

Evolving Steps of Quality Culture in Universities: Outline from European University Association's (EUA) Institutional Evaluation Reports

Üniversitelerde Kalite Kültürünün Gelişim Aşamaları:

Avrupa Üniversiteler Birliği'nin (EUA) Kurumsal Değerlendirme Raporlarında Öne Çıkan Alanlar

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Abstract

Quality expectations bring many political and practical changes in universities. Some staff can see such a changing atmosphere as a danger for their work routines and prefer to refuse this renew quality approach in their university. However, it is critical ensuring the active participation of each staff to achieve better quality standards in university services. Then, to motivate all staff for quality development works, university managers need to evolve the quality culture in their institutions. Therefore, this research aims to explore the evolving steps of quality culture in universities. The research was designed as a qualitative inquiry, following multiple-case study pattern. The qualitative data were collected from the institutional evaluation reports published by European University Association (EUA). The multiple cases come from 14 universities in eight countries (including one initial and one follow-up reports per university, total 28 institutional evaluation reports). The dataset was analysed using content analysis approach, as follows: coding relevant sections in the reports; categorisation of various codes; integration of emerging themes. The analysis revealed that top administration first set up quality strategies and then generally delegate the policy development responsibility to the dedicated committee in their university. As the next steps, this committee plan necessary actions and steer institutional practices to develop quality in their services, including teaching, research, and engagement activities. However, three steps seem crucial to constitute a strong quality culture in universities: i) design "quality development" as an institutional project, ii) establish quality management system to minimise bureaucratic burden, and iii) recognise staff's achievements (whether small or exceptional) contributing to the quality standards and timely award these achievements as motivating examples for all staff to take a part in quality development.

Özet

Kalite beklentileri üniversitelerde birçok politik ve uygulama temelli değişikliği beraberinde getirmektedir. Personellerin bir kısmı böyle bir değişim atmosferini kendi çalışma rutinleri için bir tehlike olarak görebilir ve üniversitelerindeki yenileşen kalite yaklaşımını reddetmeyi tercih edebilir. Diğer taraftan, üniversitenin sunduğu hizmetlerde daha iyi kalite standartlarına ulaşmak için her personelin aktif katılımının sağlanması kritik önemdedir. Doğal olarak, tüm personeli kalite geliştirme çalışmalarına katılım konusunda motive edebilmek için üniversite yöneticilerinin kurumlarında kalite kültürünü geliştirmeleri gerekmektedir. Bu bağlamda, üniversitelerde kalite kültürünün gelişim aşamalarını keşfetmek araştırmanın amacını oluşturmaktadır. Bu araştırma, çoklu durum çalışması modelini temele alan nitel bir araştırma olarak tasarlanmıştır. Nitel veriler, Avrupa Üniversiteler Birliği (EUA) tarafından yayınlanan kurumsal değerlendirme raporlarından derlenmiştir. 8 farklı ülkeden araştırma kapsamına alınan 14 üniversite bu çalışmadaki çoklu örnek durumları oluşturmaktadır. Üniversite başına bir ilk ve bir takip raporu olmak üzere, toplam 28 kurumsal değerlendirme raporu ile oluşturulan veri seti içerik analizi yaklaşımı analiz edilmiş ve analiz sürecinde şu aşamalar takip edilmiştir: raporlardaki ilgili bölümlerin kodlanması; çeşitli kodların kategorize edilmesi; ortaya çıkan temaların bütünleştirilmesi. Bulgular, üniversite üst yönetiminin öncelikle kalite stratejileri oluşturduğunu ve ardından genellikle politika geliştirme sorumluluğunu özel komite yapılarına devrettiğini göstermektedir. Sonrasında, bu komite gerekli eylemleri planlamakta ve öğretim, araştırma ve katılım faaliyetleri de dahil olmak üzere kurumsal hizmetlerde kaliteyi geliştirmek için yapılan uygulamaları yönlendirmektedir. Bununla birlikte, üniversitelerde güçlü bir kalite kültürü oluşturmak için üç adım çok önemli görünmektedir: i) "kalite gelişimini" kurumsal bir proje olarak tasarlamak, ii) bürokratik yükü en aza indirmek için kalite yönetim sistemi kurmak ve iii) personelin kalite standartlarına katkıda bulunan başarılarını (küçük veya istisnai de olsa) tanımak ve bu başarıları tüm personelin kalite gelişiminde rol alması için motive edici örnekler olarak zamanında ödüllendirmek.

