„Identifying Barriers in Promoting the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance at Institutional Level"

IBAR

Agreement number – 2010 – 4663/001 - 001

WP8
Quality and Management/Governance
National study – Czech Republic
2012

National study: Quality and management/governance (WP8)

Czech Republic

Author: Jan Kohoutek

Methodology

Analysis of institutional quality managements processes aiming at providing evidence for the formulated research questions was based on a qualitative methodology. It entailed a document review and acquisition of primary data through semi-structured interviews with different types of actors concerned. More specifically, 30 persons were interviewed, out of which 13 were academic staff, 12 senior managers and 5 students. The responses obtained enabled forming a more thorough and balanced conclusions on the issues under study in the WP8.

Answering research questions

1) What is the institutional context of governance?
   a) *What are the main changes for institutional governance and quality in the national framework and how they affect the governance structures and processes within the institution?* [lead on to the policy context]

In national context, the nexus between quality and management is set in the Higher Education Act no. 111/1998 Coll. and, somewhat more specifically, in the long-term plans of the Ministry for higher education development. The Act delegates the responsibility for *systemic* quality management to the Accreditation Commission. The management is to be done through two measures, i.e. programme accreditation and periodic external evaluation for improvement, both including the element of peer review. However, effectiveness of pursuing these two external quality management measures by the same agency has been put in question (Šebková 2009; Kohoutek 2011). The Act gives a significant autonomy to HEIs as far as a set-up of *institutional* quality management processes is concerned, acknowledging HEIs' ownership of these processes and stipulating that the corresponding process outputs must be made publicly available.

The long-term plans of the Ministry for higher education development, as a major mandatory strategic policy documents elaborated by the Ministry in five-year intervals since 2000, give a somewhat more precise link between sectoral governance and institutional quality management. In this respect, the long-term plan for 2000-2005 set the groundwork, stating that evaluation of quality of HEIs became an element of institutional management in the last decade (1990s). The long-term plan for 2006-2010 promoted the idea of internal quality evaluation as a prerequisite for functional institutional management and for building institutional quality culture. More explicitly, it referred to the Development Programmes as a major funding incentive-based instrument for supporting the development of institutional quality management schemes. In this sense, HEIs were also encouraged to take notice and

inspiration from the pilot project "Evaluation of Quality of Higher Education Institutions" run between 2004-2006. The long-term plan for 2011-2015 presently in place specifies the Ministry-preferred developments bearing on institutional quality management even further. In concrete terms, it gives support to: changeover to accreditation of areas of study and/or whole institutions, implementation of multi-criteria institutional evaluation with the aim to reflect on different missions of HEIs, implementation of the ESG and of the National Qualifications Framework including its piloting at selected HEIs (in sense of exploring how to achieve greater cohesion between processes of learning outcomes-based programme design and of internal quality management). Implementation of these systemic governance measures affecting institutional quality management is to be done through the Development Programmes and the EU structural funds (especially Education for Competitiveness programme). In its 2012 update, the long-term plan for 2011-2015 also explicitly declares the aim of joining of the European Quality Assurance Register at the governmental level.

Hence, as far policy-making context is concerned, the linkages between systemic governance and institutional quality management can be traced especially in the aforementioned long-term plans of the Ministry for higher education development. By their foci, in time, these strategic policy documents clearly show a tendency towards higher specificity of expectations ("soft requirement") on HEIs' quality management schemes in reflection of systemic developments. The identified Ministerial tendency towards more numerous (and complex if reflected on in depth) requirements may not combine easily with the repeated claims of HEIs' ownerships of their quality management measures. Correspondingly and finally, the inference can be that the respective priorities of the currently valid long-term plan for 2011-2015 (see above) seem to pave a way to the stipulations of a new higher education act, contemplated by the Ministry (and opposed by HEIs) for some time.

b) *What is in general characteristic in the decision-making culture in the institution: strongly bottom-up or strongly top-down?*

At HEI A the decision-making culture seems to fall to the latter category with a top-down orientation. This is due to the set-up of institutional management in general conducive to adoption of rectorate-made strategies and policy measures by lower-level institutional units (4 faculties). In this respect, the legally mandated (Higher Education Act) elaboration of the institutional statute to be taken into consideration by faculty statutes is a strong factor supporting the top-down mode of institutional decision-making. The same holds true for the long-term plans for institutional development, made in reflection of the Ministerial plan for HE development by the institutional top management (rectorate)[1], to which faculty development plans should (broadly) correspond.

