff.

On the other hand, it was recognized that course evaluations as well as student and graduate monitoring activities had relatively little effects on management in some case universities, as they are not usually associated with management and certainly not with senior management (Vettori *et al.*, 2017).

Other institutional practices[38] and their effects on management

Similar effects of IQA instruments as indicated above have been achieved through other institutional practices. The UDE **student panel** is one such practice that provides information on the characteristics of

38. This refers to all the institutional activities, including IQA processes not included in survey questionnaires (see *Table 2.3* in *Chapter 2*), which promote the areas of concern in the study: teaching and learning, employability, and management.

UDE's students and graduates. While the data generated by the panel on particular features of UDE students can be used to improve teaching and learning and also support management decisions, this tool is, to an even greater extent, geared towards providing information to UDE's leadership rather than particular faculties or study programmes. When interviewed about the student survey panel, representatives of UDE's rectorate emphasized its importance, because it provided valuable information about the university's students. For example, results from the panel's first cohorts confirmed that the typical UDE student, most of whom had come from non-academic or migrant backgrounds, had special needs in areas such as language qualifications and orientation in academic life. Based on information acquired by the student panel but also on other unsystematic information (such as intuitive knowledge of the student body), special programmes have been implemented to support students from non-academic or migrant families, e.g. in the framework of the project department of CHEDQE, where programmes like 'Talent College Ruhr' find school pupils to recruit them into university education, and support non-traditional students during their course of study.

Similarly, interview findings suggested that **institutional evaluations** had positive effects on management at UDE, introducing changes in the organizational structure of a unit, establishing a good leadership policy, and implementing qualifications for leadership personnel (Ganseuer and Pistor, 2017). Because institutional evaluation processes are organized at senior leadership level, their effects were more visible to deans and chancellors, and heads of central administration.

Performance indicator monitoring was recognized by interviewees at UFS as effective in improving evidence-based decision-making. This is evidenced by the systematic monitoring of performance indicators at different levels: state, council, and internal levels. UFS monitors a number of key performance indicators, such as the institutional enrolment plan and financial projections and risks, and submits mid-year and annual reports on these to the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). In addition, it monitors and prepares quarterly reports on a much-expanded set of indicators, including information about the university's performance in relation to its peers, for the UFS council. Finally, an internal indicator dashboard – the UFS Higher Education Data Analyser – provides a selection of indicators for all internal staff members in a user-friendly format, as well as the capacity for disaggregation of these indicators to faculty, department, and programme level (Lange and

Kriel, 2017). Such varying levels of monitoring allowed the university to process and internalize different performance indicators, facilitating evidence-based decision-making.

12.4 Conclusions

The comparative analysis of effects based on both quantitative and qualitative data drawn from the eight case universities has brought to light that most IQA tools were perceived as being effective. However, effects vary according to IQA instruments and the way they are used. This section summarizes the main effects of the respective types of IQA instruments. Also, some conclusions are drawn with regard to the lessons learned to illuminate ways to maximize the effectiveness of IQA tools.

The positive effect of IQA instruments with regard to their immediate purpose. According to our analysis, programme evaluation was clearly the IQA instrument with the strongest effects on both teaching and learning, in terms of improving the overall coherence of study programmes, content coverage, and student assessment. Similarly, employability-related IQA tools such as graduate tracer studies, employer involvement in study programme revisions, and job market analysis were perceived as having generally positive effects on the employability of graduates. Increased employability of students was achieved through providing practical information on current job markets to staff responsible for the adaptation of academic programmes to strengthen their employment orientation. Management-related IQA instruments designed to enhance managerial effectiveness, were seen as very effective by administrative staff. Target agreements and unit self-evaluation (or internal evaluation) helped to standardize management processes at the universities in line with administrative requirements. The research confirmed that the effects of IQA tools were generally in line with the purpose of these instruments, e.g. teaching and learning-related IQA tools tend to enhance teaching and learning.

The potential effects of IQA instruments beyond their immediate purpose. Whether tools are related to teaching and learning, employability, or management, their effects are not limited to their nominal purpose. In certain universities, course and programme evaluations were found to improve graduate employability, particularly when those tools involved employers and students in the data-collection processes. Moreover, as the results of some employability-related IQA actions were taken into account for the revision of study programmes,

typically within the framework of programme evaluations, there was an improvement in the field of teaching and learning. The research also brought to light that IQA can have effects across the areas of teaching and learning, employability, and management. One such effect was the contribution made by IQA tools for teaching and learning to improvements in staff management (e.g. staff allocation) and development (e.g. staff training and workshops). When the application of IQA tools in the scope of potential decisions is broad, it can be said that effects are also multi-faceted.

The effectiveness of IQA tools depending widely on the way they are implemented and followed up. In the interview and focus group data it was often mentioned that an IQA tool was not necessarily effective as such; instead, it depended largely on the way the instrument was implemented. Programme evaluation at WU was found to be effective because it was organized by means of a one-day conference involving many stakeholders. Similarly, programme evaluation at UoB was reported as having led to much change because of the consultative structure, and in particular the participation of employer representatives and students in the programme review process. Institutional evaluation at UDE was seen to be effective because it was directly related to the five-yearly planning process at the university, and thus necessary changes could be fed directly into decision-making. As a consequence, it can be concluded that IQA tools are not effective per se; rather, their effectiveness depends largely on the way in which they are organized and used.

The room for improvement in order to maximize the effectiveness of IQA tools. Shortcomings were reported in the way some IQA tools were used. Students, for instance, often commented that course evaluation coming at the end of the semester was not useful, since it did not have any effect on their education. They pressed for course evaluation to be organized earlier in the course of the semester or year. Graduate tracer studies were said to suffer frequently from a low response rate from graduates, thus they could not provide reliable and meaningful information from graduates. It was also mentioned that the results of graduate tracer studies were often not disseminated among internal stakeholders. It can thus be concluded that certain IQA tools still face a number of problems in the way in which they are used, and that there are areas where improvement can and needs to be made.

The appreciation of other institutional practices with positive effects on teaching and learning, employability, and management. Institutional practices such as student panels and institutional evaluation at UDE were said to have effects on all aspects of concern in this study: teaching and learning, employability, and management. This may be explained by the coverage of the respective practices. The student panel is concerned with the full cycle of student life from entry to graduation; institutional evaluations also cover every functional area of the university (teaching and learning, research, service, and management). Although acting on limited areas, other practices, such as performance indicator monitoring and curriculum review at UFS, and a curriculum harmonization project at UT, were reported to have similar effects on teaching and learning, employability, and management to other IQA instruments. Job fairs, counselling centres, joint student training programmes, and graduate talks were thought to be as effective in improving graduate employability as employability-related IQA instruments. This demonstrates the need to analyse the effects of IQA tools with regard to the broader scope of their application, rather than their immediate focus, and to consider unintended as well as intended effects.

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Chapter 13

Which internal and external factors support effective IQA systems?

Michaela Martin, with Jihyun Lee

Based on the supposition that internal quality assurance (IQA) does not function on its own but, rather, works within national and institutional contexts, the IIEP research project studied internal and external factors that conditioned the effectiveness of IQA. While there is abundant literature on quality assurance structures and processes, the influence of *context* on IQA is generally under-researched from an empirical point of view.

The research made a distinction between internal conditions – the institutional environment for IQA – and external factors – the national environment that influences the functioning of HEIs. Hypothetical factors identified from the available literature on IQA were submitted for assessment by both academic and administrative staff through online survey questionnaires. To take into account various stakeholders' perceptions on these factors, internal and external factors were also discussed in qualitative interviews with university leadership, and in focus group discussions with department and programme heads, as well as students.

This chapter concludes with a discussion of the overall appreciation of IQA, as ascertained from the surveys conducted with academic and administrative staff, and interviews at the eight case universities. Respondents were asked how they perceived IQA at their university in terms of its overall benefits and the workload it generates.