Keywords: QuaLity Development Initiatives, Quality Management Systems, Quality in Higher Education, Quality Strategies in European Higher Education Area (EHEA), Quality Culture in Universities

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kalite Geliştirme Girişimleri, Kalite Yönetim Sistemleri, Yükseköğretimde Kalite, Avrupa Yükseköğretim Alanı'nda (EHEA) Kalite Stratejileri, Üniversitelerde Kalite Kültürü

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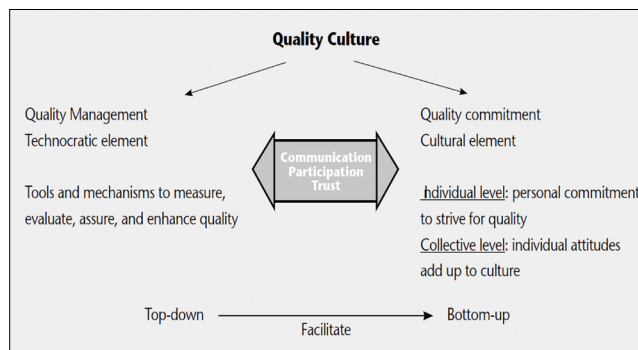
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Quality is a multidimensional concept that encompasses various aspects of an institution's activities. In the context of higher education, quality refers to the extent to which an institution's activities and outcomes meet the expectations and needs of all its stakeholders, including students, faculty, staff, and society as a whole (Welzant et al., 2015). To keep up the quality line in universities, quality assurance is the name of processes to ensure its programs, services, and operations meet the required standards of quality (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education [ENQA], 2015). Beyond quality standardisation, on the other hand, universities need to establish organisational culture embracing all stakeholders for quality development continuously.

Without exception, quality expectations bring many political and practical changes in universities too. Some staff can see such a changing atmosphere as a danger for their work routines and prefer to refuse this new quality approach in their university (Yorke, 2000). However, it is critical ensuring the active participation of each staff to achieve better quality standards in university services (Lycke & Tano, 2017). Then, to motivate all staff for quality development works, university managers need to evolve the quality culture in their institutions. According to the European University Association (EUA), while "quality is an ongoing exercise and needs to be pursued continuously both for outcomes and processes [in university organisations] to [always] enhance and improve their current status and [further] develop their systems" (EUA, 2006, pp. 9-10),

[Q]uality culture refers to an organisational culture that intends to enhance quality permanently and is characterised by two distinct elements: on the one hand, a cultural/psychological element of shared values, beliefs, expectations and commitment towards quality and, on the other hand, a structural/managerial element with defined processes that enhance quality and aim at coordinating individual efforts. Thus, the cultural/psychological element refers back to individual staff members while the structural/managerial refers back to the institution (EUA, 2006, p. 10; Fig. 1).

Figure 1
Quality culture and quality management (EUA, 2006, p. 20)



While Figure 1 shows the components of quality culture, it does not broadly explain the way how quality culture can be generated collectively around individuals and managerial practices in universities. Rather, Bendermacher and colleagues (2017, p. 45) listed "Promoting and inhibiting organisational context factors impacting quality culture", under following themes: Organisational structure/managerial elements, Organisational subculture/psychological elements, Leadership elements, and Communication elements. Following similar themes, Hildesheim and Sonntag (2019, p. 10) developed The Quality Culture Inventory for higher education institutions and categorised the questions under the sub-dimensions of "Leadership behaviour, Communication, Engagement, Commitment, Leadership expectations, and Participation".

However, Perovsek (2016, p. 10) argued the difficulties in changing the existing organisational/quality culture and claimed that "most organisations are still left with the dilemma what to do in practice, pushed by the internal and external demands for change and a very scarce knowledge of how to facilitate the [quality culture] change in practice." Yet the studies given above do not directly explain the whole transition processes from 'quality'-to-'quality assurance', and then from 'quality assurance'-to-'quality culture' approach in universities. On this point, asking 'whether essential steps could be to establish strong quality culture' can assist managers to form evolving culture around quality development in their universities. Therefore, this research aims to explore the evolving steps of quality culture in universities. Parallel to this aim, qualitative inquiry was employed on the development of quality culture through various university examples. Herewith, EUA's Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) provides highly valuable feedback about quality development in various universities from Europe. Benefitting from EUA's evaluation reports as well-rounded documented-sources in this research, EUA's IEP aims "to support institutions in developing their strategic leadership and capacity to manage change" (<https://www.eua.eu/publications/reports/institutional-evaluation-programme.html>).

