



9th European Quality Assurance Forum

13 – 15 November 2014

University of Barcelona, Spain

Changing education – QA and the shift from teaching to learning

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After 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:

The role of the administrative staff in the internal quality assurance systems: the case of the state-funded universities in Poland

Abstract (150 words max):

The paper focuses on the role played by the administrative staff in the internal quality assurance systems managed by the universities in Poland. Conducted analysis concerned the professional liability and duties served by the teaching quality offices, i.e. the units of the all-university administration specializing in running the pro-quality initiatives: the research data was gathered from the websites of the Polish state-funded



universities and then processed to create a classification of the most frequently managed teaching quality tasks and projects. In that it was possible to assess the efficiency and scope of the implementation of ENQA-approved Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. The research results form a basis for a discussion on the optimal use of the staff potential in the enhancement of the university teaching prospects and perspectives.

Text of paper (3000 words max):

The influence of the Bologna Process on the internal quality assurance systems

The Bologna Process requires close cooperation in the university teaching quality assurance policies. A governmental conference was held in 2003 in Berlin, during which ministers present made a collaborative statement to underline both the autonomy of universities within all national education systems and a need for a common teaching quality assurance framework.¹ Two years later, on a conference held in Bergen, they accepted the ENQA-approved Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.²³ Those standards form a frame of reference for efficient creation of pro-quality policies in higher education. The implementation of the quality assurance systems was accelerated due to the European Parliament's 2008 publication of the European Qualification Framework for Lifelong Learning – their effective application required designing and issuing reliable frameworks of teaching quality control within the institutions of higher education.⁴

The introduction and management of the internal quality assurance systems was made mandatory in the Polish higher education sector by ordinance of the Polish Minister of Science and Higher Education issued on 12 July 2007⁵; after this ordinance being repealed those areas were covered in an amendment to the Higher Education Act of 18 March 2011⁶. This document does not specify the scope and methods of implementing the internal quality assurance systems. The ordinance by Minister of Science and Higher Education of 29 September 2011 concerning the conditions of curricular and institutional assessment specifies the criteria for external evaluation managed by the Polish Accreditation Committee⁷. The curricular assessment consists of evaluating the condition of the internal quality assurance system in its learning outcomes analysis procedures and teaching methods enhancement initiatives, the institutional assessment equals evaluating the architecture and teaching quality enhancement effects within the internal quality assurance systems. The ordinance of 5 October 2001 deems the implementation of the internal quality assurance system as a prerequisite for obtaining teaching accreditation and gaining license for running the study program. This decree also obliges the

¹ Realising the European higher education area. (2003). In Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers responsible for higher education in Berlin on 19 September 2003

² The European higher education area—achieving the goals. (2005). In Communiqué of the conference of European ministers responsible for higher education

³ Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area. (2005). 3rd edition, Helsinki: European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

⁴ Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (2008). Official Journal of the European Union, European Parliament

⁵ Rozporządzenie Ministra Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego z dnia 12 lipca 2007 r. w sprawie standardów kształcenia dla poszczególnych kierunków oraz poziomów kształcenia, a także trybu tworzenia i warunków, jakie musi spełniać uczelnia, by prowadzić studia międzykierunkowe oraz makrokierunki (Dz.U. 2007 nr 164 poz. 1166)

⁶ Ustawa z dnia 27 lipca 2005 r. Prawo o szkolnictwie wyższym (Dz.U. 2005 nr 164 poz. 1365 ze zm.)