13.1 Internal conditioning factors

The hypothetical internal conditioning factors included in the online survey questionnaires were leadership support, financial incentives for staff, support from students, visibility of measures deduced from IQA procedures, solid data information system, transparent information on the IQA procedures, scientific evaluations on the IQA procedures, and active participation in IQA procedures. Given the focus of IQA on teaching

and learning, XMU included support by teachers instead of financial incentives in the survey questionnaires as an internal conditioning factor. Academic and administrative staff were asked whether they thought that these factors were important or not, and whether they existed in their university. Based on findings from both quantitative and qualitative data, the perceived importance of internal conditioning factors was analysed jointly with perceptions on the existence of such factors in the respective case universities.

Importance and existence of internal conditioning factors

Internal conditioning factors are closely related to one another, and the following factors were most frequently mentioned across case studies as important: leadership support, solid information system, transparency of IQA procedures, and stakeholder participation. Financial incentives to staff members were strongly endorsed by some, but viewed critically by others.

In general, the importance of factors typically rated higher than their existence. **Leadership support** was identified across case universities as one of the most important factors for the effective functioning of IQA. Despite varying levels of appreciation between academic and administrative staff or within the respective staff group across the universities, the majority of case universities noted that leadership support played a crucial role in the university's IQA system (see *Table 13.1*).

Table 13.1 Comparative table on leadership support

		AIUB	DU	UDE*	UFS	UoB	UT	WU	XMU
Importance	Academic staff	4.6	4.8	3.8	4.6	4.0	4.3	1.4	4.4
	Administrative staff	4.7	4.7	4.3	4.5	4.3	4.6	2.0	4.5
Existence	Academic staff	3.9	–	–	2.8	3.2	3.3	–	4.0
	Administrative staff	4.6	3.8	–	2.6	3.0	3.6	–	4.3

Note: Averages were calculated as follows: a). A numerical value was attributed to response categories with, for instance, 5 = very much and 1 = not at all. b) Averages were then calculated in the following way: (number of 'very much' responses × 5) + (number of … responses × 4) + (number of … responses × 3) + (number of … responses × 2) + (number of 'not at all' responses × 1) / the total number of responses.*The small sample size for the survey at UDE does not allow for reliable conclusions.

The table shows that, in most universities, administrative staff tended to value leadership support even more highly than academic staff, although both groups thought that leadership support was more important than it was present in their respective university. The

perceptions of academic and administrative staff members were not significantly different in terms of the existence of leadership support, with the exception of AIUB. At this university, administrative staff reported higher appreciation of its presence than did academic staff.

The high level of appreciation of leadership support was further elaborated in interviews and focus group discussions with academic staff. Some staff insisted on the potential role of leadership in introducing IQA activities, training for personnel in charge of IQA, and disseminating results from IQA instruments. Leadership was also seen as playing an important role in creating a quality culture through promoting self-evaluation at all stages of institutional processes and management (Villalobos *et al.*, 2017). The importance of dedicated structures that provide leadership for quality assurance was mentioned by several interviewees (AlHamad and Aladwan, 2017; Daguang *et al.*, 2017; Lange and Kriel, 2017). For instance, a number of academic staff members at UFS expressed their appreciation of the support from the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL), the Directorate for Institutional Research and Academic Planning (DIRAP), the Postgraduate School, the Higher Degrees Committee, and the Academic Planning and Development Committee of Senate (APDC). At UoB, the role of an advisor to the president for quality assurance was highly appreciated by the vice-president of academic affairs and graduate studies. The benefits of such leadership support were also mentioned in the following interviews at XMU:

> The university leadership support for IQA is crucial. The core leaders should support and promote the formulation of policies, fund inputs, and support resource allocation, etc., for IQA. (Head of the Office of Human Resources)

> Under the teaching reform led by the vice-president, our college has implemented broadly classified enrolment, launched a humanities lecture series, and established a general education centre, which provides great impetus to the improvement of students' study methods and the promotion of their personal qualities. (Head of the Office of Academic Affairs)

Leadership was not limited to the central level: department and faculty leadership for IQA was also identified as important, although it was present only in certain universities. One interviewee from UFS said that faculty leaders ought to take more responsibility for support of IQA than they currently did. It is thus important to understand leadership for IQA to be a factor not only at the central university level, but also at decentralized levels.

A solid information system was frequently mentioned as essential to a university's IQA system, as it affected the availability of analysable data on important matters such as student progression and completion, and thus supported an evidence-based dialogue on quality improvement. *Table 13.2* indicates that both academic and administrative staff placed a high value on solid data, with administrative staff viewing it as more important than academic staff. The perception of the existence of solid information systems was much lower in both staff groups, with case university academic staff in particular pointing out strongly a discrepancy between the importance and the existence of a solid information system. This underlines that solid information systems to support effective IQA are still problematic in universities.

Table 13.2 Comparative table on solid information system

		AIUB	DU	UDE*	UFS	UoB	UT	WU	XMU
Importance	Academic staff	4.2	4.4	3.8	4.4	4.0	4.6	2.1	4.3
	Administrative staff	4.6	4.4	3.9	4.5	3.7	4.9	1.4	4.4
Existence	Academic staff	3.7	2.5	–	2.5	2.5	3.1	–	3.6
	Administrative staff	4.4	3.0	–	2.6	2.6	3.1	–	3.9

Note: All figures are averages (see *Table 13.1* for explanation). *The small sample size for the survey at UDE does not allow for reliable conclusions.

The interviews and focus group discussions confirmed that a solid information system was viewed as strongly supportive of IQA, and that its presence was not acknowledged by many staff. Interestingly, some staff members in case universities that did have more solid information systems still were sceptical about their presence and suggested areas to be improved (AlHamad and Aladwan, 2017). Despite the existence of the online assessment information management system (AIMS) at UoB, university leaders found the dissemination of IQA data to be problematic, which was said to constrain the development of effective governance and management arrangements for IQA. Academics in leadership positions agreed that the high degree of centralization of access to data and information slowed down processes and impeded the development of effective management of IQA. It was further indicated that the integration of databases could be essential for developing a solid information system (Daguang *et al.*, 2017).

The interview data at XMU highlighted that technical issues such as fragmentation of the information system could also hinder the effective functioning of IQA:

> The information system of the individual departments can support IQA in different units, but the problem is that platforms for information sharing are not compatible with one another. For example, since the course selection systems for undergraduates and for postgraduates are not integrated, students cannot select courses through the other platform. (Director GH)
>
> We should break the barriers between different departments and administrative units and promote information-sharing among different departments. Establishing a university-wide IQA database will make information-sharing a reality and improve our educational performance. (Director G)

In addition, some academic staff members expressed concerns over the reliability of survey data from some of the IQA instruments at the university: they considered the response rates to be too low, or the data too subjective, or the lack of anonymity too unethical (Lange and Kriel, 2017).

> But the problem is that it is extremely difficult to manage the process if there are discrepancies in the data. Because you actually need the support of the data and the outcomes of all these measures to support your actions; to make it easier for management to actually implement all of these QA measures. Also, the moment there are discrepancies, then it opens the door for people to not engage. (Economic and Management Sciences faculty member)

As much as solid information systems, **transparent information on IQA procedures** was viewed as a critically important factor for IQA. *Table 13.3* illustrates the overall positive acknowledgement of its importance in terms of supporting effective IQA. Although the difference in perceptions was not significant, academic staff seemed to view this factor as somewhat more important than did administrative staff. The opposite trend was seen when it came to opinion on the existence of transparent information on IQA procedures.

Interview data also highlighted the importance of transparent IQA procedures, showing that transparency of IQA procedures and results was seen as a necessary condition for effective IQA (Villalobos *et al.*, 2017). The majority of university authorities at UT agreed that the university's clearly defined system had positive effects on developing and implementing its IQA mechanisms and instruments. Academic staff

in the focus group discussions also stressed the need for a greater degree of coordination in the generation of IQA instruments and mechanisms in the areas of teaching, research, outreach, and institutional management.