Since IEP's launch in 1994 to this year, 2024, during these 30 years, EUA has conducted more than 450 evaluations on 340 universities from 50 countries (EUA-IEP, n.d.). While EUA's IEP is listed on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAAR) and a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), they provide independent evaluations which complies with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) (ENQA, 2015). With initial and follow-up evaluations (if requested) based on field-visits to universities, EUA experts assess the strengths as well as areas needed further improvements by observing the quality outcomes on practices and services in a related university. With a highly similar structure to the reports



of Turkish Higher Education Quality Council (YÖKAK), EUA experts evaluate quality components in various categories, as follows: Governance and institutional decision-making, Quality culture, Teaching and learning, Research, Service to society, and Internationalisation (see details: <https://www.iep-qaa.org/>). While EUA's IEP reports clearly show the importance of 'Quality culture' as an essential component for universities, it is also important to understand how the adaptation of quality culture into organisational processes influence the institutional development of universities.

Reflections of Quality Culture in Universities

Quality culture is an important component to enhance university performance and to ensure the development of academic excellence (Hilman et al., 2017). However, the development of quality culture is further than just employing quality assurance mechanisms. Cultural development can be operated in the best way including shared values, practices, and procedures within the institutional community, rather than solely relying on standard measurement procedures (Alberto, 2015). Whereas measuring predetermined standards is important for accountability, it cannot guarantee quality alone; instead, quality culture requires the willingness and aspiration of all stakeholders to ensure its implementation and success in universities. Parallel to the common effort of stakeholders, many researchers also underlined that quality culture has a significant positive effect on university performance through the contribution to institutional reputation, resource effectiveness, student experience, and academic environment (Hildesheim & Sonntag, 2019; Katiliute & Neverauskas, 2009; Ortiz-Herrera et al., 2020). At this point, it could be possible to evaluate reflections of quality culture to universities in terms of five major aspects, namely, Improved Student Outcomes, Enhanced Institutional Reputation, Improved Efficiency and Effectiveness, Increased Stakeholder Satisfaction, and Continuous Professional Development.

For example, looking over "Improved Student Outcomes", quality culture can help to generate a supportive and engaging learning environment. A commitment to quality requires to ensure rigorous academic standards, which empowers the excellence understanding in the whole institution. Thus, if universities prioritise quality, students often experience more engaging curricula, better teaching methods, and supportive services during their education (Tucker, 2013). This can obviously lead to increase in student satisfaction as well as better success in their academic performance. Then, graduates from universities with a strong quality culture are more likely to possess the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in their future workplace (Bendermacher et al., 2017). Meanwhile, with higher satisfaction, universities having a well-established quality culture can also achieve to decrease retention among their students and to get higher graduation records.

Similarly, "Increased Stakeholder Satisfaction" includes both internal and external parties beyond students. For instance, with their student's higher satisfaction, it is likely to get positive feedback from parents and possibly their economic and moral contribution for the further development of universities (Jawad et al., 2015). Also, quality culture can provide a common basis for more supportive and positive work atmosphere in which faculty and other personnel can be happier with better well-being and higher morale levels. Further, students graduating from universities with a strong quality culture often have better career, and then these graduates can contribute more to the university's alumni network as well as establish bridging between their university and external donors/partners too (Paraschivescu et al., 2013).

Yet one of other factors contributing to universities' further development in financial and human resources is "Enhanced Institutional Reputation". In this respect, universities named with a strong quality reputation can attract better students and high-skilled researchers and teachers. With this increasing reputation, beyond strengthening their academic community, universities can find more opportunities to increase their funding streams from government agencies, private foundations, and previously underlined, their alumni group (Zawada, 2019). In addition, if universities achieve to establish a strong quality culture, they will more likely elevate their position in various ranking and benchmark system by means of high level scientific and academic contribution from their talented faculty and student cohorts (Lanares, 2011). Expectedly, quality approach among their staff and students can also help universities to align their programs towards national and international accreditation standards, even they will achieve to exceed far beyond such external expectations.