⁷ Rozporządzenie Ministra Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego z dnia 29 września 2011 r. w sprawie warunków oceny programowej i oceny instytucjonalnej (Dz.U. 2011 nr 207 poz. 1232)



universities to gather and process data on students' achievements, class survey assessment, and conclusions drawn from following the alumni career paths.⁸

Guidelines aimed at adjusting the Polish higher education system to the pan-European teaching frameworks made it necessary to revise and refresh the old university procedures concerning study programs and teaching quality assurance. Numerous changes introduced in short time span by the Minister of Science and Higher Education redirected the pro-quality initiatives to the responsibility of the administrative staff, employing both the full-time administrative officials, and regular academic staff: teachers and researchers. Their duties are made more complex due to the lack of clear and stable ministerial guidelines and the usual resistance to change in institutions long established in the sector. The result being that, according to the 2012 report on the implementation of the Bologna Process, less than 25% of Polish higher education institutions have managed to issue their teaching quality assurance policies to date.⁹

Recommendations concerning the internal quality assurance systems

The ENQA Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area were established in accordance to the Graz Declaration, which states that „the purpose of a European dimension to quality assurance is to promote mutual trust and improve transparency while respecting the diversity of national contexts and subject areas”¹⁰. This aim is being realized by implementing the university internal quality assurance systems covering:

1. policy and procedures for quality assurance,
2. approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards,
3. assessing students's achievements according to transparent criteria,
4. teaching skills assurance and improvement among the academic staff,
5. learning resources and student support,
6. information systems processing data on study programs management,
7. publication of comprehensive data on the currently managed study programs.

Those guidelines do not provide specific problem solutions, they just indicate the areas of interest and responsibility for universities striving towards high effectiveness and good teaching reputation. The higher education institutions are supposed chiefly to establish the specific management policies, choosing employees responsible and surveilling their professional progress. Careful documentation of planned and already realized initiatives helps detect the weak points and then correct them with the help of available resources. This line of reasoning conforms to the requirements of the ISO 9001:2008 quality standard¹¹, which specifies the general outlines of the quality management systems within organizations – it conforms especially to IWA2, i.e. ISO 9001:2000 version for education¹².

The aforementioned approaches are of universal scope, ready to be used at any given higher education institution, regardless of its profile, structure and funding status. The key mutual element is inscribed in the Plan-Do-Check-Act Cycle¹³. The internal quality assurance system is supposed to outline the goals that the given university aspires to

⁸ Rozporządzenie Ministra Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego z dnia 5 października 2011 r. w sprawie warunków prowadzenia studiów na określonym kierunku i poziomie kształcenia (Dz.U. 2011 nr 243 poz. 1445)

⁹ The European higher education area in 2012: Bologna Process implementation report. (2012). Brussels: Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency

¹⁰ Forward from Berlin: The role of universities to 2010 and beyond (2003). Convenção de Graz. European University Association

¹¹ ISO 9001:2008. Quality management systems – Requirements

¹² International Workshop Agreement – IWA 2:2007, Quality management systems - Guidelines for the application of ISO 9001:2000 in education

¹³ Hamrol, A. (2005). Zarządzanie jakością z przykładami. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.



achieve and the ways to realizing those goals with consciousness of the obstacles ahead. Any fulfilled initiative requires the control of its real outcomes and results – whether they actually led to the desired effects and whether they strongly established the positive procedures. The key role is played here by the managerial staff, which initiates, supervises, and modifies the teaching process. Academic teachers are bestowed with the task of transferring knowledge, skills, and ways of thinking conforming to the prescribed learning outcomes and study program methods and requirements. On every step of that process the administrative staff plays the role of the advisory body to the managerial staff.

The role of administrative staff within the internal quality assurance systems

The special quality assurance responsibilities on the Polish higher education institutions were adopted by the all-university administration quality offices. These units were given various names and emerged from other units or within other units in order to fully support the internal quality assurance systems on the stage of planning, realization, control, or implementation of the pro-quality procedures. What is the specific role played by those units and, consequently, what is their way of work? This article tries to answer this question: it reviews the data published by the state-funded academic institutions on their internal quality assurance systems.

Data collecting method on the quality offices in the Polish institutions of higher education is based upon the premise of transparency of the internal quality assurance systems in the public sector. This premise is rooted in the Polish law¹⁴ and makes the data on approved procedures and professional responsibilities of all specific units taking part in their realization openly available, systematized and reflecting the actual state of affairs. That is why the article is based on documentation published by the institutions of higher education for example on their official websites. The article disregards data irrelevant to the role designed for the quality assurance teams within the quality assurance system.