Table 13.3 Comparative table on transparent information on IQA procedures

		AIUB	DU	UDE*	UFS	UoB	UT	WU	XMU
Importance	Academic staff	4.4	4.4	3.7	4.3	4.1	4.7	2.3	4.3
	Administrative staff	4.6	4.4	4.0	4.2	3.8	4.8	1.5	4.3
Existence	Academic staff	3.7	2.7	–	2.3	2.7	3.3	–	3.6
	Administrative staff	4.4	3.0	–	2.1	2.5	3.3	–	4.0

Note: All figures are averages (see *Table 13.1* for explanation). *The small size of the sample for the survey at UDE does not allow reliable conclusions.

However, stakeholders disagreed about the existence of transparent information on IQA procedures (Ganseuer and Pistor, 2017). The unequal perceptions of transparency in IQA procedures at UDE reflected the position that staff held there. Heads of programme reported that they were only involved in selected steps in the quality cycle and thus not aware of the underlying philosophy and background of quality cycles (e.g. they were asked to write reports for university target and performance agreements without knowing why and received no feedback as to how their reports would be used). Although deans and faculty managers also conceded that there was an information gap, they seemed to be slightly better informed, due to their direct involvement in the development process for programme-level quality assurance tools.

Clearly, there are still areas to be improved in terms of transparency of IQA procedures that would allow tools and processes to function in an integrated manner. The Vice-President for Academic Affairs at XMU, for example, said:

> The most pressing issue with the university's quality assurance is the lack of systematic, sustainable designs at the top level of the university. We've worked hard to transform the previous spontaneously developed, fragmented, experience-based quality assurance measures or methods into a professional, scientific quality control system. We've raised our quality assurance awareness and practices to the right level. To enhance the university's educational and teaching quality, it's essential to build a full set of rigorous methods, technical lines, and management procedures.

The findings of our research therefore suggest that more transparency in IQA procedures is required to ensure that the procedures and results of

IQA tools are appropriately disseminated to a university's stakeholders. This points to the need to communicate the purpose of IQA and its instruments more effectively, in particular to academic staff.

Active stakeholder participation was considered critical for the effective functioning of IQA. *Table 13.4* illustrates that both academic and administrative staff considered stakeholder participation to be highly important, yet again they showed some reluctance to acknowledge its existence at their university. The table shows that there was a significant difference in the perceived importance of stakeholder participation between academic and administrative staff at UoB, with the perception of academic staff in general lower than that of administrative respondents. It is noteworthy that administrative staff at most case universities acknowledged the importance of stakeholder participation more than academic staff, though there was perceptible difference in the two groups' opinions as to the factor's actual presence in their particular university.

Table 13.4 Comparative table on active stakeholder participation

		AIUB	DU	UDE	UFS	UoB	UT	WU	XMU
Importance	Academic staff	4.1	4.4	3.6	4.1	4.0	4.5	1.6	4.2
	Administrative staff	4.5	4.4	4.1	4.1	2.6	4.7	1.7	4.3
Existence	Academic staff	3.8	2.8	–	2.2	3.8	3.1	–	3.5
	Administrative staff	4.1	2.3	–	2.0	2.7	3.2	–	3.9

Note: All figures are averages (see *Table 13.1* for explanation). *The small size of the sample for the survey at UDE does not allow reliable conclusions.

The interview and focus group discussion data made clear some causes of the different perceptions on the presence of stakeholder participation. Interviewees at UFS attributed the lack of engagement by academics in IQA to the top-down nature of the university's discourse on change and quality at the university. Perceptions on stakeholder participation also varied in response to the focus of IQA at a university. XMU's heavy emphasis on teaching quality in IQA placed stress on **support by teachers** in the area. Some interviewees noted that teachers' efforts to enhance their teaching performance were an important condition for an effective IQA system.

> Teachers' dedication to their teaching duties is the most important internal conditioning factor for IQA. To produce high-calibre talent, the university must give first priority to teaching and make sure teachers realize that their greatest works are not the books that they write but their students, and that their most important task is talent cultivation. It's also important to create an atmosphere wherein teaching is respected and teachers are committed to excellence in teaching. (Head of the Centre for Teaching and Learning Development)

Similarly, **support by students** was considered to be highly important for the successful implementation of an IQA system in several case universities (Daguang *et al.*, 2017). Teachers and administrators at XMU agreed in interviews that support from students was an important conditioning factor for the effective functioning of IQA. This is illustrated in the following interview extract:

> One of the important enabling factors for IQA at Xiamen University is the expectation and support of students. We are responsible for giving students a great academic environment to improve their capacity since they chose to go to Xiamen University. (Vice-Dean for Academic Affairs, School of Architecture and Civil Engineering)

This viewpoint was also echoed in the interviews at WU, indicating that the well-structured IQA system should be based on the needs of different stakeholders, with the involvement of students being strongly valued.

However, the presence of student participation in IQA was not always viewed entirely positively (Lamagna, Villanueva, and Hassan, 2017; Vettori *et al.*, 2017). Student interviewees at AIUB described their involvement in IQA as relatively low, and suggested that student awareness of the importance of IQA needed to be raised by the authorities through the university website and through personal accounts in the university management system. They also advocated raising awareness and participation by means of a student body to disseminate information related to the university's IQA system.

Although perceived as another important internal factor for the IQA system, there were varying understandings of the importance and presence of **financial incentives** (see *Table 13.5*). Overall, academic staff seemed to place a higher importance on financial incentives than administrative staff, with a striking difference between staff groups being observed in some of the case universities (AlHamad and Aladwan, 2017; Lange and Kriel, 2017). The gap in perception between academic and administrative staff was greater for this factor than any other. Fewer academic staff than administrative staff recognized its existence, suggesting that financial incentives were not sufficiently provided to academics.

Table 13.5 Comparative table on financial incentives

		AIUB	DU	UDE*	UFS	UoB	UT	WU	XMU
Importance	Academic staff	4.4	4.3	4.0	4.1	4.0	3.8	–	–
	Administrative staff	4.2	4.0	3.2	4.0	4.1	3.9	–	–
Existence	Academic staff	3.5	1.9	–	1.8	2.1	2.9	–	–
	Administrative staff	4.2	4.6	–	2.0	2.2	2.9	–	–

Note: All figures are averages (see *Table 13.1* for explanation). *The small size of the sample for the survey at UDE does not allow reliable conclusions.

Varying perceptions of the importance and existence of financial incentives were also discernible in interviews and focus group discussions. It appeared that the variations in understanding largely depended on whether or not IQA was seen as part of the regular responsibilities of staff. Academic staff at AIUB tended to emphasize the importance of financial incentives for an effective functioning of IQA. The development of IQA was part of an externally funded project at the university, hence it was not perceived as part of the normal functions and duties of academic staff, hence their request for additional rewards in return for the involvement in IQA.

In the case of universities where IQA was understood to be part of the core tasks of an academic, interviews demonstrated a contrasting perception: financial incentives and rewards were perceived as unimportant for the effective functioning of IQA (Ganseuer and Pistor, 2017; Vettori *et al.*, 2017). At UDE, for instance, academics perceived quality-related work as an inherent part of their duties, rather than connected to management processes. Academic staff at WU regarded incentives and rewards as largely irrelevant to the success of IQA since the institutional culture there encourages actors at every level to engage with quality improvement.

> The perception that financial incentives and rewards are less important owes something to the prevailing quality culture at WU. WU has a long tradition of constructive dialogue, and is an important aspect of the IQA system. (Vice-rector at WU)

Also, it was pointed out that financial incentives to staff members might even be inhibiting to those with internal motivations or 'a drive ... to change things although the system does not require this from them' (Lange and Kriel, 2017).

Other internal conditioning factors

Other internal conditioning factors were identified in the qualitative data as internally conditioning the effective functioning of IQA system: alignment of IQA with strategic planning, and provision of staff development.