When we look at "Improved Efficiency and Effectiveness" perspective, it is possible to say that some essential components of quality culture can prioritise the efficient use of resources to ensure for optimised resources allocation within universities through the areas of greatest need and gain balance (Hilman et al., 2017). Similarly, using quality measures as well as detailed analysis on their consumption areas, universities can easily identify and eliminate inefficient areas; hence, universities can improve their financial sustainability by reducing costs, at least at a certain level. Furthermore, quality culture embraces accountability and transparency where faculty and administration are more responsive to student needs and outcomes, which possibly results with mutual trust in the academic community (Dziminska et al., 2018). Yet cost reduction or resource allocation, even accountability measures, is not one-time process, and naturally quality culture can give university management clear directions to complete their institutional culture adding continuous improvement in any areas, as well as leading them to ongoing enhancements in all processes and practices institutionally.

Parallel to the continuity in institutional development, “Continuous Professional Development” is also another important aspect of quality culture in universities. As an advantage in this point, a quality culture always encourages faculty and staff to regularly assess and enhance their practices, curricula, and support services for students (Seyoum, 2012). Then, with the impact of such an institutional culture, it is possible for faculty feel deeper obligation to engage in professional development opportunities to achieve better teaching practices and more effective mentoring for students. Beyond individuals’ professional development, quality culture mostly embraces different structures to enhance collaboration among faculty, departments, and administrative units (Alberto, 2015). Such a collaborative environment can help to develop more innovative approaches in teaching, research, and community engagement too.

Given above, the establishment of quality culture in universities is essential for achieving a wide range of positive outcomes. These potential results can include improved student outcomes to enhanced institutional reputation, and increased efficiency to continuous development among academic community. On this point, it is important to know what the necessary steps could be to ensure a strong “quality culture” in universities. Herewith, the following sections of this research will focus on evolving steps of quality culture to contribute to universities’ long-term sustainability and growth.

Method

This research was designed as a multiple-case study. According to Creswell (2013, pp. 73-74), “a multiple case study is a qualitative inquiry in which researchers explore a selected issue or concern through multiple-bounded systems (cases) via detailed, in-depth data collection, and report case-based themes” (as cited in Uslu, 2018, p. 36). In line with this definition, the researcher benefitted from the case study approach to inquire the evolving stages of quality culture in universities through the qualitative analysis of the institutional evaluation reports of EUA.

The initial institutional evaluation report and follow-up institutional evaluation report of EUA could present better evidence together to be able to understand a longitudinal establishment of quality culture in a related university. EUA has published both initial institutional evaluation reports and follow-up institutional evaluation reports in its website since 2009. Thereby, the researcher only included universities which have both initial and follow-up reports in the EUA website among potential cases. After such an inclusion process, 14 universities (and 28 reports) from eight countries constitute the multiple cases of universities for this research (■ Table 1).

■ Table 1

Distribution of the selected universities by countries

Country	University	Report*	Date
Czechia	Charles University, Prague	Follow-up	2019
		Initial	2017
Macedonia	St. Kliment Ohridski University, Bitola	Follow-up	2021
		Initial	2017
	Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje	Follow-up	2017
		Initial	2015
	Goce Delchev University (Shtip)	Follow-up	2017
		Initial	2014
Montenegro	University of Montenegro	Follow-up	2018
		Initial	2014
	University Mediterranean, Podgorica, Montenegro	Follow-up	2018
		Initial	2014
	University Donja Gorica	Follow-up	2018
		Initial	2014
Portugal	Universidade Da Beira Interior	Follow-up	2012
		Initial	2009
Romania	Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad	Follow-up	2018
		Initial	2014
Slovenia	University of Primorska	Follow-up	2015
		Initial	2010
Spain	European University of Madrid	Follow-up	2015
		Initial	2011
Türkiye	Sakarya University	Follow-up	2020
		Initial	2016
	Marmara University	Follow-up	2017
		Initial	2014
	Istanbul University	Follow-up	2013
		Initial	2010

* The EUA’s reports selected in the dataset were listed in the Appendix.

The researcher then employed Content Analysis to examine the qualitative (in textual format) data in the EUA’s reports. In the next phase, all initial and follow-up reports were analysed in accordance with Miles and Huberman’s (1994) qualitative data analysis steps: Data reduction, Data



display, and Conclusion drawing/verification. Each report was analysed separately several times by using codes (as keywords or phrases) to reduce the data, and all reduced data were combined in one whole as a manageable data set. In the final step of analysis, all codes were categories in accordance with the proximity in their (intended) meanings; therewith, the themes were emerged, as follows: 1) (setting up) quality strategies, 2) responsibility delegation (to the dedicated committee); 3) necessary action plans (by this committee); and 4) directing quality development (in institutional practices and services, including teaching, research, and engagement activities). After all of these steps, the research results were summarised following the themes and presented in the next chapter in combination with direct quotations from the examined reports.