Content analysis was handled over data gather from the websites of 52 state-funded academic institutions, among them 18 general universities, 18 universities of technology, 5 universities of economics, 5 pedagogical universities, and 6 universities of agriculture. 19 of those (including 3 general universities) have not yet launched their quality assurance offices or do not post any data on the topic, in 2 institutions the quality offices are faculty-affiliated. As a result 31 quality offices were surveyed, including 15 serving as independent administrative units, the rest functioning under the auspices of administrative management of teaching process.

Table 1. All-university administration units designed as quality assurance offices in Polish state-funded universities.

JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY in Krakow	Teaching Quality Assessment Team
UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW	Teaching Quality Office
ADAM MICKIEWICZ UNIVERSITY in Poznań	Teaching Quality Improvement Board
THE UNIVERSITY OF SILESIA in Katowice	Teaching Quality Assurance Office
GDANSK UNIVERSITY	Teaching Quality Enhancement Task Force
SZCZECIN UNIVERSITY	Teaching Quality Assurance Office
RZESZÓW UNIVERSITY	Quality and Accreditations Office
KAZIMIERZ WIELKI UNIVERSITY in Bydgoszcz	Teaching Quality Assurance Office
BIAŁYSTOK UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY	Independent Specialists in Teaching Quality Assurance
GDANSK UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY	Teaching Quality Management Task Force
LODZ UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY	Head Specialist in Teaching Quality Management
RZESZOW UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY	Teaching Quality Assurance Office
CRACOW UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS	Teaching Quality Proxy's Office
WROCLAW UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS	Teaching Quality Assurance Center
PEDAGOGICAL UNIVERSITY OF CRACOW	Teaching Quality Assurance Office
MARIA CURIE-SKŁODOWSKA UNIVERSITY in Lublin	Teaching Police Office - Teaching Quality Assessment Team
UNIVERSITY OF WARMIA AND MAZURY in Olsztyn	Teaching Policy Office - Teaching Quality Management Team

¹⁴ Ustawa z dnia 6 września 2001 r. o dostępie do informacji publicznej (Dz.U. 2001 nr 112 poz. 1198)



CARDINAL STEFAN WYSZYŃSKI UNIVERSITY in Warsaw	Teaching Policy Office – Teaching Quality Assessment and Evaluation Center
UNIVERSITY OF ZIELONA GÓRA	Teaching Policy Office – Teaching Quality Assurance Section
JAN KOCHANOWSKI UNIVERSITY in Kielce	Student Affairs Office
WEST POMERANIAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY in Szczecin	Teaching Policy Office – Teaching Standards and Quality Section
ACADEMY OF TECHNOLOGY AND HUMANITIES in Bielski-Biała	Student Affairs Office
SILESIAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY	Student Affairs and Teaching Policy Office
AGH UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY in Krakow	Student Affairs Office – Teaching Quality Improvement Team
LUBLIN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY	Student Affairs and Teaching Management Office
OPOLE UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY	Teaching Policy Office – Teaching Quality Assessment Section
UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY AND HUMANITIES in Radom	Student Affairs Office
UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS in Katowice	Teaching Policy Office – Teaching Quality Assurance Team
UNIVERSITY OF NATURAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES in Siedlce	Teaching Management Office
UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURE in Krakow	Student Affairs Office
UNIVERSITY OF LIFE SCIENCES in Lublin	Teaching Management Office