In several of the case universities, interviewees referred to the importance of **aligning IQA with strategic planning and management**. Indeed, strategic planning can provide a framework of goals and objectives, including on quality, towards which IQA works. Also, IQA provides information and evidence to feed into strategic planning exercises. In this conception, IQA and strategic management are intrinsically interwoven. At UT, this linkage was strongly acknowledged by interviewees, who highlighted the fact that 'strategic management had helped to define goals and quantifiable indicators for IQA. This further allowed the university to evaluate accomplishments and make necessary improvements to the IQA system' (Villalobos *et al.*, 2017). Ganseuer and Pistor (2017) also indicated that institutional planning for teaching and learning was tightly connected to IQA, such as the strategy for teaching and learning, which was drafted by the Centre for Higher Education Development and Quality Enhancement.

> The interconnection between quality assurance and institutional planning was mentioned as a regular feature of UDE's quality assurance system, which is designed to close quality loops on microscopic (e.g. individual teaching performance), mesoscopic (e.g. study programme design), and macroscopic (strategic planning) level.

The quality and quantity of human resources for IQA were frequently reported as conditioning the IQA system in case universities (Lange and Kriel, 2017; Villalobos *et al.*, 2017). Staff members at UFS acknowledged the importance of improving staff competencies and workload in relation to IQA. All of those interviewed – including staff from three faculties as well as students – reported that they felt heavily burdened by IQA activities due to the lack of human resources devoted to them. They advocated the recruitment of additional staff members for IQA-related tasks and the development of IQA competencies in existing staff. Similarly, university authorities at UT said that training personnel was a key factor in implementing the IQA system. This was consistent with the perspectives of both academic and administrative staff in focus group discussions, both groups acknowledging the need for

being informed about quality assurance issues through a permanent IQA training programme.

13.2 External conditioning factors

External factors conditioning the effective functioning of quality assurance were discussed in qualitative interviews with holders of university leadership positions – deans of faculties, heads of offices, and programme directors. Two pre-identified factors were presented to the interviewees: the role of external quality assurance (EQA), and the level of autonomy of universities.

External quality assurance

Although there were mixed opinions on the role of EQA in the development of IQA at the case universities, the leadership of the majority of institutions viewed it as a crucial, and even supportive factor. EQA covers a variety of evaluative processes, such as institutional and programme accreditation and reviews and audits, which higher education institutions (HEIs) either have to undergo as part of a national regulatory requirement, or to which they submit themselves on a voluntary basis (Martin and Stella, 2007). EQA may be implemented by national and/or internationally operating quality assurance bodies.

International accreditation

Despite the existence in their country of national quality assurance bodies (with the exception of Bangladesh where a national quality assurance agency did not yet exist at the time of IIEP research), four of the eight case universities mentioned having requested accreditation of some of their programmes by an accreditation provider located outside their country. Whether compulsory or voluntary, international accreditations have provided an opportunity to increase institutional capacity for IQA, at the level of both individual colleges and universities as a whole. UoB prepared for international accreditation of its programmes in engineering, chemistry, and IT, starting in 2005. This preparation process allowed academic units to adapt and consolidate evaluation techniques in light of the innovative practices required for international accreditation, which provided a strong basis for development of the university's overall institutional capacity for IQA. International accreditations also helped to identify areas that needed improvement for individual colleges. At XMU, several faculties have requested international accreditation of

their academic programmes. The dean of the faculty of management at XMU explained:

> XMU's School of Management received international accreditation from the Association of MBAs (AMBA) and business school accreditation from the European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS) in 2011 and 2013, respectively. These external evaluations propelled us to pay attention to student satisfaction and thus guarantee that they can gain knowledge [through academic programmes] and have platforms and resources for networking.

Moreover, as a result of international accreditations, a dedicated quality assurance unit was created at some case universities (Lamagna, Villanueva, and Hassan, 2017; Vettori *et al.*, 2017) to support internal processes related to international accreditations. Similarly, at WU, international accreditations had led to changes such as the adoption of learning process assurance as well as the creation of the programme director position. This further resulted in promoting dialogue on quality among the university community, a crucial component of today's IQA system at WU.

However, some critical voices from academics were heard in the interviews on international accreditation: notably claiming that accreditation could have negative side-effects when it required methods or instruments designed to fit only the system of higher education in the country of origin (Vettori *et al.*, 2017).

The national quality assurance framework

National quality assurance frameworks were also seen as having a significant effect on the development of IQA in the case universities. With the exception of Bangladesh, all case universities adapted their IQA to the requirements of their national quality assurance framework. At UDE, the introduction of so-called system accreditation in 2010 provided a major impetus to the development of IQA in the university (see *Chapter 4*). According to system accreditation, any German university granted system accreditation no longer needs to go through sometimes cumbersome and manifold programme accreditation processes; instead, the university is allowed to design and introduce new IQA tools and integrate existing ones under a system perspective (Ganseuer and Pistor, 2017). At UDE, a two-year development project for IQA was initiated with funding from the Ministry for Science, Technology and Research of the federal state of North Rhine Westphalia. Within this framework, major developments were introduced at the university, such as the

development of an implementation process for quality assurance at study programme level, and IQA training for UDE personnel.

Similarly, national audits and programme accreditation in South Africa led to many changes in universities. One visible effect was the development of IQA policies and quality assurance structures in universities, according to the criteria and requirements emanating from the Higher Education Quality Committee (HECQ). At UFS, a formalized, centrally located quality assurance system was first established in 2006 in response to HECQ's institutional quality audit system. HECQ's audit report of 2008 highlighted the lack of monitoring of quality policies at the university in particular at the decentralized level. This led to the transformation of the institutional structure for IQA and the integration of quality assurance into the Directorate for Institutional Research and Academic Planning (DIRAP) (see *Chapter 6*).

This is also the case for the People's Republic of China, where national requirements for EQA have shaped the development of IQA at universities (see *Chapter 9*). The Chinese EQA system consists of compulsory annual institutional self-evaluations, external conformance evaluations conducted every five years, and professional accreditation of certain study programmes (Daguang *et al.*, 2017). XMU adapted its IQA system to respond to the national requirements by introducing an annual undergraduate evaluation, teaching supervision, teaching observation, and feedback from students. These mechanisms supported the annual self-evaluation and the five-yearly conformance evaluation conducted by the Higher Education Evaluation Centre.

The role of Bahrain's local quality assurance authority, the National Authority for Qualifications and Quality Assurance for Education and Training (NAQQAET), was positively viewed by UoB's leaders (AlHamad and Aladwan, 2017; see also *Chapter 6*). They noted that NAQQAET required Bahraini HEIs to comply with the national qualifications framework (NQF) as well as to conduct programme and institutional reviews on a regular basis. This persuaded UoB to conduct annual programme and course evaluations, and to align the intended learning outcomes (ILOs) of programmes with NQF thresholds. As those two bodies started reviewing or accrediting the university after establishing its IQA system, they thus helped to fine-tune the IQA system of UoB. Centralized management ensured the implementation of standardized learning outcomes in all colleges and programmes, and

the colleges and departments ensured its diffusion through and to all faculty members.

Despite the positive contribution of EQA to IQA, EQA was sometimes also perceived as having a limited effect on IQA and even hindering the development of certain IQA processes. Interviewees at XMU mentioned that EQA only served as an initial driver for quality assurance at the university.

> The assessments and appraisals by the Ministry of Education and professional certifications facilitate the development of IQA, but only temporarily. The internal discussions [and practices] on the quality assurance are required for the sustained development of the IQA system at the university. (JS, Head of Department)

Moreover, since external accrediting agencies usually require a university to meet either their own regulations and requirements or those of the labour market before accreditation, there is delay in the accreditation process and ineffective results from accreditation. For instance, it was reported that the strict requirements and regulations of external accrediting agencies such as the Nursing Council of Kenya and the Engineering Board of Kenya had delayed the launch of new academic programmes in nursing and electronic engineering at DU. The postponed accreditation was said to have made the proposed core texts obsolete when the programme came to be implemented.