---

[1] Subject to agreement by the academic senate and the board of trustees (the same practice for every HEI in CR).

At HEI A, only one faculty develops its own long-term plan, the other three adopt the institutional plan of development. Similarly, the faculty statutes, to a large extent, tend to follow the rectorate approach to quality management, based on student evaluation of tuition every semester with the same design for all 4 faculties and their departments. This set-up of institutional quality management (departments → faculties → rectorate) was laid down in the institutional development plan for 2000-2005. At the same time, neither the institutional statute nor the long-term plan (or any other available document) has reference to holding quality evaluation of the whole HEI (or rectorate activities). Such institution-wide evaluation has been held only once in two decades at HEI A. The foci of quality evaluation at HEI A thus clearly seem to be on faculties, with the decision-making powers for quality management lying at the rectorate level.

The top-down, centrally-oriented quality management at HEI A is likely to assure public accessibility of policies and procedures of quality enhancement, whilst still giving some room for implementation of bottom-up students' initiatives, thus meeting the ESG 1.1 standard with the guidelines (though not referring to it (or any other part of the ESG) in any institutional policy documents). Despite this, some problematic issues exist. First, the available evidence suggests that despite the statutory rules demanding participation of external stakeholders (mainly employers) in institutional quality enhancement in line with their visibility and interest, such participation is inadequate. This points to limitations in management approaches, notably in development of effective strategies how to assure involvement of a busy employer community when observable results cannot be achieved overnight. Second, a barrier can be seen in low trust attributed to the top-down institutional quality management, not only because of its top-down nature but also due to scepticism brought about by time-consuming teaching and research (with quality seen as an expendable asset), lack of information combined with pressures for harmonisation in the EHEA (associated with increase in bureaucracy), and scarcity of resources in the wake of the ongoing economic crisis. This scepticism is also detectable from the section of the institutional long-term plan for 2011-2015 on quality, stating that evaluation of quality of education is complicated due to its vague definitions, making it possible to approach this area from many, often contradicting standpoints.

Inquiries into the nature of the decision-making culture at HEI B do not lend support to a specifically top-down or bottom-up characteristic. Despite the legally mandated role of the university academic senate and faculty senates including representatives of the shop-floor level (both academics and students), the experience shows that the senates deal in detail mostly with budgeting matters. Hence, many strategic decisions such as participation in large-scale projects is debated and pre-agreed in the rector's advisory panel, including the vice-rectors, deans, registrar and chancellor. The decision-making at HEI B is thus characterised

by the combination of top-down and bottom-up patterns, depending on the type of an issue at stake.

Similarly as in case of HEI A, the decision-making culture at HEI C *currently* favours a top-down orientation. However, this finding must be further contextualised. The basics (aims, rules, responsibilities) of quality management as well as other agendas are set in the institutional statute with development goals to be specified to an extent in development plans of HEI C (including yearly updates). From 1999 to 2011, there have been nine amendments to the statute. However, the wording of the section on quality management has remained almost identical to the 1999 version, with the competences for organisation of student evaluations delegated to the faculty level. Nonetheless, the establishment of the Department for Quality Assurance at the top decision-making level (the rectorate) in 2008, followed the year after by the setting-up of the Council for Quality Assurance[2] as an advisory body to the top management, points to the recent top-down orientation of quality management processes at HEI C[3]. Lastly but importantly, the new rector's directive no. 6/2012 issues an institutional policy on quality, with the policy based on four facets: robust management for quality enhancement, diversified stuffy offer and development of cooperation with the secondary education sector (source schools). Again, the making and publication of this policy by the rectorate attests to the top-down orientation of institutional decision-making.

Finally, the evidence gathered at HEI D strongly points to the establishment of a top-down pattern of decision-making. This is underlain by the non-existence of the academic senate(s) (either at university or faculty level, or equivalent) and thus preference for the managerial rather collegial governance style. The fact that HEI D constitutes a private institution by type, founded by two private companies in 1999, is also conducive to the pursuit of top-down institutional management.

c) *How strong or weak is, in general, the top administration in the higher education institution: e.g. does it regularly take initiatives for changing institutional policies?*

Some evidence on this issue at HEI under study is, to a large extent, given in section 1.b. At HEI A, the central level (rectorate) holds responsibility for making the long-term plan of the institution (and updating the plan annually). In making the long-term plan and its updates, the rectorate outlines the institutional development goals, including quality enhancement, in reflection of the state policy priorities[4]. Aside from responsibilities for strategic governance, competences and decision-making powers of HEI A central units are further strengthened by

---

[2] Composed of the members of top management, staff of the QA Department and faculty representatives.

