



## **10th European Quality Assurance Forum**

**19-21 November 2015**

**Quality Assurance Agency and UCL Institute of Education**

**London, UK**

### **Taking stock and looking forward**

**Paper presented during EQAF 2015**

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#### **Short bio:**

Sociologist (2008), Sophie Fuhrmann has been working at the University of Lausanne from 2011. Initially as a Staff member in the Faculty of Geoscience and Environment. She helped the Dean and the self-evaluation committee to evaluate two programs. Then, from 2012 onwards she has been a Staff member of the Quality Unit of the Management of UNIL, working with the Vice-rector Jacques Lanarès.

She is also currently a Phd student in Political Science (Faculty of Social and Political Sciences/SSP, UNIL) since 2014 in the domain of Quality, studying the relationship between Quality Assurance and Swiss universities governance.

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Graduated with a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Lausanne, Mélanie Glayre was part of many different commissions at UNIL. She was, amongst others, internal expert at UNIL for degree program evaluations; student representative in the steering committee of the UNIL Quality Audit; member of the self-evaluation board of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Lausanne and member of the Committee for Teaching and Research Enhancement (COVER).

She was also member of the presidency of the National Union of Students of Switzerland (VSS-UNES-USU) in charge of quality assurance, from March 2013 to September 2014, and an external expert for the Quality Audit of the University of Fribourg (CH).

She is going to start a Master of Arts in Legal Studies in September 2015 at the University of Fribourg.



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Biologist with a Master from the University of Fribourg (CH) and a post-graduate education in Human Nutrition from ETH Zurich, Véronique Kobel has been responsible for the Quality Unit at the UNIL since February 2015 after completing a certificate in Quality and Process Management. Before that, she worked from 2000 to 2006 at the ETH Zurich in the field of research, specialising in determining data quality in the food sciences. From 2006 to 2014, she worked in various Swiss hospitals as a project manager on organizational projects, with a specialization for accreditation within the care sectors.

## Proposal

**Title: Students: full partners of institutional Quality at the University of Lausanne (UNIL)**

**Abstract:**

Student participation in the internal Quality processes is one of the fundamental values underpinning the Quality system at the University of Lausanne (UNIL). This participation does not stop at their involvement as beneficiaries of the processes: students are involved in steering them too.

This article will demonstrate that the value of student participation at all levels of institutional Quality processes is not just wishful thinking enshrined in the texts describing the institutional processes, but can actually be seen in practice with the students showing a genuine willingness to be involved. Students are, in fact, present, they play a role, participate and appreciate being able to do so, at every stage in the processes.

**Text of paper:**

### 1. The Quality Culture at the UNIL

Student participation in the internal Quality processes is one of the fundamental values underpinning the Quality system at the University of Lausanne (UNIL). This participation does not stop at them being beneficiaries of the processes: students are also involved in steering them too. This article will demonstrate that the value of student participation at all levels of institutional Quality processes is not just wishful thinking, but can actually be seen in practice with the students showing a genuine willingness to be involved.

Since 1998, the UNIL has collectively addressed Quality issues. An overarching concept has gradually been developed and a genuine system constructed. This system is part of the Swiss Quality framework in the higher education institutes which is compatible with the ESG, both old and new.



The UNIL Quality System encompasses many processes. However, the UNIL does not simply aim to develop a coherent and efficient system, but a genuine Quality Culture as well. This notion, which has been advocated by the EUA since 2006, underlines the fact that Quality initiatives become truly meaningful when quality is a shared value in the Institution and leads to a collective search for improvements. For the UNIL, a Quality Culture is established once everyone sees the relevance of these initiatives and becomes involved in carrying them out.

A prerequisite for Quality to take root in the university community is for the processes to be based on values shared by the Community as a whole. Support from the Management and political commitment are also key prerequisites for it to take root. The core values underpinning the Quality processes have therefore been chosen through consultation between the Institution's Management and the various actors in the field. They lie within an approach which focuses on learning, development and creativity. They are the bedrock of all the processes and thereby ensure the system is consistent. They include:

1. Fitness for purpose
2. Taking account of distinguishing features
3. Reflexivity
4. Participation of people concerned
5. External validation
6. Compliance with ethical rules
7. Balance between transparency and confidentiality
8. Relevance of requested information
9. Accountability

In the rest of this article, we will mainly be looking at the value of participation, and more specifically at student participation.