Interviewees in academic leadership positions further expressed negative opinions of accrediting agencies, saying that their prescriptive processes left DU little room to incorporate its liberal arts approach to education. At UDE, study programme accreditations were also 'not thought of as intrinsically effective' by some academic staff. They were said to be 'bureaucratic', 'pseudo-objective', and even 'absolute nonsense' by an interviewee. The majority of interviewees in academic leadership positions viewed the process of accreditation as a control mechanism whose intention was to ensure that programmes met minimum standards. They stated that these EQA mechanisms were not at all helpful to quality enhancement at the university and could lead to a so-called 'compliance culture', in which internal stakeholders focus on external requirements to maximize their chances of obtaining a positive verdict from the quality assurance body. This indicated that the role of EQA in IQA development was perceived differently depending on the context of the university.

National regulatory requirements

Case study findings indicated that other national regulatory obligations, such as reporting requirements, had considerable effects on universities' IQA. Interviewees at XMU mentioned that the government imposed the requirement of conducting two surveys, and that universities needed to report on these to government. For instance, since 2012, Chinese universities have been required to submit annual reports on the quality of undergraduate teaching. This was said to have encouraged the normalization and standardization of IQA processes, and raised the awareness of higher education quality assurance among colleges and universities.

> Yes, the requirements are supportive. Colleges and universities are required to release two reports, on undergraduate education and graduate employment quality annually. The annual compilation of these two reports helps us to identify deep-rooted problems in teaching quality improvement. The release of the reports also helps us build the teaching database and supports the existing mechanisms for improving teaching quality, thus facilitating the monitoring and improvement of teaching quality throughout the teaching process. (J, Head of Unit)

This example showed that the national regulatory requirements can be beneficial to the development of IQA at a university. Critical voices were, however, also raised. Mention was made of regulatory requirements bringing with them an increased workload, and of a lack of autonomy in implementing them. In such a context there is a grave danger that universities will develop a 'compliance culture' rather than a strengthened ability for self-regulation and quality improvement. Nonetheless, national regulatory requirements were perceived as supportive for IQA development.

Somewhat surprisingly, the case universities did not refer to other external factors that could have been mentioned as supportive of IQA developments, such as the provision of information to enable institutions to compare their performance against that of others, guidance and training support for institutions, and a research and evidence base, i.e. systems of external 'quality support' for IQA.

Institutional autonomy

Since autonomy is necessary for universities to shape IQA to their particular vision and development needs, the role of autonomy in the development of IQA at the case universities was submitted as a topic

for discussion in the interviews and focus group discussions. The notion of autonomy was investigated from two different angles: first, the autonomy that the government has granted to universities to design and implement their IQA system, and secondly the autonomy that the central management of a university has left to basic units (e.g. faculties, departments) to do the same.

The association of autonomy with two different notions was well demonstrated in the interview findings at UDE. First of all, the notion of autonomy was connected to democracy and participative higher education governance, as in this comment from a governing board member:

> In general, I can imagine democratic, pluralistic circumstances, which are balanced in terms of power, as being factors which could contribute to a well-functioning QA system. (Interview III, Governing Board at UDE, translation by authors)

In addition, members of the Rectorate at UDE acknowledged that the importance of autonomy at sub-unit level was recognized at UDE, although they equally acknowledged the importance of a prescriptive, guiding framework in order to make connections between centralized and decentralized strategic planning:

> Autonomy is a key element for the governance of higher education institutions. To believe quality could be prescribed is wrong and dangerous. A certain degree of autonomy, combined with continuous efforts to communicate the quality spirit and the existence of cycles between autonomous areas and the overarching area, this, for me, is a formula for success. (Interview II, Rectorate, translation by authors)

Similarly, interviewees at XMU indicated that autonomy allowed them to implement quality assurance in light of local specificities and existing issues. They appreciated particularly the autonomy for colleges to adapt IQA to their specificities, as it gave them more flexibility and choices.

> Autonomy allows us to implement quality assurance in light of characteristic and existing problems. (JS, Head of Department)
>
> The autonomy for colleges is very important; it gives us more flexibility and choice. (GL, Dean of Faculty)

However, IQA was also seen as a form of imposing managerialism by interviewees at UFS, where it was perceived by many academics as taking away both individual autonomy and that of their academic units,

leading to a gain of power of the university leadership. An interviewee at this university said:

> If you think about how academics are brought up, they are brought up to have an inherent pride in what they are doing. So I think one of the elements of the system is the professional identity of an academic and for many of them these systems are offensive because then they imply that they don't have the integrity. (Humanities faculty member)

The issue of autonomy therefore clearly relates to the issue of who makes what decision in quality assurance. It throws light on the issue of the balance between centralized and decentralized decision-making in IQA (see also *Chapter 5*). There is certainly not one solution to this issue; solutions will have to fit a university's particular context and organizational culture.

13.3 Staff perceptions on overall benefits and shortcomings of IQA

The overall benefits of IQA

In the surveys conducted as part of the eight case studies, academic and administrative staff were asked about their appreciation of the benefits of IQA. There was consensus on the 'very high' or 'high' benefits of IQA among academic and administrative staff at AIUB, UT, and WU; respondents at DU, UFS, UoB, and XMU considered the benefits to be 'high' or 'moderate'. In general, administrative staff had a higher appreciation of the benefits of IQA than their academic counterparts. At DU, XMU, and WU, for example, administrative staff reported a much higher appreciation of IQA than did academic staff. Academic staff in these universities expressed a more moderate appreciation, in terms of the overall benefits of IQA instruments and processes.

The positive association of IQA with the benefits of IQA was supported by findings from the qualitative interviews. At XMU, interviewees appreciated the role of the university's IQA system in enhancing its overall effectiveness in the teaching and learning domain (Daguang *et al.*, 2017). For example, the head of the Office of Academic Affairs said:

> The university has witnessed increased satisfaction with teaching quality on the part of undergraduate students. In the four academic years from 2011 to 2015, there has been class evaluation each year, with rising ratings. The percentage of graduates who are satisfied or very satisfied with their teachers has increased from 75 per cent to 84 per cent, and the percentage

of graduates who are satisfied or very satisfied with the overall teaching performance has climbed from 78 per cent to 85 per cent. Moreover, the percentage of graduates who think that their competences have improved or improved greatly has gone up by 16 per cent.

Table 13.6 Overall benefits of IQA instruments and processes

		Very high (%)	High (%)	Moderate (%)	Low (%)	None at all (%)	I do not know (%)
AIUB	Academic staff	43	37.8	19.2	0	0	0
	Administrative staff	58	29	13	0	0	0
DU	Academic staff	39.3	0	39.3	3.6	7.1	10.7
	Administrative staff	14.3	57.1	23.8	0	0	4.8
UDE*	Academic staff	0	7.1	42.9	35.7	7.1	7.1
	Administrative staff	0	25	33.3	8.3	25	8.3
UFS	Academic staff	8.6	40.3	31.2	8.6	1.1	10.2
	Administrative staff	17.5	36.4	19	6.7	2.2	18.2
UoB	Academic staff	13.5	34.1	23.8	17.5	3.2	7.9
	Administrative staff	9	31.4	26.9	9.6	2.6	20.5
UT	Academic staff	29	43	12.9	3.2	0	11.8
	Administrative staff	39.2	31.4	19.6	2	0	7.8
WU**	Academic staff	18.2	29.6	36.4	11.4	4.6	0
	Administrative staff	14.8	59.3	18.5	7.4	0	0
XMU	Academic staff	6.2	28.5	43.9	7.9	3.1	10.4
	Administrative staff	8.7	41.1	38.4	1.9	1.5	8.4

Note: *The small sample size for the survey at UDE does not allow for reliable conclusions.**This is limited to the perceived benefits of IQA for the respective staff. WU measured staff perceptions of overall benefits in terms of students, graduates, prospective students, job market, academic/ administrative staff, and university administration.