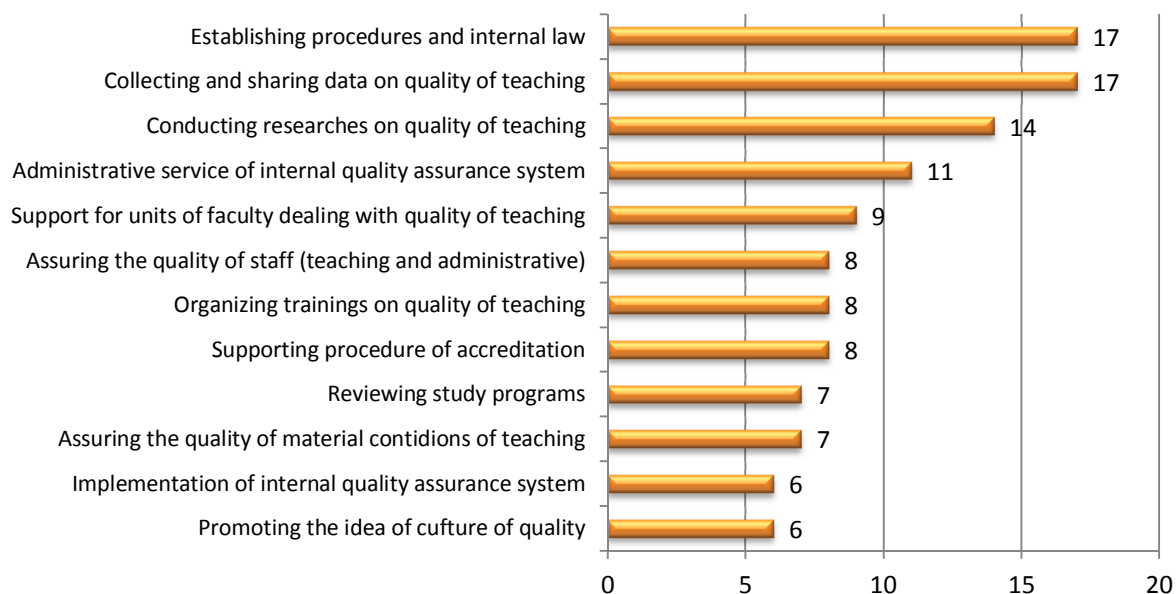
Tasks and initiatives bestowed upon the teaching quality offices

The collected between March and June 2014 research material from the university websites was processed to classify tasks bestowed upon units serving as quality offices within the internal quality assurance systems.

The information published online are of various levels of precision. It means that in several cases the task scopes were described so enigmatically that it was difficult to classify them to a specific category. The usual practice was to for example assuring that „teaching quality improvement” was taking place on the university. The lack of clear and precise data may be due to the fact that the universities are still in the beginning of building their quality assurance systems, and that is why the distribution of responsibilities among various units, offices, and proxies is not clearly established yet, hence the information on the webpage tends to be „cautious”, vague, broad, and general, leaving the space open for various initiatives and not indicating directly the list of currently managed tasks. Those types of descriptions are too vague to bear any significant value in establishing the work structure in the quality offices on the Polish universities.

Certain institutions of higher education took their time to fully describe the responsibility scope of their quality offices, the most frequent data dealing with initiatives concerning academic information issuing and access to data on teaching quality on the university. The tasks described cover both the decisions made on the profile of the data made public: who should be granted access to them (academic community of the university, managerial staff or general audience) and in what form (internal document, publication, webpage), and also pre-publication preparing of that data. Equally frequent task to be mentioned was the design of the teaching quality enhancement procedures, i.e. mainly preparing adequate decrees of the in-house regulations and document forms and templates to be used all over the university. The next most frequent tasks described were concerned with survey assessment initiatives (both questionnaires, and quality-specific projects, e.g. interviews) chiefly among students, alumni and employers – which is understandable in the face of the obligation bestowed upon the university to carry out such research. We should underline that in the whole domain of the various institutions and functions run to enhance the teaching quality it is specifically the quality assurance offices that are bestowed with the research tasks. Beside the three aforementioned functions, the quality offices are also described with their relations to the administrative system for teaching quality assurance and assistance to faculty-specifics units (or employees) dealing with teaching quality. The tasks most frequently mentioned on the websites of the quality offices are visualized on the Chart 1.