[3] In this respect, the primary data from interviews show the division by the interviewees' position, with front line academics favouring faculty and departmental impact on quality management whilst the top management speaks in favour of centralisation.

[4] Included in the Ministry's long-term plan for the given period.

formulation of internal institutional regulations (namely the statute). Although faculties are free to develop both their own strategic plans and faculty regulations provided these broadly correspond to the rectorate ones, at HEI A, this happens rather rarely, pointing to proactive leadership at the central level. However, once made either through official or unofficial communication channels, academic staff and students' suggestions on quality matters are taken into consideration by the central level.

At HEI B, a combination of top-down and bottom-up decision-making patterns points to a moderately strong central administration (rectorate units). However, as regards quality management, the role of the university central level is likely to increase. This is due to steps taken to set up a small-size quality management unit at the rectorate, holding responsibility for the agenda of study programme (re-)accreditations as well as overseeing and coordinating internal quality assurance (student evaluations, evaluations of academic and administrative staff). The plan is to take a one year pilot-run and, if successful, institutionalise the activities further at faculty level (possibly through the agendas of already functioning personnel management units).

At HEI C, evidence suggests a strongly proactive role of the institutional top management (given the Czech situation in comparative perspective). In the last decade, top management members have taken steps to involve HEI C in several quality-related initiatives, such as participation in piloting the national methodology for quality assurance, EUA institutional evaluation programme as well as Quality Culture project, institutional benchmarking organised by ESMU[5] or national programme on developing quality assurance and enhancement. The experience and findings from these initiatives are fed back to quality management process, thus helping to develop institutional quality culture.

Similarly, as far as HEI D is concerned, the existence of the top-down decision-making pattern factors into the characteristics of the central administration. The central administration is strong and takes initiatives in the area of institutional management. This is evidenced by issued modifications of all internal regulations (i.e. regulations on disciplinary proceedings, organisational rules of the scientific council, library and loan rules, study and examination rules, scholarship rules and the statute) in the period of September 2009-October 2011 to react to external (massification) developments and internal modifications in institutional structure (setting up two faculties).

2) How does the institutional governance relate to quality assurance (ESG standard 1.1)?

---

[5] The European Centre for Strategic Management of Universities.

a) *To what extent do governance structures and processes affect the quality culture of your institution? Give examples.*

At HEI A, accumulation of responsibilities for quality management at the rectorate level attests to a significant impact of the rectorate on shaping up institutional quality culture. This can be most clearly documented by the inclusion of rules and guidelines for quality enhancement processes into the rectorate-made institutional statute. Moreover, the studied documentation shows that the rectorate actively utilises the results of quality enhancement processes by e.g. taking steps to establish the university guidance and counselling centre. Still, some faculties and departments–especially deans and vice-deans–can also be said to somewhat contribute to the quality culture by reflecting on results of student evaluations of tuition.

At HEI B, the impact of governance structures on institutional quality culture is most visible in the process of re-accreditations of study programmes. This is due to the fact that the university does not have the system of internal quality evaluation developed to the level allowing for standardisation of the corresponding procedures (evaluation designs applied throughout the institutions are too diverse). Steps are taken to improve on this, starting from student evaluations. Programme re-accreditation is a process involving the top institutional level (rectorate), mid level (faculty, dean, vice-deans) and micro level (departments, teaching staff). In practical terms, the micro level is responsible for providing resources and capacities for re-accreditation (infrastructure and personnel) laid down in requirements by the Accreditation Commission. The faculty management via a special committee checks up on the extent of a match between the external requirements and actual capacities, whilst the rectorate checks the formalities of the request as well as potential inter-faculty duplicities in programme provision. The rules and responsibilities of individual levels and actors (including programme guarantors) during re-accreditation processes are to be institutionalised by a new internal regulation.

At HEI C, institutional governance impacts on quality culture especially through the Department for Quality Assurance and the Council for Quality Assurance (see also question 1.b). The activities of the former unit relate to three major areas, i.e. international/national trends in quality assurance, international/national projects in quality assurance, quality management at university. More specifically, they comprise the following:

- **International/national trends:** making strategic policy lines in reflection of international and national developments in quality assurance of tertiary education. Analysing international and national approaches to evaluation of quality and institutional performance with respect to their long-term and short-term impact on activities of HEI C (including individual faculties). Making reflections on ethics and

moral aspects of quality management in connection to international and national strategies.