## **2. Participation of people concerned**

Nowadays, apart from the institutional Quality processes, there are many well-established mechanisms for engaging the Institution's members, including students, in UNIL structures and processes. The legislator for the representative bodies (University Council, Faculty Council) and the Management including the thirteen advisory committees are clearly determined to allow representatives from all the UNIL bodies to inform the Management of their analyses and suggestions. Furthermore, regular dialogue between the Management and umbrella associations (including the Federation of Student Associations (FAE)), as well as with entities and individuals enables respective concerns and expectations to be shared and clarified.

In the case of institutional Quality processes, as with any cultural shift, gradually instilling



a Quality Culture takes a long time and requires the involvement of an increasing number of both people and the different facets of UNIL activities. To this end, it is vital to encourage everyone concerned to take part and it enables the needs and expectations of the Institution's stakeholders to be taken into account. This participation has a legal basis, as well as being an UNIL Management's will.

This is reflected in the implementation of the institutional Quality processes, in the ways these Quality processes are put into practice. The construction and development of the various processes are based on a PDCA cycle with three stages: designing the processes (a), implementing the processes (b) and evaluating and adjusting the processes (c). At each of these stages, the opinions of the four UNIL bodies are sought (students, teaching staff, non-professorial teaching staff and members of the Administrative and Technical Staff (ATS)).

This participation is ensured in several ways which are similar from one process to the next. In the rest of this paper, we will be providing concrete examples, especially of the participation of the student body, by looking at these three stages in three institutional Quality processes - the faculty and curriculum evaluations, and the student evaluation of teaching. We will also be looking at the Quality Audit led by the OAQ (now the AAQ).

### 3. Student participation

#### 3.1. The modalities

From designing the processes to implementing and evaluating them, the students participate in Quality processes in two different ways. On the one hand, they participate as beneficiaries of the Quality processes and on the other, they fully participate in steering the processes, having a role in designing and continually adjusting them, something which does not usually happen in student participation.

The following table shows the fields where students are involved. *The parts in italics show the stages where students take on a steering role.*

<b>Processes</b>	<b>a) Designing</b>	<b>b) Implementing</b>	<b>c) Evaluating and adjusting</b>
<b>External Quality Audit</b>	(external)	<i>Members of the UNIL internal Steering Committee</i>	(external)
<b>Faculty evaluation</b>	<i>Committee for Teaching and Research Enhancement (COVER)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <i>Members of the Self-Evaluation Steering Committee (SESC)</i></li> <li>– Questionnaires and/or focus group</li> </ul>	Questionnaire
<b>Curriculum evaluation</b>	<i>COVER</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <i>Members of the SESC</i></li> <li>– Questionnaires and/or focus group</li> <li>– <i>Members (paid) of the internal expertise group</i></li> </ul>	Focus group



<b>Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET)</b>	<i>Management Teaching Committee</i>	Paper questionnaires	<i>Management Teaching Committee</i>
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a) Designing the processes

As part of the faculty and curriculum evaluations, students participate in designing the processes through their four seats on the *COVER*. The *COVER* is a participatory committee, created after the first Quality audit in 2003. Composed of 22 members, it includes representatives from the Institution's various bodies and faculties.

Its mission is to design and support the development of a quality system specific to the UNIL. Its mandate is therefore to design concepts and Quality processes as part of the faculty and curriculum evaluations. In this context, it has participated in identifying the values underpinning the Quality processes and guarantees they are complied with when applied to the processes.

The *COVER* ensures fairness between the various faculties through its participatory aspect. It also enables the needs and expectations of the various faculties and bodies to be raised in order to guarantee that they are included in the development of the Quality processes as far as possible.

In the context of the SET, students have one seat per Faculty on the *Management Teaching Committee*. This committee is particularly responsible for drawing up SET questionnaires. Students therefore have a role in drawing up these questionnaires, as well as in the guidelines for implementing the SET.

Students have a steering role in these two points.



#### b) Implementing the processes

The implementation of the main institutional Quality processes follows a PDCA cycle. This is a common process which includes a planning, a self-evaluation, a visit by external experts, the adoption of a position by the Management, then regular monitoring before a new evaluation.