Findings

It is obvious that universities have to observe their surrounding conditions when designing their quality management structure. For example, “whether from the devolved perspective of the faculties or the wider institutional remit of the senior leadership team, a policy handbrake emanating from central [or, in other words, national] government is felt to hinder the clarification or enhancement of quality processes and practices [in universities]” (St. Kliment Ohridski University, Bitola, Macedonia, follow-up report, 2021).” In addition to national differentiations, universities may also have various institutional priorities depending on their vision, local connections, and even international outlook. All against these national and institutional varieties, the evolution of quality culture in universities show quite similar sequence in general (■ Fig. 2).

■ Figure 2

Evolving steps of quality culture in universities



As can be seen in ■ Figure 2, the analysis here revealed that top administration first set up their quality strategies (largely focusing on their institutional priorities). For example, the case of St. Kliment Ohridski University, Bitola, Macedonia (initial report, 2017) underlined that “The university’s primary mission is said to be ‘offering quality education [to] young professionals and producing qualified, accomplished experts, competitive on both the national and international labour markets’. A vision has been developed around eight general strands including ... European standards and the quality and recognition of study programmes”. Parallely, “one key element of the new strategy emerged around the quality assurance and enhancement of education and research” for this university (St. Kliment Ohridski University, Bitola, Macedonia, initial report, 2017). Then, after 4 years, during their second visit to St. Kliment Ohridski University, Bitola, Macedonia (follow-up report, 2021), EUA experts assessed “how far th[e] student engagement currently extends into the more strategic debates [and further] recommend[ed] that the university builds on the current progress in embracing the student voice [on educational development initiatives] and makes sure that students’ involvement in governance [to particularly enhance the participative culture] both [on] strategic and operational levels”. In a more comprehensive example of quality strategies, Sakarya University, Türkiye (initial report, 2016) employed “quality assurance operat[ion]s within a Total Quality Management Framework (TQM) and much emphasis is placed on implementing the specific model developed by the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM). [With this approach, EUA evaluators] received a full listing of reporting mechanisms and reports which demonstrated a comprehensively planned, well-managed and disciplined approach to quality control”. In their follow-up visit, EUA experts similarly underlined the enhancement of such strong quality strategies with other practices in Sakarya University, Türkiye (follow-up report, 2020), as follows: “[The university] adopts an external quality/excellence model as the central mechanism to support the assurance of quality in all its dimensions: the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM). This sits alongside the involvement of other nationally based external accreditation agencies, linked largely to programme evaluation”.

In the second step following quality strategies, top management generally delegate the policy development responsibility to the dedicated committee in their university. “In terms of the governance, the university states that it sees the Board of Internal Evaluation (BIE)[–a dedicated committee for quality development in this university example–]as being at the heart of future developments in quality assurance and quality enhancement” (Charles University, Prague, Czechia, initial report, 2017). Looking over the follow-up visit assessment, EUA’s experts clearly underlined the further enrichment of related committees for quality development in Charles University, Prague,

Chezchia (follow-up report, 2019), as noted: “From a governance perspective, the Internal Evaluation Board is now seen to be functioning effectively, while in 2018 a new Creative Activities Evaluation Board was established to... evaluat[e] scientific work (research) and is notable[ly]... composed of well-recognised foreign academics and researchers”. In addition to university-level committees, there are also similar committees at different academic units; for example, Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad, Romania (initial report, 2014) “has put in place multiple layers and bodies involved in quality assurance... [such as] quality assurance department and quality assurance council at institutional level, as well as faculty-level quality assurance committees which analyse data concerning the quality of education [and] also make recommendations about... establishing new [programmes] for reasons related to labour-market needs and student demand”. In their second visit, EUA experts outlined similar positive situation for the variety of quality committee structures, as follows: “the other members of these decision-making bodies, as well as of various specialised preparatory and consultative bodies such as the university and faculty level quality assurance commissions see[ing] essential components, and]... the various representative bodies are important for engaging in discussions on the improvement of various aspects of university activities” (Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad, Romania, follow-up report, 2018).