In the interviews at UDE, both university leaders and heads of study programmes recognized IQA as important for the development of the university, though they assigned different roles to it. Members of the rectorate and deans at UDE, for instance, considered that the university's IQA system was 'a steering instrument adequate for higher education institutions' (Ganseuer and Pistor, 2017). The value of IQA for management purposes was also emphasized by members of UDE's leadership team, since it helped to provide data and information on which they could make informed decisions. Due to their limited involvement in IQA (only at course and study programme level), it seemed difficult for heads of programme to assess the overall effectiveness of IQA at UDE. All those interviewed at the university nonetheless agreed that it is 'better to have IQA than not to have it, even if it means additional work to research and teaching' (Ganseuer and Pistor, 2017).

At AIUB, academic and administrative staff emphasized the benefits of IQA in improved teaching and learning as well as in improved pedagogical approaches, while administrative staff mentioned improved management and better services at the university (Lamagna, Villanueva, and Hassan, 2017). The Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences at UoB pointed out that quality policies and procedures had helped programmes to obtain international accreditation from prominent agencies and had promoted evidence-based decision-making (AlHamad and Aladwan, 2017).

Deans and heads of study programmes at UDE further emphasized the role of IQA in fostering thought and discussion about quality development at the university, reporting it to 'be a good basis for developing quality and thinking about improvement measures' (Ganseuer and Pistor, 2017). Students were aware of the benefits of IQA, however, mainly in relation to facilitating their entry into the labour market. The students at DU in their focus group discussion attributed the increased reputation of the university in the labour market to its focus on IQA (Kuria and Marwa, 2017).

The overall workload associated with IQA instruments and processes

Academic and administrative staff were asked about their views of the workload associated with IQA. The survey findings showed the staff's generally high estimation of the workload related to IQA, with both academic and administrative staff at most case universities rating it as high or moderate (see *Table 14.2*). Even so, there were differences in perceptions between academic and administrative staff: Whereas academic staff reported having a heavier IQA workload than administrative staff in UoB, the workloads perceived by academic staff were thought to be significantly lighter than the workloads perceived by administrative staff in other institutions (e.g. AIUB, UDE, UT, and WU). Moreover, the perceived workload of both academic and administrative staff was reported as low at WU, a university that emphasizes the importance of not regarding, or even speaking about, IQA as a separate task from the regular programme management.

Table 13.7 Overall workload associated with IQA instruments and processes

		Very high (%)	High (%)	Moderate (%)	Low (%)	None at all (%)	I do not know (%)
AIUB	Academic staff	17.6	43	21.8	3.6	5.7	8.3
	Administrative staff	36	41	22	1	0	0
DU	Academic staff	14.8	44.4	7.4	22.2	0	11.1
	Administrative staff	9.5	52.4	28.6	0	0	9.5
UDE*	Academic staff	7.1	28.6	35.7	7.1	7.1	14.3
	Administrative staff	16.7	25	33.3	0	0	25
UFS	Academic staff	12.9	24.2	33.9	13.4	4.3	11.3
	Administrative staff	10.4	30.9	25.3	10.8	4.1	18.6
UoB	Academic staff	21.4	33.3	23.8	11.1	0.8	9.5
	Administrative staff	11.5	30.1	28.8	9	4.5	16
UT	Academic staff	7.5	31.2	31.2	11.8	3.2	15.1
	Administrative staff	9.8	39.2	23.5	15.7	0	11.8
WU	Academic staff	0	18.4	36.7	36.7	4.1	4.1
	Administrative staff	6.5	19.4	29	32.3	9.7	3.2
XMU	Academic staff	1.4	47.9	29.7	1.9	1.1	4.9
	Administrative staff	12.4	37.1	36.6	4.4	0.9	8.6

Note: *The small sample size for the survey at UDE does not allow for reliable conclusions.

Qualitative data shed light on the different perceptions among academic staff members in terms of IQA-related workloads between senior managers and other staff. At UoB, senior managers felt that IQA work should be seen as integral to the responsibilities of academic and administrative staff, while many academic staff viewed it as additional and supplementary to their main tasks and felt burdened by IQA-related work (AlHamad and Aladwan, 2017). This may be explained by the lack of compensation for the extra workload of academic staff from their involvement in IQA activities and their low understanding of IQA as an integral part of the teaching and learning processes. The dean of one faculty suggested that faculty members on the quality assurance committee in particular should be released from teaching responsibilities for one course, just as chairs or directors of quality assurance committees or offices were.

Appreciation of the benefit–workload relationship related to IQA

The findings on overall appreciation of IQA by internal stakeholders were generally positive, with administrative staff viewing IQA more positively than academic staff. This may be attributable to the fact that

IQA has shifted power within universities from the academic to the administrative sphere, and that extra workload is falling on academic staff who sometimes do not associate IQA-related work with their 'legitimate' duties.

However, there were also critical voices among stakeholders of the relationship of benefits to workload. Indeed, academic staff in some universities displayed a negative attitude towards IQA, which seemed to be closely associated with a perception of reduced ownership of academic decisions (Ganseuer and Pistor, 2017; Lange and Kriel, 2017). In other universities, the negative perception of IQA was related to a high workload with little incentive or compensation provided to academic staff for their involvement in IQA-related tasks (Kuria and Marwa, 2017). Some academic staff in the focus group discussions attributed the increased workload related to IQA to top-down processes (Lange and Kriel, 2017) which made them focus on the benefits to compliance with external processes and standards rather than the improvement of academic processes in line with internal perceptions.

13.4 Conclusions

This chapter has discussed both internal and external factors that conditioned the effective functioning of IQA in the case universities. Certain factors were commonly identified as very important by the internal stakeholders across the eight case universities, while others were seen as less important, and some as potentially bearing risks. It was also interesting to note that while all internal factors were seen as very important, they were generally thought to be much less present. External factors, e.g. EQA and autonomy, were seen as affecting IQA strongly and generally positively, but there were also some critical comments on their possible constraining effects. The various perceptions of both internal and external factors will be presented below, together with the implications of these findings.

There was agreement that certain internal conditioning factors were especially important. Case universities' different stakeholders seemed to agree on the crucial importance of leadership support. The high rating of this factor can be attributed to the fact that university leaderships naturally play an important role in building up IQA infrastructure, supporting IQA processes, and disseminating results from IQA instruments. Another important internal factor in supporting IQA development was solid information systems: both solidity of the

information management system and transparency in IQA processes were seen as essential, and both were linked to the credibility of IQA perceived by the university community. Lastly, active stakeholder participation was indicated as critical, although the level of emphasis on a particular stakeholder differed by institutional context. Financial incentives were seen as important in some universities, while less so in other and potentially risky in one. Differences in attitude can be explained by differences in the understanding of academic work, and by the status (tenure or not) and remuneration of academic staff in the universities.

The absence of certain factors were seen as detrimental to IQA development. When it came to leadership support, it was pointed out in the interviews that some decentralized units lacked effective department and faculty leadership for IQA. In those universities where financial incentives were seen as important, many academic staff considered incentives for their involvement in IQA-related tasks to be insufficient. While several universities reported major progress made in their information systems to comply with IQA tasks, problems such as the fragmentation of databases or lack of data reliability were reported in others. The presence of stakeholder participation in IQA was seen unequally, particularly between academic and administrative staff, with the latter group having been more actively engaged in IQA instruments and processes. The involvement of students in IQA was often reported as weak, while students expressed an interest in their interviews in being more strongly involved in IQA processes, and, in particular, receiving systematic feedback from it.