- **International/national projects:** managing and processing background materials and internal evaluation reports concerning HEI C for the sake of external evaluations organised at international and national level. Coordination of international and national cooperation in quality assurance. Participation in design, management and implementation of the Development projects.
- **Quality management of HEI C:** implementation, management, coordination, optimisation and improvement of the system of quality management at HEI C.

HEI D also shows some involvement of institutional governance in shaping up the quality culture. This is done through periodic internal evaluations, initiated by the rectorate and currently done in five-year intervals, and the activities of the central-level department of pedagogy (under the vice-rector for study affairs). The department is responsible for organising and analysing *the workshop on the final state examinations* held at HEI D at which the overall student performance as well as academic staff approach and requirements are brought up and debated by the top management. The conclusions reached feed back to the system of organisation of studies and curricular content, thus helping to develop institutional quality culture.

b) *To what extent have the mechanisms for the approval, periodic review and monitoring of study programmes increased the control of central/middle level administration over academic staff/director of study programmes?*

In case of HEI A, the evidence shows that responsibilities for design and assuring quality of Master and doctoral programmes lie at the departmental level, respectively, at faculty level for Bachelor programmes. The position of the central level management on this issue thus seems to favour a steering from a distance approach, primarily seeking to prevent duplications in study programme offer at different faculties.

At HEI B, there are two factors playing against each other. On the one hand, diversification in designs of evaluation procedures among institutional units reduces the control of central/middle level administration over academic staff. On the other hand, this control increases when re-accretion processes are initiated (every 2-10 years, depending on the type and quality of the programme). For now, the long-lasting impact of the former (front-line discretion) seems to prevail over the short-term latter (central control). However, this balance may change, following institutionalisation of the rectorate quality unit, plans for unification of designs of student evaluations as well as, to some extent, effects of the newly prepared re-accreditation regulation.

The situation at HEI C, characterised by quality management activities done by the Department for Quality Assurance and the Council for Quality Assurance, suggests some intensification of the role of the central level over the recent period as far as quality management is concerned. However, two things should be pointed out. First, personal attributes of the top management members (rector, vice-rectors) factor into this characteristic of the institutional set-up, which may be, due to a traditionally strong position of faculty management, likely to differ once the composition of the top management is changed. Second, the current set-up of quality management is workable and effective, given the fact that there are no obstacles to organisation of student evaluations of tuition, which requires cooperation between the faculty and central level.

As suggested, at HEI D, the centralised agenda of the department of pedagogy dealing with curricular and programme revisions (also when preparing for (re-)accreditations) to a significant extent reduces the controls and responsibilities of front-line academic staff for these matters (though not for student assessment). However, it should be stated that such a centralisation-oriented approach may be needed given the situation. The situation at private HEI D mirrors the fact that most of academic staff members have teaching commitments elsewhere (mostly at other public HEIs), implying somewhat a secondary interest by some of them in programme and curricula development within HEI D.

c) *How regularly are curricula reviewed in this higher education institution, as a rule? How strongly is the quality function (quality office, senate committee, etc.) involved in vetting reviewed curricula? (ESG Standard 1.2)*

At HEI A, guidelines for internal evaluation are set in the institutional statute. In this respect, the statute stipulates student evaluations of tuition be done every semester, evaluation of teaching (including curricula review) and research on a yearly basis and complex evaluation of university activities (incl. supporting ones and infrastructure) every 3-6 years. Findings from these evaluations are reflected in institutional internal regulations, in rector's decrees on organisation of educational activities within HEI and its faculties or in internal pedagogical grants. The intention is to make such findings, where applicable, relevant for assessment of academic performance as well as a factor to be considered in monetary allocations to faculties.

At HEI B, reviews of study programme and course content are officially done on a yearly basis. To make an example, at one faculty, the dean asks the academic staff at the end of every academic year to make suggestions on modifications of content of the course type **b** (mandatory) and **c** (optional). This also entails syllabi updates, implementation of new

courses, elimination of courses no longer deemed adequate and changes in the course category (from **b** to **c** and vice versa). Such changes as a result of course and study programme reviews have also taken place in the process of introduction of a three-cycle study structure.

