

## 2021 European Quality Assurance Forum

### Building trust and enhancement: from information to evidence

Online event  
18-19 November 2021

#### Call for contributions: Paper submission form

**Deadline 26 July 2021**

*Please note that all fields are obligatory. For a detailed description of the submission requirements and Frequently Asked Questions please consult the Call for Contributions.*

#### Author(s)

**Name:** Oliver Vettori

**Position:** Dean, Accreditations & QM / Director Program Management & Teaching and Learning

**Organisation:** WU Vienna (Vienna University of Economics and Business)

**Country:** Austria

**E-mail address:** [oliver.vettori@wu.ac.at](mailto:oliver.vettori@wu.ac.at)

*Dr. Oliver Vettori is Dean for Accreditation and Quality Management as well as the Director of the Department for Program Management and Teaching & Learning Support at WU. As such he holds responsibility for WU's international accreditations and manages WU's program portfolio and central teaching and learning policies and processes. He has been working as an expert in the area of quality assurance and higher education development for more than a decade in more than 50 different countries, including work for EUA, ENQA, ESU, UNESCO, EU-SHARE and various international higher education agencies and higher education institutions. As a research associate at the Institute for Organization Studies, he has authored dozens of publications in the area of organization theory and organization culture, quality assurance, teaching & learning and curriculum development. Dr. Vettori has been involved in a variety of European projects (e.g. ERASMUS+, HORIZON2020) and is currently coordinating the teaching and learning efforts of the ENGAGE.EU European University alliance.*

**Name:** Elisabeth Haslinger

**Position:** Accreditation Officer

**Organisation:** WU Vienna (Vienna University of Economics and Business)

**Country:** Austria

**E-mail address:** [elisabeth.haslinger@wu.ac.at](mailto:elisabeth.haslinger@wu.ac.at)

*Elisabeth Haslinger works as Accreditation Officer at WU (Vienna University of Economics and Business). As such, she is in charge of the implementation of WU's international accreditation procedures (EQUIS and AACSB) as well as of the coordination between external quality assurance and internal information management. She is also involved in*

*further developing the impact monitoring initiatives at WU and coordinating quality management activities within the ENGAGE.EU European University alliance.*

**Name:** Karl Ledermüller

**Position:** Head, Evaluation Unit

**Organisation:** WU Vienna (Vienna University of Economics and Business)

**Country:** Austria

**E-mail address:** [karl.ledermueller@wu.ac.at](mailto:karl.ledermueller@wu.ac.at)

**Short bio (150 words max):**

Dr. Karl Ledermüller is the Head of the Evaluation and Quality Enhancement unit at WU (Vienna University of Economics and Business). He holds responsible for running and further developing Internal Quality Assurance at WU. His major research interests focus on IQA aspects of learning and assessment analytics as well as predicting students at risk, aspects of the social dimension and the employability of students and graduates. He methodically focuses on (educational) data mining techniques and psychometrics. As a business educator, he enjoys teaching courses such as corporate finance and operations research on undergraduate and graduate level.

***If there are several authors, please copy and fill in the fields for each author and indicate who is the corresponding author and who will be responsible for presenting the paper at the Forum.***

*IMPORTANT: If you are submitting a proposal, please do not register for the event online until the results of the selection process have been announced. Papers selected for EQAF 2021 will benefit from one reduced fee per contribution, which will be applied through a special registration process.*

*During the Forum, the full text of all papers presented at the Forum will be published on the Forum website. If you do not wish your paper to be published, please indicate so here. This has no consequences on the selection of the papers.*

### **Proposal**

**Title:** Mapping impact through quality assurance: Towards a more investigative QA paradigm

**Abstract (150 words max):**

*The relationship between quality assurance and impact has increasingly gaining attention during the last two decades. The focus, however, is usually put on the impact of quality assurance. In this paper, the authors want to shift the attention to how QA could contribute to assessing the impact of higher education (institutions) and what this implies methodologically. After presenting two current initiatives on monitoring “broad” and “deep” impact at their own institution, the authors thus argue for a more “investigative” approach in quality assurance, which might also strengthen links to institutional decision-making.*