As ■ Figure 2 outlined, the third step shows that the quality [assurance/development/evaluation] committees mostly plan necessary actions for further quality development in universities. Considering such an example of necessary planning; in University of Montenegro, Montenegro (initial report, 2014), “quality assurance systems should be put in place for research, following the work that has been started by the Research and Development Service Centre”. Nonetheless EUA experts suggested in their follow-up assessment for “wider implications of a quality culture [to] fully develop across the university, monitor[ing] the university’s] activities against a full range of standard quality indicators, for example in taught study programmes against the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)” can enrich the roles of Committees for Quality Assurance and Control (University of Montenegro, Montenegro, follow-up report, 2018). Another planning example from Universidade Da Beira Interior, Portugal (initial report, 2009) underlines the contribution of stakeholders, by noted: “the outcomes of the quality assurance processes should go to all internal and external stakeholders. [Therefore,] the intrinsic virtues of a robust quality culture – internal synergy and corporate confidence – are also the basis for effective external projection... [and,] the credibility of the quality assurance system which depends on transparent agreed procedures efficiently implemented and fair outcomes widely disseminated”. Parallely, after their second visit, EUA experts suggested “act[ing] to deepen and enrich

quality culture throughout the institution, and diversify the means used to gather student and alumni feedback” could be useful mechanisms to monitor institutional progress, as the core of next step which explained in the final part below (Universidade Da Beira Interior, Portugal, follow-up report, 2012). Interestingly, in the case of European University of Madrid, Spain (follow-up report, 2015), “[the university] considers itself a quality teaching institution, [yet they plan] both research processes, with the participation of students in research, and output should be integrated into teaching”. Similarly, but in a university named one of research universities in Türkiye, their quality assurance committee gives importance to another plan “for training, particularly of younger university teachers, in contemporary teaching skills and methods... The [EUA evaluation] team recommends that the university should create a unit for developing teaching quality and methodology by offering educational pedagogic seminars and workshops” (Marmara University, Türkiye, follow-up report, 2017).

Following institutional plans designed by the [quality] related committee, the final step includes steering institutional practices to continuously develop quality in university services, including teaching, research, and engagement activities. Covering two wide-spread actions related to quality assurance; the case of University of Primorska, Slovenia (initial report, 2010) presents student [course evaluation or satisfaction] surveys and programme accreditations, as follows: “the range of quality related activities described in the Self Evaluation Report is extensive and includes provision for systematic student surveys and periodic external evaluations of individual faculties. External evaluations have been initiated for the College of Health Care and the Faculty of Management”. In their follow-up assessment, EUA experts also underlined the importance of students’ voice to discover areas need to further quality improvement for programme accreditation by stating “effective institutional systems for the collection and analysis of feedback from students on the teaching they receive [are] good practice[s] and should be encouraged... The data obtained can help greatly in decision-making, and also satisfies accreditors and evaluators” (University of Primorska, Slovenia, follow-up, 2015). As a similar proposition, EUA experts also highlighted another important group and their potential contributions to the university, as follows: “Alumni organisations function inconsistently among faculties with often only partial tracking and recording of final destinations/employment outcomes which limited the opportunities for drawing on the influence and support of alumni following graduation... The university should play an active role in restructuring alumni organisations to enhance the relationships between UKIM and its graduates (Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, initial report, 2015). Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, Macedonia (follow-up report, 2017) has then acted “to develop alumni tracer surveys for quality improvement purposes... The data should be analysed



to understand better the need of graduates as they enter the labour market and develop their professional careers; ultimately, the analysis should lead to an adaptation of study programmes". Further, University Mediterranean, Podgorica, Montenegro (initial report, 2014) "[seeks potential] ways of ensuring that part-time staff is not a missing part of its quality culture. This is especially important due to the high number of part-time staff" in this university. For the following visit, EUA experts stated that "staffing levels have remained largely constant since the 2014 evaluation. [Likewise,] the university is confident that the [feedback collection] process was conducted without barriers and that this inclusivity applied as much to the student body as to the wider staffing establishment" and "e-learning had been established... and [all] teaching staff [found opportunities to comment, as well as] support the implementation of these [interactive] technologies" (University Mediterranean, Podgorica, Montenegro, follow-up report, 2018).