At HEI C, curriculum reviews are a component of internal quality evaluations[6] that are done systematically at all faculties with a different degree of periodicity. The periodicity may vary, as the evaluations can be run:

- Every year as part of the process of compiling and assessing the annual report.
- Every three to six years based on the elaboration of the internal report and its external assessment by an expert group including an on-site visit, final presentation of major findings and managing feedback processes.
- Based on the rector' decision following exceptional circumstances that make the initiation of such evaluation necessary.

The decisive factor is the requested complexity (breath, depth) of evaluations with analysis of interconnections and overlaps (in content, function and management) between the assessed areas taken into consideration.

At HEI D, curricular revisions are undertaken in two ways. The first way gets done as an in-depth revision within the periodic internal evaluation (5-year intervals). The second one is associated with reviews of individual programmes for (re)-accreditation.

As to the issues of vetting curricula by the respective bodies, the findings at HEIs inspected suggest the following approach. The university senate hardly ever discusses curricula of study programmes. These are more likely to be deal with by the rector's office (in condensed form of a (re)-accreditation application for final approval and signing), and in some detail by the scientific councils at faculty level or, in exceptional circumstances, by the faculty senates. None of these bodies is likely to put a veto on programme curriculum unless exceptional circumstances have arisen[7]. Instead, potential discrepancies are dealt with through deliberations. The case of private HEI D with no academic senates and centralised agenda for study programmes (under vice-rector for study affairs) points to the deliberations held almost exclusively at the rectorate level if some problems arise in these matters.

---

[6] Further including research, development, artistic and other creative activities (innovations) along with managerial, steering and controlling functions. Academic staff performance, institutional governance bodies and overall economic effectiveness of the institution are also parts of internal quality evaluations.

[7] At HEI B, there have been very few cases when the rector's office turned down the application for study programme re-accreditation (including curricular revisions) to prevent duplications in programme offer at different faculties.

d) *What are the authorities/responsibilities/freedoms on quality assurance, curriculum renewal, etc. of:*

      i)   *Senior managers/leaders and representative bodies of the higher education institution?*

      ii)   *Middle level managers/leaders (faculty Deans, Heads of Departments) and representative bodies at these levels?*

      iii)   *"Street level" teaching staff?*

      iv)   *Students?*

As far as HEI A is concerned, the evidence points to a more proactive role taken by the senior managers (rector, vice-rectors) and, to a lesser extent, of academic representative bodies (institutional and faulty senates plus deans and vice-deans) in formulating and enacting internal regulations. The role of street-level academic staff seems to be more reactive, making advantage of a high level of discretionary authority. Differentiated responses to internal evaluations dependent on respondents' age have been noticed. Some older academic staff seem to associate quality evaluations with externally imposed controls made centrally during the socialist times and thus regard them with scepticism. Some younger academics, on the other hand, tend to focus too narrowly on some evaluation criteria (scientific publications) to the detriment of "less visible criteria" in the long-term. The interviewees, nonetheless, agree on the difficulty of specialisation what "quality culture" represents for different actors in different contexts, which in effect may inhibit proactive street-level approaches.

At HEI B, the importance of the re-accreditation processes involving actively the mid and central management level along with the ongoing establishment of a rectorate quality unit suggest proactive involvement of these two levels compared to front-line academics and students. The approach of a street-level academic staff to student evaluations is somewhat sceptical due to low participation rates (circa 10%), with some academics devising their own evaluation approaches (specially designed questionnaires, asking for student oral feedback once assessment of his/her performance is done, etc.).

As regards HEI C, the fundamental approach applied to quality management is fitness of purpose, achieved through evaluations of development goals set in (updates to) the institutional long-term plan. As suggested above, under the current institutional set-up, senior managers are active and powerful enough to establish the rectorate quality units (department, board). Still, faculties and students are also, to an extent, actively involved as they participate in designing and running of student evaluations of tuition and infrastructure. In 2010, these actors started up on consolidation of different designs and contents of student evaluations with the final aim of devising a unified version usable across all 8 faculties. Hence, street-level academics seem to show the lowest amount of involvement in managing and enhancing quality of institutional activities. In this regard, by the initiative of the central level, training

11

and information courses on quality management are held for some of front-line academic staff.

At HEI D, responsibilities for quality management lie strongly in the hands of the institutional top-management and the deans. From this, it follows that the powers held by students or front-line academics are quite few. This finding is augmented by the non-existence of student representation (no academic senates) and other teaching and research obligations of most of academic staff elsewhere.