**Has this paper previously been published/presented elsewhere? If yes, give details. No.**

**Indicate whether your contribution is based on practice, policy or research: Practice and research**

**Text of paper (3000 words max):**

**Mapping impact through quality assurance: Towards a more investigative QA paradigm**

The relationship between quality assurance and impact has gained attention from scholars and policy-makers for more than fifteen years now (cf. Reith et al. 2019; Vettori & Kernegger 2013; Stensaker 2008). Foremost, attention paid to the effects of external quality assurance (cf. Stensaker et al. 2011; Massaro 2010; with investigations on the effects (and effectiveness) of internal quality assurance struggling with all kinds of ontological, epistemological and methodological difficulties. Studies showed that effects were stronger on formal aspects (routines, processes, regulations, structures) than on the actual quality of teaching and research, and also prone to further advancing institutional isomorphism (cf. Dattey et al. 2014).

In all these projects and papers, the focus was set on the impact of quality assurance. In this paper, however, we intend to present a different angle: Building on the work within our own institutional context, and drawing from the still growing discourse on the impact of higher education on economies and societies at large, we pursue the question how quality assurance can serve the increasing needs to demonstrate the impact of higher education. This is well in line with the emphasis of evidence-based quality assurance in this year's forum, as providing evidence and following chains of cause and effect needs to be a big part of any legitimate impact demonstration.

After a brief introductory section on the “impact question” in contemporary higher education, we will therefore describe the most recent impact mapping and impact monitoring initiatives at WU Vienna (Vienna University of Economics and Business), which make use of a mix of qualitative and quantitative approaches and combines different sets of data. This will lead us to a concluding reflection on the implications of such initiatives for how and what data can be collected and used via an institution's quality assurance operations – and if, ultimately, a more investigative QA approach might be called for.

## The impact question in higher education

The roles of universities toward society have been changing over time – and probably never as dynamically as in the last decades. In addition to their activities in teaching and research, universities are expected to deliver answers to grand societal challenges and foster engagement with societal stakeholders and partners. More and more attention is drawn to the relevance of the institutions' work for society at large and their third mission activities. This is especially true for public universities where the majority activities rely on public funding. This implies an obligation towards society to positively impact society (cf. Meyer & Schachermayer 2018). In the UK, for example, the Research Excellence Framework (REF) was established to assess the impact of research beyond academia and to provide accountability for public investment.

The respective discourse is arguably particularly well developed in the business school segment of higher education: After the financial crisis in 2008, business school came under pressure regarding the accountability of their activities and the legitimacy of business schools and business education. The role business schools should have in business, in society and in educating the future leaders was questioned to a great extent. Positive societal impact developed into a vehicle, not only for business schools, to demonstrate their role as a positive contributor to society. Quality assurance has been a strong driver of such developments, as international accreditation agencies (such as AACSB and EFMD) also adopted the notion of impact into their assessment and evaluation guidelines. Therefore demonstrating positive impact on business and society became also an important topic in the external quality assurance of business schools. (AACSB 2021; EFMD 2020; LeJeune et al 2019)

In 2014, EFMD even introduced its own Business School Impact System (BSIS), a comprehensive impact assessment tool for business schools to demonstrate and document

their impact. The framework consists of 120 indicators covering 7 dimensions including financial and economic as well as more narrative based dimensions such as the societal and image dimensions of impact. The purpose of BSIS is to achieve a clearer accountability and greater transparency towards important financial and political stakeholders or society at large. (cf. EFMD 2020). In 2020, AACSB adopted new standards for business accreditation that shifted the focus from rule-based to principle-based judgements and put a focus on societal impact in all areas of the standards. AACSB expects that business schools clearly envisage the areas in which they intend to make a positive impact on the business world and society at large. Through the shift to principle-based standards, AACSB enables business schools to demonstrate their impact beyond impact metrics of intellectual contributions and economic criteria such as alumni salaries. (cf. AACSB 2021)

