

# QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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## Introduction

Higher Education (HE) environment has started to change radically and widely in 1990's. Specifically, dramatic moves have been observed in Europe in the following issues:

- Increased autonomy from governments and the need to mature
- Increased demands for accountability linked to broader and wider access to higher education (from elite to mass participation) and its accompanying rising costs on the public purse
- Increased need to diversify income sources as government funding stagnates or declines
- The rise of the “knowledge society” and heightened expectations of higher education's contribution to the local, regional, national and European economies
- The on-going creation of the European education and research areas
- Increased internationalization (e.g., student and staff mobility, cross-border partnerships), which, through comparisons, raises expectations about quality
- Increased globalization, leading to the emergence of competitors in hitherto safe national “markets” as well as a trend towards the “marketization” of higher education

Collegial, academic self-regulation, which was sufficient for centuries in guaranteeing quality, has been replaced by explicit, formal quality assurance mechanisms and external accountability procedures. Universities can no longer simply express their commitment to excellence; they must actively monitor their activities and demonstrate their quality to a variety of stakeholders. The competition is keen and institutions are in search of sustainable improvement. Requirements imposed are global as the radical changes listed above force institutions to reposition themselves in order to survive. The issue of quality provision has received growing interest from the various stakeholders as the graduates are expected to be well equipped to participate in the knowledge economy and to update their competencies as the knowledge front expands.

The rise of societal demand for accountability and for cost-effectiveness both in higher education and in public administration has spread world-wide. Governments agreed to provide more autonomy to HEI's to enhance the reactivity of the system, but in exchange for effective quality assurance procedures. New forms of provision called for better protection of consumers<sup>1</sup>. North American based assessment culture has been adapted and enriched by European countries with original contributions in certain cases (like UK and the Netherlands); the accompanying strategic management emphasis has not rooted in the European practice, however. The mission, strategic goals, relevant action plans, annual reviews and revisions are not widely used or valued as part of the institutional traditions, yet.

This chapter looks into the purposes of quality assurance, discusses various approaches and the associated terminology, covers national structures guaranteeing quality provision of higher education and points to the difficulties in transferring international experience. Internal quality management is explored and a case study is used to point to the volatility of quality initiatives if the environmental motivations are weak.

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<sup>1</sup> OECD 2008,

## **Purpose of Quality Assurance for HE**

National authorities or institutional leaders may adapt quality assurance (QA) schemes with different intentions. Although several advantages are accrued from such an exercise, one major purpose usually dictates the type of assurance institutions choose. Schwarz and Westerheijden<sup>2</sup> explained “the main motor to establish accreditation in most Nordic countries was the desire to expand open access and equal opportunity for mass higher education by creating new regional colleges and new study programs as counterparts to the large traditional universities. In other countries both North and South (Germany, Italy, the Netherlands), low efficiency of higher education system was the major issue to be resolved by quality assurance”. Typical purposes of quality assurance are cited by Billing<sup>3</sup> as:

- Improvement of quality, i.e. assisting higher education institutions (HEI) to make improvements,
- Publicly available information on quality and standards, for students and employers
- Accreditation, i.e. legitimization of certification of students,
- Public accountability, for standards achieved, and for use of money,
- To contribute to the HE sector planning process.

The spectrum of national preferences is observed to vary from softer/developmental or formative approaches to harder/ judgmental or summative ones, where the former emphasizes improvement and the latter, the legal and financial aspects. Summative reports contain explicit statements of outcomes, e.g. pass/fail or a quantified grade, and are written for an external audience. Where the emphasis is formative, the audience tends to be academic, and the reports emphasize recommendations. Where there is considerable institutional autonomy, as in the UK, this tends to be compensated by a summative approach to quality assessment, emphasizing accountability<sup>2</sup>. Where there is strong state regulation of the HE sector, as in continental Europe, there is less need for further control through QA, and a more formative approach is common, emphasizing improvement.