3) *To what extent does institutional governance take into account quality assurance of study programmes in particular with respect to:*
   a) *Development and publication of learning outcomes (ESG standard 1.2)?*

Implementation of the National Qualifications Framework (Q-Ram) is still in its pilot stage in the CR, with HEI A not participating in the pilot stage. Still, national-level developments concerning implementation of learning outcomes are followed in governance of HEI A. This can be documented by the 2009 update to the long-term plan for 2006-2010, setting up the goal to develop institution-specific descriptors in areas of study relevant for the institutional profile, whilst at the same time reflecting on the corresponding national-level descriptors. The activities undertaken so far along with the outcomes of intra-institutional debates have led to the conclusion to abstain from developing the descriptors as well as the ECTS *for the third cycle*. Referring to the ECTS, HEI A takes steps to utilise the measures adopted for obtaining the ECTS label (i.e. innovation of graduate profiles, credit distribution by study workload, information packages) in development and publication of learning outcome-based curricula.

Little evidence on reflection of learning outcomes in institutional governance processes can be gathered at HEI B. For now, the only indirect/implicit reflection comes in summative final assessments (final state examinations) during which the members of exam committees review several student performances at the same time (incl. abilities and skills demonstrated during a thesis defence), thus having an opportunity to make comparative judgements on the match between the expected student profile and actual performances. The situation is somewhat similar at HEI D, reflecting on national-level developments (Q-Ram project) and utilising feedback from the annual internal workshop on final state examinations for curricular and programme design modifications (see also question 2a)

HEI C takes part in piloting the National Qualifications Framework (in the fields of economics and electrical engineering). This experience along with that of preparing for and obtaining the ECTS label are conducive to the revisions and modifications of curricular content and graduate profiles towards learning outcomes. In this respect, curricula of some study programmes have been redesigned with the study and graduation requirements modified

and subsequently made into learning outcomes (including descriptors for student knowledge, abilities and competences).

b) *Curriculum and programme design content; modes of delivery and institutional profile (ESG standard 1.2)?*

Curriculum and programme design, content plus the other aspects are monitored on a regular basis at HEI A, with the results of the monitoring available in institutional long-term plans and annual reports. The documents show that the design of the first cycle of studies, discriminating between a theoretical and practical stream of Bachelor studies, put into practice in the mid 2000s, proved suboptimal, with the clear majority of applicants and students preferring the theoretical stream. Among other sources, this finding comes from student evaluations as a major facet of institutional quality enhancement. For this reason, the practically-oriented programmes of the first cycle have been reduced and the Bachelor programmes on offer feature new attractive fields of study. The portfolio of Master programmes has been adjusted accordingly. The composition of a programme offer helps to profile HEI A as having a significant proportion of master and doctoral study programmes, which corresponds to the goals set already in the institutional long-term plan for 2000-2005. Hence, keeping to the profile of a research university, HEI A has amplified theoretical orientation of its portfolio of Bachelor study programmes. This has been done in reaction to the outputs of quality enhancement measures (student evaluations) as well other factors, i.e. namely applicant interests and an unclear position of Bachelor graduates in chemistry fields in the labour market.

At HEI B, designs of curricula and study programmes as well as modes of their delivery are discussed and monitored regularly, especially but not only in cases of programme re-accreditations. Here, the faculty committees play a central role by checking up on the capacities of the micro-level units and progressing with/stopping the application measures. Hence, especially compared to HEI A, the processes of curricula and programme design are de-institutionalised with faculties given more leeway to construct their own profiles. As far as HEI C is concerned, curricula and study programmes along with the other aspects are regularly monitored within the annual internal evaluation. The link to and reflection by central governance is established through data analyses for the annual report (plus internal purposes), elaboration of the respective goals in the long-term plan and their implementation. This feedback loop is instrumental in developing the institutional profile and keeping it up-to-date to internal developments. Regular monitoring of curricula and study programme content is also done at HEI D either within study programme (re-)accreditations or within internal evaluations (the latest one for the 2006-2010 period).

c) Availability of appropriate learning resources and student support (ESG standards 1.2 and 1.5)?

