

Abstract for paper on

Quality management in higher education: developments and drivers

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Over the past decades, many higher education institutions worldwide have put in place quality management procedures, either in response to national requirements for quality assurance, or to generate information that serves internal quality monitoring and management.

In order to better understand the current state of the art in the quality management (QM) of higher education institutions internationally, a tri-lingual online survey on QM practices, structures, processes, external drivers and internal factors was conducted. It is the first truly international survey of this kind, and it thus offers first-hand primary data in the area. There were 311 higher education institutions from all continents that responded to this survey.

The analysis of the data shows that QM is already a reality in a majority of the responding institutions. It is also widely formalized through a quality policy, but less so through clear procedures and responsibilities for QM indicated in a quality manual. Leadership, such as the head of the institution or the vice rector play an important role in leading quality management, but support structures such as quality management offices or units at both central and even more so at decentralized levels are however often lacking.

In terms of the focus, the survey confirmed the assumption that teaching and learning is at the centre of quality management systems. Despite a high attention in the political discourse to employability of graduates, tools relating to this area are however less frequent, which indicates that QM systems do not yet fully embrace this issue. Also QM procedures are not always comprehensive since the QM of assessment systems, for instance, is often not addressed.

With regard to the use of data generated from quality management monitoring, the survey confirms the common issue of lack of feedback provided to students and a poor use of information for decision makings in the quality improvement of teaching and learning.

When looking at the drivers for the development of quality management, both internal motivations and external push factors are important. The concern with the enhancement of the image of the HEI is a dominating internal motivation while the development of QM remains also strongly driven by the national quality assurance system. Among the internal factors that are supportive of the development of QM, leadership support emerges clearly as a main element, together with participation of staff in the development of QM procedures.