Chart 1. Most frequent task scopes and responsibilities descriptions on the websites of the quality offices in the higher education.



The complete task scopes mentioned on the chart form a full list of standards prescribed by ENQA. Those standards should find their place in the functioning of every institution of higher education. Given that every quality office as a separate and independent university unit was established in order to efficiently manage the teaching quality improvement process and should meet all the standards required – there should be as many bars on the chart as there are university under scrutiny. Not all quality assurance offices declare the realization of these functions, which may mean that one of the three circumstances arose:

- the structure of the internal quality assurance systems is scattered, hence no general unit exists to comprehensively manage the issue of teaching quality at the university;
- standards are not yet fully realized;
- the information posted on the website does not reflect the actual situation on the university, i.e. the university publishes incomplete data on the work of its quality assurance units.

The task scope analysis shows also the dualistic view of the concept of placing the quality offices with the larger framework: they may serve as a central element with the system, which establishes the rules of teaching quality functioning, distributes specific tasks to the faculties and appraises their fulfillment; but they may also be units situated away from the mainstream of initiatives, serving as assisting bodies to the structures dealing with teaching quality on the faculties, i.e. – in fact – they may appear to be a service-and-counsel unit. The question arises which role configuration would be more beneficial to the whole system? A remote, rules-creating office clerk, who supervises that the academic community plays by the rules, or maybe a flexible negotiator who is willing to adjust the frameworks to the current situation on the university?

Following that line of reasoning we may ask, which types of task can be managed centrally and which should be in the responsibility of the specific teaching units? Is a central bureau capable of collecting and processing the vast amount of data on the teaching quality – i.e. on virtually all aspects of the university functioning? How to build a



structure that would enable deliberate and rational (on the level of the institution) shaping of the teaching process?

Conclusion

State-funded institutions of higher education in Poland bestow the administrative staff with a significant role in designing, supervising, and implementing teaching quality policies. Teaching quality assurance offices are a special case here, whose core is strictly tied with carrying out specific tasks for the benefit of internal quality assurance systems. The tasks in their responsibility are frequently of critical value to the proper work of the whole system. This form of centralized coordination allows clear and concise distribution of responsibilities and prerogatives and leads to the information flow between university units being more efficient, it also bears the risk of excluding certain university areas from the process of decision-making. This situation also may lead to the conflicts arising between specific quality offices doing their duties and academic teachers becoming anxious about their autonomy and over-formalization of the education process. Probability of such instances of conflict rises in the authoritarian structures and decreases in the structures based on cooperative partnership and dialog.

Regardless of the adopted structural solutions, indirect engagement of the administrative staff in shaping the education process on a university raises a lot of questions concerning the scope of competence and responsibility. Among them we find an aforementioned issue of whether it is the role of the administrative staff to impose any standards and procedures and to supervise their execution, or maybe it is their task to assist and guide the academic community through the process of realizing those procedures. The effect of which is another question: should administrative employees interfere with the teaching process? If so, should they be seen as a part of the professional skill improvement framework designed for the academic community or maybe as external inspectors?

The discussion launched in this article was undertaken to inspire the managerial staff to critically assess and revise both the long established and newly invented internal quality assurance systems in the institutions of higher education. The optimal use of available resources requires the task management to include the skills acquired by the employees and their abilities to engage in the initiatives realized on various levels and stages of teaching quality assurance cycle. Certain Polish higher education institutions show a tendency towards assigning essential tasks to specialized administrative units. Adequate risk management proves centralization beneficial in such cases. The university policy should be flexible enough for future developments, supervisions and proper modifications in order to assure the best teaching quality possible.

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Questions for discussion:

- Is it the role of the administrative staff to impose any standards and procedures and to supervise their execution, or maybe their task is to assist and guide the academic community through the process of realizing those procedures?
- Should administrative employees interfere with the teaching process?
- Should they be seen as a part of the professional skill improvement framework designed for the academic community or maybe as external inspectors?