Aligning IQA with broader management was seen as crucial. The interviews brought to light the importance of two supplementary internal factors that interviewees associated with an effective functioning of IQA. First, aligning IQA with strategic planning was considered to help information gathered from evaluation to directly feed into decision-making and resource allocation. Second was offering staff development. Human resource training was found to be particularly useful for training specialized IQA staff at a university, preparing academics to take part in it, and responding to development needs identified through IQA.

EQA plays a crucial role in the early stages of IQA development. The EQA framework usually states the quality assurance requirement for individual universities. According to the case study findings, international accreditations triggered the development of IQA in several

case universities. Similarly, national accreditations, one of the common EQA mechanisms across case universities, also applied pressure to overcome internal resistance and the guidance to a university to develop an IQA system at the early stages. However, too-strict regulations and requirements by external accrediting agencies were also mentioned as preventing effective quality enhancement, when they are not directly aligned with national requirements and when they take precedence over internal processes. It should also be noted that EQA has a limited effect on the IQA system and that the sustained development of IQA requires flexibility to adopt processes and structures in line with internal requirements over time.

Institutional autonomy and decentralization of responsibility were seen as being important for IQA. Institutional autonomy was identified as a factor that widely conditioned the effective functioning of IQA at a university. In particular, the institutional autonomy to design IQA processes and tools according to local circumstances and needs was identified as highly valuable. Also, allowing the faculties the necessary autonomy to adapt IQA to their local disciplinary context and study offer was frequently claimed to be important by academics in the interviews. Increased autonomy and decentralization allowed for more flexibility and choice in terms of implementing quality assurance within units/departments, and therefore was seen as positive. These findings indicated that while centralization can contribute positively to the development of a university's IQA system at an initial stage, the effective mature IQA system needs to be embedded in a decentralized approach to IQA and the increased autonomy of individuals and units in implementing IQA and making use of results.

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Chapter 14

Conclusions: Learning for the future

Michaela Martin

This chapter draws conclusions and shares lessons from the IIEP research project 'Exploring effective and innovative options for internal quality assurance'. Key principles and good practices highlighted by the research have been framed as a series of recommendations for national and institutional policy-makers, as well as for quality managers looking for guidance on developing or improving IQA in their countries or HEIs. It is anticipated that the recommendations on structures, tools, and communication processes will be most relevant for institutional policy-makers (university leadership) and quality managers (who implement IQA policies), while recommendations on factors supporting effective IQA will be more relevant to national policy-makers in charge of establishing environments conducive to IQA.

14.1 Tools and processes

Approach IQA as an integrated set of processes and tools

The IIEP research has shown a variety of approaches, tools, and processes used by universities worldwide, and (among our eight case studies, in particular) various ways of organizing IQA mechanisms. Universities often undertake IQA in response to requirements for EQA, and then develop their processes and tools over time to respond to internal needs. Depending on the level of decentralization in a university, faculties – taking account of distinctive disciplinary needs – may develop their own processes and tools in addition to those developed at the central university level. The case studies have shown that IQA in many universities has developed over time, with new tools being added to existing ones. IQA tools and processes should be conceived of as a means of providing complementary evidence on previously identified questions, rather than generating excessive information. It is therefore necessary to periodically take a critical look at existing IQA tools and processes to assess their continued usefulness and complementarity.

Use flexible and qualitative tools (such as student polls) in addition to, or as replacements for, standardized quantitative instruments

Both the international survey and the case studies demonstrated that quantitative surveys were typically at the heart of IQA. They were used for student course evaluations, student and staff satisfaction surveys, student panel analyses, graduate tracer studies, employers' surveys, and many other purposes. The degree of standardization of IQA processes, however, needs to be considered. In several of the case universities, quantitative instruments were reported to have shortcomings. Course evaluation was often not systematically exploited to ensure quality improvement, and graduate tracer studies often suffered from low response rates. Universities should balance the use of quantitative and qualitative tools, with the latter often being more flexible in use and complementary in nature. This will enable universities to generate a broader range of evidence for IQA purposes. In drawing conclusions from the evidence provided by IQA processes, some comparative perspective is always necessary, but it can take different forms: 'this year's results are better than last year's'; 'the results for this faculty are better than the results for that faculty'; 'this discipline's results are quite different from the results for the same discipline at other universities'. Different comparisons are needed for different purposes and can send quite different messages. But they all require the availability of comparable data and the organizational expertise to analyse those data along different academic, organizational, and timeline dimensions.

Design tools and processes for IQA to integrate multiple stakeholder perspectives

IIEP's research demonstrated that effective IQA can confront and integrate multiple stakeholder perspectives. IQA primarily collects students' views on their learning experience and on factors for their academic success. An effective IQA system also tends to take into account the perspectives of other stakeholders, including academic and administrative staff, graduates, and employers, and thus systematically seek their opinions on the quality and relevance of study programmes. Also, it is necessary to involve stakeholders when analysing the data, and to organize an internal dialogue on quality. This allows universities to take into account and integrate multiple perspectives on important issues with a view to informing and consolidating sustainable decisions about quality improvement.

Use employability-sensitive IQA tools, while balancing the emphasis on generic competencies and job-specific skills

With rising levels of graduate unemployment and changing labour markets within rapidly and radically differentiating knowledge societies, graduate employability is becoming an increasingly important issue in higher education policy as well as in IQA tools and processes. The case studies demonstrated that the opinions of alumni and employers on the relevance of academic programmes should be compiled systematically as part of IQA instruments and processes. Employers may also be directly involved in the design and review of study programmes, regularly providing inputs on what skills are needed and how to develop them. At the same time, IQA staff have to be aware that a balance has to be found in the design of study programmes between the skills and competencies necessary for graduates to find a first employment and the skills needed for them to remain adaptable throughout their professional life. Therefore, while employer participation in programme design and review is to be considered as good practice, this balance needs to be kept in mind when interpreting survey findings and making changes to study programmes. Employers' needs tomorrow may not be the same as employers' needs today, and the importance of higher education's contribution may lie particularly in respect of providing a prospective view of the former.

14.2 The structure of IQA

Find an appropriate balance between central steering of IQA and decentralized ownership

One of the continuous issues in organizing IQA is finding an appropriate balance between centralized and decentralized management. The IIEP international survey demonstrated that IQA often relied on central university leadership, with vice-presidents frequently bearing the main responsibility. An increasing number of universities employed technical support structures, such as quality assurance offices, either to coordinate IQA centrally or to provide back-up and support to decentralized units. However, there is no such thing as an ideal distribution of responsibilities for IQA. The best distribution is the one that is in line with the level of autonomy provided to organizational units in a university. In universities where faculties have a relatively high level of decentralization, autonomy in IQA development was emphasized as one of the most important factors for its success. Within such a context, IQA should reduce the standardization of processes and tools to a minimum so that faculties can

take ownership of their own IQA practices. However, it is also important to establish some university-wide IQA structures to support faculties in their quality work for central management and, therefore, for quality development and comparison with other HEIs.

Integrate IQA with strategic planning, management, resource allocation, and organizational change

To bear on decision-making and change in the most effective manner, IQA must be connected with strategic planning, resource allocation, and staff and curriculum development, as well as academic planning. IQA should not be structured as a stand-alone management function, but, rather, integrated with other management processes such as target and service-level agreements. IIEP research on IQA has demonstrated how universities have integrated IQA processes into their overall planning cycle; strategic planning provided the framework of values and goals that guide IQA in its orientation, policy, tools, and processes, while IQA tools generated information and evidence for multi-year and annual planning and resource allocation. In addition, linkages need to be established with curriculum development, human resource management, organizational development, and data management. This enables IQA to function as an interconnected and coherent system geared to continuous quality enhancement. This integration of IQA with planning, management, resource allocation, and organizational development is necessary to close the loop between evidence and decisions supported with resources to implement them. Integration is necessary both to identify action that requires improvement and to monitor the effects of the decisions when implemented. But the executors of this integration need also to remember, always, that IQA is concerned with the central academic purposes of HEIs, and the perspectives of academic staff and students need always to be central to IQA processes. The ultimate goal of IQA is to contribute to the development of a dialogue on quality, and an institutional quality culture.