At HEI A, development of learning resources has been achieved, with the relevant goals reflected in policy documents and evaluation processes. Since 2002, practically all the updates to institutional plans refer to the goal of developing electronic forms of leaning resources (digital textbooks), multimedia educational aids and databases with on-line availability to students. The appropriateness of availability of learning resources, laboratory equipment and library funds along with other study infrastructure issues have been itemised into the student evaluation of tuition based on an on-line questionnaire. Planned updates to the design of this evaluation tool should also include student feedback on factors of failing exams and on newly implemented counselling services. Another important tool providing linkages between administration of studies (incl. student evaluations) and information sources is the electronic study and information system. Importantly, apart from the support given to the development of electronic study sources, the institutional long-term plans also point to the importance of on-site tuition, requiring student physical participation, in chemistry-oriented studies.

No deviations form the ESG 1.2 and 1.5 standards on learning resources and support have been found from a primary and secondary data analysis concerning HEI B. The academic staff interviewed stress that a high level of provision of students with learning resources is achieved across HEI B also because this factor (quality and availability of learning resources) is taken into consideration for academic career promotion (achieving the rank of a (associate) professor). The enquiry into availability and appropriateness of learning resources at HEI C has not shown difficulties with implementation of the corresponding ESG standards either. The major site for provision of the resources is the university library. With the range of resources continuously expanded, the library runs several information systems and provides training courses. In this respect, the library also provides a platform for running the institution-wide e-learning Moodle system. Similarly, the document review and interviewees' feedback attest to the presence of learning resources and support-associated aspects in institutional governance processes of HEI D. In this respect, enough resources are allotted to the stocking of the university library and, importantly, production of e-learning study supports and study materials in electronic form available on-line (including conversion of book sources).

> *d) Periodic reviews of programmes including feedback from employers and alumni (ESG standard 1.2)?*

In case of HEI A, periodic evaluation utilising employer and alumni feedback has not been fully implemented. The development goal is to initiative such evaluations on a regular basis within a multi-criteria evaluation system to be made operational in the 2011-2015 period (see the institutional long-term plan for 2011-2015). For now, employers' feedback is obtained through standpoints of members of the university/faculty scientific boards. Importantly, employers' preference for interdisciplinary designs of study programmes get repeatedly opposed by the Accreditation Commission (hence, in effect, few such programmes are on offer).

Similarly, HEI B does only randomised seeking for employer or alumni feedback. The former is somewhat unsatisfactory, including complaints on graduates' abilities, the latter is, for now, mostly associated with ceremonial purposes ("golden graduation ceremonies" at which graduates with best study results give feedback).

Rather in contrast, HEI C shows a more proactive approach to seeking employer and alumni feedback. As to the former, regular communication with representatives of small and medium-size enterprises (SMES) has been established and steps have been taken to institutionalise the communication links (e.g. through joint projects). With regard to the latter, every two years, a large-scale graduate survey is conducted. The survey aims at obtaining feedback on applicability of knowledge, skills and abilities acquired during the study in work settings. The survey results have been fed back to the contents of strategic policy documents, namely the institutional long-term plan for 2011-2015. To foster feedback processes further, the long-term plan includes the goal to set up the university alumni club. The proactive approach in terms of establishing the alumni club is also documentable at HEI D where its members are regularly sent a newsletter with up-to-date information on university activities (including invitations to promotional events and the like).

> *4) The views of students, academics and decision-makers on ESG:*
> > *a) How well are students, academics and decision-makers familiar with the ESG?*
> >
> > *b) How do students, academics and decision-makers see the ESG impacting on curricula and quality assurance? (Give examples)*
> >
> > *c) How do students, academics and decision-makers assess the level of implementation of Part 1 ESG standards?*

d) What barriers do students, academics and decision-makers see when implementing Part 1 ESG guidelines?

Starting with situation at HEI A, the interviewees across the individual categories (students, academics, decision-makers) agree that the academic community has very little if any awareness of the ESG and that for this reason it makes little sense to break the topic into individual sub-questions. However, the enquiry into quality documentation (secondary data) suggests that quality assurance at HEI C is given attention sufficient enough to imply implementation of the ESG Part 1 standards to a significant extent, even though this is done only indirectly, i.e. without the familiarity of the academic community and explicit reference to the ESG in official policy documents.

In case of HEI B, no valid answers to the four sub-questions can be given either. This is again due to no awareness and knowledge of the interviewees (across the categories) of the ESG.