While both accreditation agencies rely on quantitative indicators to measure impact, they also are starting to encourage business schools to include more narrative and qualitative approaches into impact measurement and impact monitoring. This helps business schools to create a broader narrative about the legitimacy of their activities and the impacts they have on business and society at large beyond citation metrics and aggregated labour market indicators. (cf. LeJeune et al. 2019)

Driven by such external influences (the SWISS quality audit with its sustainability-oriented standards might serve as another example, outside the business-school segment), higher education institutions are increasingly setting up their own internal processes and try to adapt their internal quality assurance schemes in order to meet the externally imposed criteria. Overall, however, the IQA discourse on the topic appears to be rather underdeveloped, and the respective methods and approaches often remain in familiar domains.

## Mapping impact: Deep impact and broad impact

In order to better understand its own impact on the relevant environment(s) across the university's performance spectrum, WU has started several evaluation and monitoring initiatives. Differentiated by purpose and methodology, two basic approaches are employed: WU's **deep impact** monitoring initiatives, focusing on a reconstruction of impact pathways along the university's mission-related activities (research, teaching, third mission) and making use of a more qualitatively oriented methodology; and WU's **broad impact** monitoring initiatives, aiming to gather information on institutional impact on a larger scale with the help of more quantitatively oriented data mining techniques.

The **deep impact** monitoring is basically organised around a selected set of case studies in the form of "Stories of Impact", based on theory-based evaluation and the logical framework approach. The approach has been adapted for WU's context, and describes the relationships between specific activities, outputs, and their societal impacts along so-called impact pathways. An impact pathway would typically consist of an impact carrier (e.g. a specific academic programme, a research project, or a community outreach activity), the process output (e.g. graduates of the programme, research results from the project, or participants in the community outreach activity) and the effects that can be linked to the output (e.g. careers of activities of the programme graduates, use of the research results to solve a practical problem, or a change in the outreach activity participants' mindset). One specific example would be the impact story of the MSc program in Business education (impact carrier), which over the last 25 years has led to more than 2.500 graduates, many of them teaching business, economics, accounting or a related subject in secondary schools (output). Per year, about 100.000 high school students are educated by a teacher who had graduated from WU (impact). A more research oriented example followed the experimental testing of different auction rules and designs to sell carbon permits for different years, which did not only lead to some well-received publications but also provided input in the design of

the Australian carbon permit trading scheme (and yes, this is indeed Australia, not Austria ☺.)

Methodologically, the deep impact monitoring mixes elements from “follow the artefact” approaches (cf. Lueger & Froschauer 2017) with elements from reconstructive social research (cf. Bohnsack 2014), requiring an open an investigative mindset, where hypotheses are dynamically created, changed and discarded, in relation to the available data and stability of the interpretative strands. Though qualitative in principle, the use of quantitative evidence to bolster claims and impact chains, is a big part of the method.

WU’s **broad impact** monitoring has started with a pilot project in order to get a more systematic view of the positions WU alumni occupy after their graduation and in their later career stages. For achieving this, WU linked its alumni data with the ORBIS database containing information on more than 300 million listed and non-listed companies worldwide. In a first step, the project concentrated on national companies to see in which companies and in which sectors WU alumni hold impactful positions. First results yielded from the project show that WU alumni included in the ORBIS database largely hold top management positions and they are predominantly represented in top management positions in large companies (by revenue and also by number of employees) and in sectors such as financial services, consulting, insurance and marketing. This pilot in many ways built on prior projects where WU’s QA team analysed the CV’s of the top executives of the Austrian top 500 companies or of the companies listed in the Austrian prime market segment. Methodologically, this approach builds on existing international databases, such as a published company register, which includes information on its management, supervisory and ownership structure (e.g. the Orbis Database from Bureau van Dyke<sup>1</sup>). These databases can be searched to identify graduates in Top Management positions. Due to the large bulk of available data, the searching routine in the register data, several descriptive statistics, mostly corresponding to company related object-covariates (e.g.: industry, size, country) as well as its reporting (statistics and graduate/company name lists) are automatized in R (R Core Team, 2021) and its packages.