## **Different approaches to QA**

There is no unified approach to the formal quality assurance mechanisms, nor is there a unique terminology. “Quality assurance is referred to as the – systematic, structured, continuous – processes and schemes that have the objective of assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, and maintaining and/or improving quality in higher education institutions and/or programs. These can have the functions both of accountability (including information provision) and improvement. Accreditation, on the other hand, is defined as a particular form of quality assurance, with, as the distinctive characteristic, that it leads to the formal approval of an institution or program that has been found by a legitimate body to meet predetermined and agreed upon standards, eventually resulting in an accredited status granted to that provider or program by responsible authorities”<sup>4</sup>. It is a formal ‘yes/no’ decision, bringing in legitimacy or recognition, with a time-limited validity. Still another term is the audit (or review) which is a process for checking that procedures are in place to assure quality, integrity or standards of provision and outcomes.

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<sup>2</sup>Schwarz and Westerheijden 2004

<sup>3</sup> Billing 2004

<sup>4</sup> Damme 2004

There are built-in contrasts in the QA practices, which make it harder to decide on the proper scheme and implement it successfully. The foremost one is the definition itself: evaluation as **“fitness for purpose”** or **accreditation against set standards**? The former is usually associated with a developmental, formative attitude, whereas the latter falls in the judgmental, summative category. “Fitness for purpose” approach stimulates a change of institutional mission, as well. (It involves attempting to make the staff of the institution do different things: to make their courses more relevant to employment; to undertake more applied research; to generate linkages with the local community; to teach in the evenings;..). The trend seems to favor institutional evaluations centered on “fitness for purpose”, but it is early to rule in favor of one of the two approaches. Guy Haug<sup>5</sup> contends that too many new programs are in queue for accreditation in Europe, which hampers the development of new curricula instead of boosting it. Hence, he expects the longer term development to go in the direction of institutional evaluation, complemented by program accreditation in certain areas or in certain cases. Several alternatives are being developed in Germany similar to institutional accreditation (like the process accreditation of ACQUIN); subject-level reviews have been discontinued in UK in favor of institutional level of assurance. Sursock<sup>6</sup> advocates that quality efforts should be targeted towards building robust internal quality arrangements in universities and criticizes accreditation against set standards: “Evaluation approaches that are based on standards, quantitative methods, sets of criteria, or checklists will not improve quality meaningfully and may not even control it significantly because they will not capture the complexity of the educational enterprise.” She advocates seeing the standards as guides that require local interpretation, and as evolutionary frameworks that require adaptation to a changing environment.

The second-and similar to the first- dilemma is whether the emphasis should be on **enhancement** or **compliance**? Compliance and quality enhancement are almost contradicting terms in quality space. As enhancement represents the positive aspects of staff striving for self-improvement and being innovative in their approach and ideas, compliance has the implication of doing what you are told to do. Compliance may not sound fashionable today but one needs to remember that promotion of public confidence that quality of provision and standards of awards in HE are being safeguarded constitutes the basic philosophy of QA. Finding an appropriate balance between accountability and enhancement, between external and internal accountability may be the deciding factor for a successful QA scheme.

The third contrast is the traditional dichotomy of **input** versus **outcomes and processes**. Typical collegial structures have concentrated on input quality. Recruitment of top quality academics and students, combined with the proper infrastructures and program design can be perceived as the guarantee of excellence. This input oriented, bottom up approach is sometimes related to “laissez – faire” model (especially in research) whereas the top down approach is more output oriented and corresponds to the managerial view. The mission-oriented, targeted model, which is closer to the “interventionist” model, cares about the existence of processes and procedures checking the agreement between the objectives and the outcomes. In any case, the knowledge, skills and attributes obtained by higher education graduates and their effective participation in society become the governing issues. It can be argued that assessment and accreditation are more input and output sensitive whereas audit is more process oriented.

The fourth issue is the **focus** of evaluation. Teaching, research or management / administration or any specific goal of the HEI (such as internationalization, adult learning or transition of graduates

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<sup>5</sup> Haug 2003

<sup>6</sup> Sursock 2006.

to the labor market) can be the subject of the quality assessment. Existing emphasis may be in teaching, especially when accreditation is implied, but others may outgrow the traditional focus.

The fifth contrast is in the **level**; do you address the whole institution or individual programs or departments? It is true that most institutional approaches tend to lean towards improvement as most program based approaches have the flavor of accreditation; this is not a rule, however. The policy decision of the institutional evaluation versus individual departmental assessment is a difficult one, as mentioned above. The long term solution may lie in the middle, combining enhancement and conformity to standards; enforcing both institutional and departmental evaluations. Dirk Van Damme, indeed, describes the current understanding of quality through such a combination <sup>4</sup> :

- The guaranteed achievement of minimal standards and benchmarks
- The capacity to set objectives and to achieve them with the given input and context variables
- The ability to satisfy the demands and expectations of consumers and stakeholders
- The drive to excellence

This formulation includes threshold requirements, fitness for purpose and excellence arguments at the same time; it may be demanding but also more descriptive of the future trends.