As part of the *faculty and curriculum evaluations*, responsibility for the process lies with the head of the entity being evaluated. However, he or she shall ensure that all the bodies concerned are involved. In this way, in order to get a clearer picture of the various facets and diversity of this complex reality, an advisory committee acting like a steering committee and representing all four bodies is involved in performing the self-evaluation. For students, this is a role in the steering of the process.

On the other hand, during the self-evaluation stage, consultation with the different bodies is encouraged. In this context, students will have the role of beneficiaries by filling in questionnaires or participating in focus groups.

Another way that students are involved in steering the processes is by volunteering to participate in *internal expert training workshops*, then as *voluntary internal experts (paid in the case of students)* during curriculum evaluations. Internal experts have several roles, the first of which is to check that the process has been properly conducted according to the rules laid down by the COVER and also to assist external experts by helping them to understand the UNIL context. The group of internal experts is composed of two people from separate bodies.

For the SET, students take on the role of evaluation beneficiaries by filling in questionnaires. They are encouraged to fulfil this role by the teachers and the information boards on SET modalities and input display in every classroom and lecture theatre.

For an external process to the UNIL, but which relates to the internal Quality system, namely the *Quality audit led by the OAQ (now AAQ)*, most of the modalities were outside the UNIL's decision-making framework. However, the UNIL could choose the organisation of the internal steering of the process. It obviously involved the student body within the Steering Committee. They were therefore able to have a role in steering the internal part of the Quality Audit.

#### c) Evaluating the processes

At the end of each faculty or curriculum evaluation, an evaluation of the process is carried out among stakeholders. For faculty evaluations, a questionnaire is sent to members of the SESC and those who participated in the experts' visit and the experts themselves. For curriculum evaluations, a focus group is organised which also includes representatives from each body involved in the self-evaluation process.

This evaluation will regularly check that the rules and mechanisms of the Quality processes still match the values and principles on which the Quality Culture is based, and also raises the needs and expectations which might not have been met by the process. This will enable the processes to be constantly pushed forward on an informed basis. In this context, student feedback clearly plays a key role in steering the evaluation.

For the SET, every year the Education Support Centre prepares an assessment of the evaluations which have been performed. This assessment is discussed within the *Management Teaching Committee* in which students have one seat per Faculty. The questionnaires are therefore regularly reviewed in the light of this assessment and the



feedback from the various bodies within the committee. So students also have a role here in steering the process.

### 3.2. In numbers and in practice

#### Participation of students as beneficiaries of the Quality processes:

The *questionnaires handed out as part of faculty evaluations* to gather the opinions of the students during the self-evaluation processes obtained a 37% - 100% response rate. These rates are generally similar to the response rates of the other bodies questioned, demonstrating a good level of involvement.

The *evaluation questionnaires for the faculty evaluations* also obtain good student response rates from 45.5% - 100%. These response rates are generally either higher or the same as the global response rates for these questionnaires, which are between 46.5% and 71.6%, also demonstrating a good level of involvement.

In these same questionnaires, there are several open questions with *qualitative comments*. The main *positive comments* made by students are connected with the satisfaction, amazement even, of seeing their opinions and requests taken into account, and sometimes supported, in the context of the process, as well as within the SESC and during the visit by external experts. They believe they have benefited from this. They also often give a positive assessment of the plurality of the actors involved in the process. Here are a few extracts from these comments:

- About the process: *"The chance for members of several bodies to get together round a table and discuss general Faculty issues."* (2013)
- On what students get out of participating in this process: *"The in-depth debates on teaching, governance and research are really interesting and necessary. As a student, I've learnt such a lot about how my faculty operates."* (2014)
- On how their needs are listened to: *"having the opportunity to apply some self-analysis and to have external opinions. For us, having our requests backed up by other people."* (2009)

*"The freedom given to students by the Faculty to express ourselves freely in front of the group of experts has been greatly appreciated."* (2012)

Several *negative points* are also raised. These are firstly to do with the process planning, leading, for example, to a visit by experts during examinations. Another point raised is the lack of information given to the student body as a whole about the processes as such. Here is an example of a comment: *"Generally speaking, the self-evaluation process is largely unknown within the student body."* (2014)

To enable processes to be constantly improved, these points are taken into account and solutions discussed by the COVER to resolve them in the best possible way.