Discussion and Conclusion

In this research, EUA's reports for 14 universities from eight countries were evaluated following qualitative inquiry. Thus, the research does not intend to generalise the findings with 'one size fits all', particularly considering various national quality assurance policies and different surrounding conditions of each university. Yet the analysis here revealed a similar (at least for the case universities) pathways for the establishment of quality culture in universities. These evolving steps starts with setting up quality strategies by top management and then delegating (or, sharing) the policy development responsibility from top management to the related (quality development/evaluation/assurance) committee(s) in a university, and similarly at faculty and departmental levels. As the next steps, this kind of dedicated committees plan necessary actions and lastly steer institutional practices to develop quality in universities services, regarding teaching, research, and societal engagement missions. However, the establishment and development of an understanding of quality, from quality assurance (standardisation) to quality development as part of the organisational culture, is not a smooth transition for any university. According to the analysis outcomes, to constitute a strong quality culture in universities, three intertwined approaches seem crucial organisational developments.

First and foremost, 'quality development' should be accepted as an institutional project by university management. 'Quality development' in the context of university management refers to the continuous improvement of various aspects of the institution to ensure high standards of performance and service delivery (Martin & Parikh, 2017). This concept encompasses not only academic quality but also institutional management, fiscal stability, and student services (Jorquera & Caamano, 2003; Soyer & Güler, 2021). In terms of development in 'Academic Quality', that processes involve the continuous review and enhancement of

academic programs, teaching methodologies, and research activities to ensure that they meet the highest standards (Rahnuma, 2020). For instance, regular curriculum reviews, faculty development programs, and the establishment of learning outcomes assessment mechanisms are all part of academic quality development. Considering 'Institutional Management', quality development encompasses the improvement of administrative processes, governance structures, and strategic planning. The implementation of quality management systems, regular internal audits, and the establishment of key performance indicators are all strategy examples that contribute to institutional quality management. As another part of a long term institutional 'quality development' project, 'Fiscal Stability' includes the responsible allocation of resources, transparent financial reporting, and the development of sustainable revenue streams. Here, the establishment of an endowment fund, cost-saving initiatives, and regular financial performance reviews could be examples of quality development initiatives in universities' financial management. No doubt, the quality improvement in student services is a critical aim for any university, and universities would like to enhance the overall student experience and support services. Student services involve various components such as the implementation of career counselling programs, mental health support services, and extracurricular activities. University managers can employ regular student satisfaction surveys, establish student support centres, and initiate mentorship programs to enrich quality development strategies for student services.

Secondly in the evolving pathway from quality standards to quality culture, many universities prioritise to establish quality management system to minimise bureaucratic burden. Here, from one of analysed cases, "to counter the view held in some quarters that quality processes were simply a bureaucratic hurdle, the university was looking to develop clearer processes and also engineer a shift towards enhancement" (St. Kliment Ohridski University, Bitola, Macedonia, initial report, 2017). The engineering of such structural changes is made ... [through] the development of IT systems such as iKnow [*the name of electronic university management system*] that support the monitoring of quality activities" (St. Kliment Ohridski University, Bitola, Macedonia, follow-up report, 2021). This kind of systems can assist university managers to increase efficiency and effectiveness in the quality processes and practices as well as to meet the required quality standards. For example, universities can use quality management systems to ensure that their courses are designed to meet the needs of their students, that their research is conducted to the highest standards, and that their administrative processes are streamlined and efficient.

Third and last approach to quicken the evolvement of quality culture is to recognise staff's achievements (whether small or exceptional) contributing to the quality standards

in universities. A well-established appraisal system can help university managers to timely award staff's achievements; with this way, they can generate motivating examples for all staff to take a part in quality development too. Considering key missions of universities, managers may award the staff for their contributions to quality standards in teaching, research, or administrative procedures. Such award system should include staff's various efforts in terms of developing innovative teaching methods, conducting high-quality research, or streamlining administrative processes (Uslu, 2017). No doubt, these types of prizes will indirectly (through staff's endeavours) improve teaching and research outcomes, as well as efficiency and effectiveness in administrative practices.

All in all, this research underlines the evolving stages to establish quality culture in universities, as well as some institutional policies and practices from case universities. Considering the nature of qualitative inquiry, the findings are limited with the selected universities for the analysis of their EUA (initial and follow-up) evaluation reports. To outline more general framework on the formation steps of quality culture, the researchers can include more university cases, even from more countries. In addition, quantitative surveys can be employed in further research to gather larger dataset from different stakeholder groups (e.g., students, academics, administrative staff, and might be external partners). Through such quantitative data, it would be possible to draw more general structure focusing on the various and complementary stages of quality culture enlargement in universities.



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Appendix

List of EUA's reports in the dataset

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