In terms of future plans, the impact monitoring team is currently exploring ways of better tracking international careers and of monitoring the university’s graduates in other societal areas beyond the economy, i.e. in the public, political or cultural spheres. This will probably require a match of different databases and of some further “investigations”. Some first exploratory steps in the direction of media resonance analyses have also been taken, in order to gain a better understanding of the university’s impact on public discourses. Overall, the deep and broad monitoring initiatives are rapidly becoming an important pillar of WU’s quality assurance procedures, very much in line with one of the university’s well established QA principles that the role of QA needs to go well beyond “navel-gazing” by helping the university to make sense of its relevant environment. This opens up, from our perspective, some fertile new grounds for data driven quality assurance and data-based decision-making, but it also has some considerable practical and methodological implications which we want to explore in the concluding section.

## Towards a more investigative QA paradigm

Our impact monitoring initiatives are not only intended as a pitch towards more impact assessment in general as part of institutional QA endeavours, but also as an argument for a methodologically more diverse QA “arsenal”. Traditionally, quality assurance procedures are focusing on information gathering within a higher education institution (e.g. course evaluations, program evaluations, student surveys, staff surveys), and even when involving

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bvdinfo.com/de-de/unsere-losungen/daten/international/orbis>

other stakeholders the use of self-reporting data (again via surveys, e.g. company surveys, graduate surveys) is clearly dominant. This has considerable advantages (economically and in terms of acceptance), not least by catering to the inherent political logic of quality assurance as a derivative from the Bologna process in comparison to the more business-infused quality management (cf. Vettori 2017). Yet there are also limits, in particular with a clear lack of environmental analyses and the resulting difficulties to obtain information that is new for the organization and decision-makers alike.

What has become a preferred data source for many research projects is, therefore, still largely ignored within institutional QA systems. We can find more and more (and continuously growing) databases which offer a wealth of secondary, though largely hardly structured, data which, if properly structured, processed and interpreted, offer important impulses for institutional development and decision-making. Very often, those databases also offer significantly more data points than any self-generated questionnaire, which allows for more specific analyses. To provide just one example: Finding data to answer the question “who are our graduates and what have they done in the last 20 years” offers insights than standardized questionnaires on their experiences within the first three years after graduation. Moreover, many of the surveys employed in our current QA systems tend to generate rather stable results (very often because the instruments themselves are kept stable and unchanged over a long time), which adds further difficulties to using them for institutional decision-making, in particular in a more strategic manner. This is not to say that using different data sources and approaches will resolve well-known obstacles to rational decision-making such as Simon’s “bounded rationality theorem” (cf. Klaes & Sent 2005); yet the limited explanatory scope of many of our current instruments and the fact that their usefulness in terms of impact on institutional improvements has yet to be proven (cf. Vettori et al. 2015; ) acts a further argument towards broadening our methodological options. We are firmly convinced that, ultimately, this will not only enable QA professionals to assess institutional impact, but, coming full circle to our introduction, maybe also help with creating a clearer, and more visible impact for (internal) QA itself.

## References

AACSB International (2021) *How AACSB Is Transforming Business School Accreditation*. [https://www.aacsb.edu/-/media/aacsb/publications/white-papers/accreditation\\_white\\_paper\\_2021.ashx?la=en&hash=875989B752841284CEA540D6050B1BAA737C84FC](https://www.aacsb.edu/-/media/aacsb/publications/white-papers/accreditation_white_paper_2021.ashx?la=en&hash=875989B752841284CEA540D6050B1BAA737C84FC) (last retrieved 14.07.2021)

Bohnsack, Ralf (2014): *Rekonstruktive Sozialforschung. Einführung in qualitative Methoden*. 9th edition. Stuttgart: UTB.