14.3 The importance of communication for organizational learning

Give due importance to communication and organizational learning for effective IQA

The IIEP research has shown that there is often an interruption in the information flow between university managers, who are well informed

about IQA polices, processes, and tools, and academic and administrative staff at the grassroots level. Quality assurance particularly affects staff members working in teaching, and they need to be informed of the existence of IQA and its purpose, and to have access to the knowledge generated by it. Knowledge of IQA tools was found to be particularly problematic for employability-related instruments, such as graduate tracer studies, the results of which were often not shared with staff. Also, communications with students about IQA could be improved: students often complained that they did not receive feedback about the information that was collected from them. As a broad but accurate generalization, more effort is needed to inform staff and students about IQA tools and their results, and more effort is needed to use them systematically in an internal dialogue on quality that engages all stakeholders.

Develop appropriate formats of information to nurture the discussion on quality at the grassroots level

Communication for organizational learning is important, which means that quality managers need to think of appropriate formats for analytical studies and reports so that internal stakeholders can make sense of them and connect them to their local realities. Several of the case universities reported that they were experimenting with new data formats, such as quality reports at UDE and theme reports at WU, to present data about a relevant topic (e.g. on employment, or the social situation of students) in a more readable, comprehensible form. WU's quality structure has been experimenting with 'info bits' (short e-mails containing one particularly timely or new piece of information that are directed to the university's senior management and service units). While communicating about IQA to the grassroots is essential, it is often necessary to choose the right language. Some of the case universities were communicating officially about IQA, while others did not even use the term 'internal quality assurance'. Instead, they integrated teaching and learning-related IQA directly into programme management, as the associated language was felt to be more acceptable to academic staff

14.4 The factors that support effective IQA

Recognize leadership support, stakeholder involvement, and analytical capacity as essential supports for IQA

The most important factors for effective IQA, according to the research, were leadership support, stakeholder involvement, and scientifically

sound data collection (both quantitative and qualitative). Leadership support needs to be provided at different levels of the academic hierarchy, including at decentralized levels (at faculty, department, and programme levels). Stakeholder involvement refers to both internal and external stakeholders, with academic staff being, of course, the most important actors in the teaching and learning domain. As academic staff will judge the credibility of IQA from the point of view of the robustness of its scientific methods, with which they are well acquainted, particular attention needs to be given to this aspect when developing IQA at a university.

Develop EQA that is supportive of IQA

The international survey and the case studies demonstrated that EQA was a strong driver for IQA. Compliance with external requirement shaped IQA in the case universities at their early stages. This is the case with regard to both international programme accreditation and national EQA. At an early stage of development, IQA typically consists of adaptive processes allowing an HEI to correspond to external quality standards and measurements, the organization of self-assessment exercises, and the provision of support for peer review processes. If IQA is developed merely as a response to EQA, however, there is a risk that it will not be supportive of quality enhancement and self-regulation processes at the institutional level. Institutional autonomy and managerial capacity for policy development, implementation, and monitoring are all important in this respect. The level of autonomy that EQA can concede to HEIs for the development of IQA is a matter of the solidity and therefore the need for guidance of individual HEIs in the development of their own IQA. When HEIs have strong institutional capacities, autonomy can be granted more easily.

IQA needs to recognize and to reflect the considerable diversity of higher education

The terminology of IQA implies an 'institutional' focus, and this is certainly the case for its organizational support. However, the units of analysis in IQA will frequently extend beyond institutional boundaries or concern localized pockets within them. Thus, it may be much more useful to compare the employment experiences of an institution's chemistry graduates with those of chemistry graduates from other institutions than to compare them with the employment experiences of history students from the home institution. Disciplines differ, but so do institutions. They

differ in terms of the kinds of students they recruit, their distinctive missions, their histories, and much else. This is an important richness of higher education which IQA needs to recognize and support. Standardized compliance with either internally or externally set requirements will only limit the benefits which can flow from effective IQA. 'Difference' rather than 'conformity' is often what is needed.

Different voices may have different messages, and all need to be heard

While much of this volume has addressed matters of institutional management and administration in higher education, the processes addressed by IQA are the central processes of higher education: learning and teaching experiences and their outcomes. As such they concern students, academics, employers, and the wider society. All bring perspectives and knowledge which can be invaluable to any understanding and assessment of quality. As indicated many times in the chapters above, the existence of good relationships and effective communications between the many different actors who are responsible for the delivery of higher education quality and/or whose lives will be affected by that quality is essential to the creation of a quality culture and the achievement of high-quality higher education.

Achieving the benefits of IQA and avoiding the dangers

These are the main conclusions on the good principles that can be derived from the IIEP case study research on effective and innovative IQA. They represents things to do, but there are also some 'things to be avoided', such as excessive compliance with external requirements, insufficient academic involvement at faculty level and with external stakeholders, short-termism in employability assessments. Our research project has been able to demonstrate that IQA, if it is well implemented, has the potential to bring the academic community together for an improved dialogue on quality, where external stakeholders can contribute constructively to the discussion. When IQA is conceived in this way it is not a bureaucratic take-over through which governmental officials, administrators, and bureaucrats try to increase their power, but a real opportunity to involve all stakeholders in a fruitful discussions to take better and more sustainable decisions and to create better higher education. Under such conditions, IQA can make an important difference. It is about much more than compliance with external regulatory authority or competitiveness over rankings and league tables. It can create a better educational experience for students. It can deliver more employable

graduates into the labour market. It can deliver better informed citizens into society! As a consequence, 'Quality matters!'

14.5 Future research directions

IIEP's research on IQA produced a preliminary international overview of the development, and gaps in coverage, of IQA, from a sample of 311 HEIs, internationally. However, as the sample was limited, so has been the ability to draw general conclusions on the worldwide development of IQA. A second survey, with a higher response, would be necessary in order for more generalizable conclusions to be drawn.

Nevertheless, the research has generated important insights into innovative principles and good practices for IQA and its effective functioning. Because of its comparative nature, the research was able to be somewhat sensitive to different contexts and cultural environments. It did not, however, aim to gain an in-depth understanding of the interrelationship between national policy and the organization of IQA, or of the impact of culture on the functioning of IQA. These would need to be studied through in-depth qualitative research.

Finally, the study has generated recommendations for several target audiences who together are responsible for setting up and implementing IQA policies. It will most useful to compare these conclusions with the current professional practice of quality managers in different settings. This will be possible during the dissemination of the research results – through policy discussion, capacity development, and technical assistance organized by IIEP, all of which will allow for further consolidation of the project's research findings.

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About the Book

With the rapid expansion of the higher education sector, accelerated by privatization and marketization, individual institutions worldwide face increasing challenges to offer and ensure quality educational services. In response to requirements of national regulatory bodies and/or internal demand for quality monitoring and management, a growing number of higher education institutions are adopting, or have already established, internal quality assurance (IQA).

With the international spread of this reform movement, IQA policies, structures, and processes can differ significantly, depending on national and institutional contexts. Some institutions focus on employability in IQA, others on integrating academic or management processes into IQA, still others on using information generated from IQA as the basis for a dialogue on quality. IQA practices and effects consequently vary greatly from one context to another.

This book highlights recent trends, innovative practices, and effects of IQA in higher education institutions at various stages of development. Presenting good practices and learnable lessons for IQA implementation in different contexts, it is thus a valuable resource for persons in charge of quality assurance in higher education, at both national and institutional level, as well as researchers.

About the Editor

Michaela Martin studied Economics and Public Administration in Germany, France, and Belgium at the graduate and post-graduate level. Working as a Programme Specialist, she is currently leading IIEP's research programme on higher education policy, planning, and governance. She has worked for more than a decade on both internal and external quality assurance in higher education, and has published and taught extensively in this area.

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