For process evaluations, we also seek the *opinion of experts* who have participated in faculty and curriculum evaluations. A study of their questionnaire responses shows that they agree with the student feedback. They regularly note, in fact, and in a positive way, the active and constructive participation of the different partners of the evaluated entities, particularly the students, both during visits and during self-evaluation. Here are some extracts from these comments:

*"[...] ownership of the initiative by the field [...], candour and investment in the exercise [...]."* (external expert, evaluation of a Faculty, 2014)



"Everyone present showed a sustained interest in the evaluation work they were responsible for, during both the plenary meeting and select meetings. [...] We must particularly emphasise the contribution made by the students on these working days. They were very involved and had a very good grasp of the issues raised, contributing to each of the discussions." (external expert, evaluation of a curriculum, 2010).

#### Participation of students in the steering of the Quality processes:

The *Management Teaching Committee* has one seat per Faculty for student representatives, making a total of seven seats. These seats are occupied most of the time.

Students have four seats in the *COVER*. Since the *COVER* was formed, these seats have always been occupied on a voluntary basis.

For the faculty and curriculum evaluation processes, the *SESC* have always had one or two student representatives. Therefore, this request resulting from the process is obviously followed by both the self-evaluation supervisor and by the students themselves.

In the context of the curriculum self-evaluations, a good level of student participation in the *focus groups* set up to evaluate the curriculum evaluation process shows their interest in helping to steer the process, and not just acting as beneficiaries (two focus groups with a total of 18 professors, 5 members of the non-professorial teaching staff, 4 students and 8 members of the *ATS*).

An *internal expert* training workshop for curriculum evaluations has been set up since the process was created in 2010. Internal experts are recruited on a voluntary basis from among the participants in the faculty and curriculum evaluation processes and within the *COVER*.

Of the six workshops organised, all of them included students, whereas the other bodies were not always represented. Students represent a total of 30% of the people trained in workshops, which is above the mathematical average of 25%. Furthermore, along with the members of the *ATS*, they are the body which has participated the most in these workshops, and this regularly over time.

Once trained, the *internal experts* can be recruited, again on a voluntary basis, to carry out their mandate as part of a curriculum evaluation outside their own faculty. Fifteen visits have taken place since curriculum evaluations started in 2010. Of these 30 internal experts, 10 were members of the student body, spread over the years and the faculties. It can therefore be seen that the proportion of students in the internal expert pairs is exactly the same as that of the students trained in the workshops. This data shows us that these students are not trained just as alibis, but that they really do perform the role of internal experts.

It should also be pointed out that students receive a payment of 500 CHF (around 480 Euros) when they fulfil an internal expert mandate. The purpose of this payment is to encourage all students to participate, irrespective of their socio-economic status. Members from the other bodies are not paid, as it is part of the service to the community required under their contract with the Institution.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The purpose of this paper was to pass on information about one of the priority values of the UNIL internal Quality system: the participation of the university community as a whole,





and more specifically student participation. It then went on to explain how the UNIL conveyed this value within its institutional Quality processes.

We have shown that we are heading in the right direction as regards putting this value into practice. Student involvement is, in fact, not just evident in the statutes and intentions underpinning the internal Quality processes: we have also noticed that the students are genuinely and willingly involved in each stage of the processes. Students are, in fact, present, they play a role, participate and appreciate being able to do so.

By questioning the other bodies and the external experts, we note that student participation is recognised and appreciated, thereby also demonstrating an attachment to the UNIL Quality Culture and its underpinning values.

The questions now being asked are how should we continue, how can student involvement and participation be further improved? And what more can be done as regards the identified values to increase student participation in Quality steering within the UNIL?

Some of these questions could be answered by finding solutions which respond to the students' main criticisms of the current processes, which are mainly to do with communication issues. For example, how to pass on information in such a way that students can fully understand the institutional Quality processes and therefore be full partners, in spite of the recurring issue of student turnover? One suggestion would be to produce mini-texts or video clips with students involved in the processes for the following cohorts. These development opportunities will be discussed in the COVER, in which the students themselves are bound to play a central role.

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