Dathey, Kwame / Westerheijden Don F. / Hofman, Wiecher A. Adriaan (2014): Impact of accreditation on public and private universities: a comparative study. In *Tertiary Education and Management*, 20:4, pp. 307 – 319, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13583883.2014.959037>

Ditzel, Benjamin (2017): Bedingte Wirksamkeit von QM in Studium und Lehre: Ergebnisse einer Delphi-Studie. *Zeitschrift für Hochschulentwicklung* 12:3, pp. 17 – 37.

EFMD (2020) *BSIS ASSESSMENT CRITERIA GUIDE*. [https://efmdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/Assessment\\_Criteria\\_Guide.pdf](https://efmdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/Assessment_Criteria_Guide.pdf) (last retrieved 14.07.2021)

EFMD (2021) *EQUIS STANDARDS & CRITERIA*. [https://www.efmdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2021\\_EQUIS\\_Standards\\_and\\_Criteria.pdf](https://www.efmdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2021_EQUIS_Standards_and_Criteria.pdf) (last retrieved 14.07.2021)

Klaes, Matthias / Sent, Esther-Mirjam (2005): "A Conceptual History of the Emergence of Bounded Rationality". *History of Political Economy*, 37(1), pp.27–59. doi:10.1215/00182702-37-1-27

Lejeune, C., Starkey, K., Kalika, M. & Tempest, S. (2019). The Impact of Business Schools: Increasing the Range of Strategic Choices. *Management international / International Management / Gestión Internacional*, 23(2), 88–98. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1060033ar>

Lueger, Manfred / Froschauer, Ulrike (2017): *Artefaktanalyse. Grundlagen und Verfahren*. Wiesbaden: Springer

Massaro, Vin (2010): Cui bono? The relevance and impact of quality assurance, *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 32:1, pp. 17-26, DOI:10.1080/13600800903440527

Meyer, Michael and Schachermayer-Sporn, Barbara (2018) *Leaving the Ivory Tower: Universities' Third Mission and the Search for Legitimacy*. *Zeitschrift für Hochschulentwicklung*, 13 (2). pp. 41-60. ISSN 22196994

R Core Team (2021): *R: A Language and Environment for Statistical Computing*, R Foundation for Statistical Computing, Vienna, <https://www.r-project.org/>

Reith, F.; Ditzel, B.; Seyfried, M.; Steinhardt, I.; Scheytt, T. (2019): *Qualitätssicherung und Qualitätsmanagement an Hochschulen: Theoretische Perspektiven und Methoden*. Augsburg/München: Hampp.

Stensaker, B.(2008): Outcomes of Quality Assurance: A Discussion of Knowledge, Methodology and Validity. *Quality in Higher Education*, 14(1), 3-13.

Stensaker, Bjorn / Langfeldt, Liv /Harvey, Lee / Huisman, Jeroen / Westerheijden, Don (2011): An in-depth study on the impact of external quality assurance. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 36:4, 465-478, DOI: 10.1080/02602930903432074

Vettori, Oliver (2017): Manifeste Harmonie und latente Konflikte - Das Spannungsfeld zwischen strategischem Qualitätsmanagement und stakeholderorientierter Qualitätssicherung. In *Arbeitskreis Evaluation & Qualitätssicherung der Berliner und Brandenburger Hochschulen und Freie Universität Berlin* (eds.): *QM-Systeme in Entwicklung: Change (or) Management?*, pp. 79-86. Berlin.

Vettori, Oliver / Salmhofer, Gudrun / Mitterauer, Lukas / Ledermüller, Karl (eds.) (2015): *Eine Frage der Wirksamkeit? Qualitätsmanagement als Impulsgeber für Veränderungen an Hochschulen*. Bielefeld: UVW UniversitätsVerlagWebler.

*Please submit your proposal by sending this form, in Word format, by 26 July 2021 to [egaf@eua.eu](mailto:egaf@eua.eu). The file should be named using the last names of the authors, e.g. Smith\_Jones.doc. Please do not send a hard copy or a PDF file.*