The viewpoints of actors concerned on the ESG at HEI C may be summarised as follows. The top management members are aware of the ESG existence and content, as evidenced by their referencing in institutional policy documents (especially the long-term plan). The same applies to some academic staff and students; these are mostly members of the academic senates or, in case of the former, (ancillary)[8] staff of the rectorate units (the Department for quality assurance). The ESG impact on quality and curricular matters is indirect, currently and most visibly, through the curricular reflection and revision in the process of implementation of learning outcomes (including graduate profiles). The interviewees possessing knowledge of the ESG opine that the ESG Part 1 standards have been mostly implemented indirectly throughout HEI C (some time before they were created and published), however, that the distinction between the standards and guidelines should be taken into account in implementation processes more intensely. The major obstacles are seen in low awareness of the ESG, time-consuming implementation processes (see additional workloads related to institutionalising learning outcomes oriented curricular designs and contents) as well as, to some extent, in questioning the ESG 1.2 standard, i.e. approval and periodic reviews of study programmes, *when related to the implementation of the Bologna BA/MA study template* (thus showing preference to five-year Masters). As to the missing awareness, the passive role of the state bodies, i.e. the Ministry and the Accreditation Commission, has also been mentioned.

In case of HEI D, again, top management members' awareness of the ESG is there, making it into the way how the currently valid long-term plan of institutional development is couched in its quality section. The knowledge of the ESG by academic staff and students is comparatively far less if ever present. The ESG impact on curricular and quality assurance

---

[8] Combining teaching and research in their discipline with activities and involvement in quality matters. Hence, they can be also termed "quality enthusiasts".

issues seems to be rather indirect, with reflections on the ESG Part 1 done for promotional reasons. Assessment of the scope of the ESG implementation and identification of barriers to it has been difficult to make due to a very limited pool of informed respondents (only some members of the top management in a small-size HEI), leaving out the street level completely. This again points towards the missing actors' awareness of the ESG existence as a major barrier. What can be inferred from the available data on ESG implementation is that HEI D designs and undertakes internal quality evaluations in line with the ESG Part 1 content.

Concluding remarks and identification of barriers

The legally mandated link between institutional development goals and practical goal implementation through strategic policy documents (long-term plans) along with their evaluation is conducive to the establishment of effective institutional quality management. The sample of HEIs surveyed suggests that the corresponding management processes seem to be top-down oriented with the competencies and responsibilities localised at the central level (rectorate units), though the impact of the shop floor level is still documentable (especially HEI B). Central locus of competencies in quality management may be beneficial, e.g. when quality of student services is at stake, by enhancing it by establishment of the university guidance and counselling centre (HEI A). Personal characteristics of members of the top institutional management also play a role (see especially HEI C), suggesting that the balance of power between the central and shop floor level may change once the (top) management positions are filled differently.

The management processes at HEIs under analysis regularly take account of curricular and programme content along with personnel and infrastructure issues including learning resources. These are reviewed either in preparation of individual programmes for (re)-accreditation or, as a rule in a more complex manner, as part of internal evaluations. Aspects aligned with implementation of learning outcomes and seeking graduate or employer feedback seem to factor less into quality management, though this finding can be somewhat disproved by the pro-active approach of especially HEI C and also HEI D. The self-standing document on institutional quality at HEI C, delineating major policy facets and management approaches (altogether attesting to the quality as fitness for purpose approach), is worth noticing as the example of good practice internationally.

Aside from the suboptimal reflection of learning outcomes and graduate/employer feedback by most of HEIs surveyed, the major stumbling block lies in missing actors' awareness of the ESG (see Section 4) – the point especially pertinent to academics and students. Other (minor) obstacles seem to lie in ambiguity of quality terminology (again putting off the potentially interested academics and students) and in overload of front-line academic staff, making the

spread of and identification with institutional quality cultures difficult. Finally, the rather passive role by the national bodies involved, such as the Accreditation Commission or the Ministry of Education, in translating the ESG to individual HEIs also plays against the ESG implementation at institutional level (also indirectly by not lending support to accreditations of interdisciplinary study programmes).

References:

Kohoutek, J. *A Long Night's Journey into the Day: Implementation of Czech Policy on Higher Education Quality Assurance*. Saabrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2011.

MEYS. *The Long-term Plans for Educational, Scientific, Research, Development, Artistic and Other Creative Activities*. Prague: Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, 2000, 2005, 2010.

Policy documents of HEI A, B, C, D (long-term plans, statutes, development programmes).

Šebková, H. The European Standards and Guidelines in Quality Assurance Mechanisms in the Czech Republic. In Kohoutek, J. (Ed.). *Implementation of Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education of Central and East-European Countries – Agenda Ahead*. Bucharest: UNESCO-CEPES, 2009. pp. 201-234.