### **National QA structures: independent vs. governmental**

It is the institutions or nations choice how to compose the general framework of their QA model. The four stage model is today generally accepted as the shared foundation of European quality assurance. It consists of:

1. Autonomy and independence in terms of procedures and methods concerning quality evaluation both from government and from institutions of higher education
2. Self-assessment
3. External assessment and site visits by a peer-review group
4. Publication of a report

The importance of transparency of external processes, of internal quality care in the institutions, and of a follow-up process after the report is usually added to the above. The institutional level is the key condition for assuring quality in a meaningful way. The Bologna process puts the responsibility with the institutions. Institutions have to set up internal mechanisms to manage quality and develop a quality culture. This responsibility may be distributed evenly within the institution hoping that everyone will pitch in; or it may transferred to a unit to lead and organize. It is to be noted that establishing an internal quality unit can help organize effectively the preparation for the evaluation, but there is the danger of sealing off the rest of the university <sup>7</sup> (or the department, depending on the level); the rest of the university should not think that quality is the issue of the quality unit, and not theirs. The decoupling of the assessed area from the assessment process may help little to enhancement and places the process nearer the compliance end of the quality continuum.

European dimension for quality assurance needs to take into account three distinct and inter-related levels: The institutional level, the national level, and the European level. European Network for Quality Agencies (ENQA) introduced the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Hudson and Thomas 2003

<sup>8</sup> ENQA 2005

which describe the key features for internal QA within HEI's, for the external QA of HE, for external QA agencies. Part1 covering internal quality assurance, for example, describes

- Policy and procedures for quality assurance
- Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards,
- Assessment of students,
- Quality assurance of teaching staff,
- Learning resources and Student support,
- Information systems,
- Public Information.

These guidelines and standards are not prescriptive rules, not a checklist; Substantial compliance is the intention. Principles are important rather than compliance word by word. The ESG are no end in themselves, but should serve as a tool to enhance quality assurance in higher education and to enhance higher education provision.

ESG are directed towards the capability of HEI's to steer quality development processes and towards the capability of external agencies to assess the quality of these processes. Institutional accreditation and auditing are concepts that stand forward.

European meta-accreditation (recognition) scheme intends to produce convergence between national quality assurance systems and bilateral recognition between them. Sursock<sup>9</sup> observed in 2004 that convergence had hardly matured due to reluctance of national governments to give up their prerogatives. ENQA was judged to be less successful in terms of playing the role of Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) in USA.. It remains to be seen how far ESG will penetrate into the national systems. European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) was established in 2008 to identify trustworthy quality assurance agencies in Europe.

Almost all (European) countries have by now an agency coordinating quality assurance and that agency is by nature an independent organization (independent of governments, interest groups, and the higher education institutions) with a steering body of its own. However, institutions and government may be represented on the board of the agency, or contribute to the funding of the agency or evaluations.

As to the objectives of the evaluations, European agencies predominantly point to quality improvement. Accountability, transparency and national and international comparability are other objectives. Ranking is not favored or recommended. QA agencies themselves must be evaluated, on a cyclical basis, in terms of the adequacy of their resources and impact on institutions. They must have guidelines that are transparent to the public and higher education institutions and must have specified and fair appeals procedures.

### **Difficulties in setting up QA schemes**

The typical weaknesses of QA schemes are the burden on HEI's and on academics, its high cost and heavy bureaucracy leading to quality fatigue. There are also reservations about the trustworthiness of external evaluations. This is especially strong in countries with limited pool of scientists. The elements of conformity and uniformity will jeopardize innovation is another source of concern; one often hears that too much emphasis on harmonization within countries may damage diversity. The pressure for accountability can distort the meaning of self-evaluation, which is now interpreted by some to mean 'presentation of the self to an external body', i.e.,

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<sup>9</sup> Sursock 2004

image-focused rather than reflection-based. In many institutions, there is still a relatively high tolerance for poor quality; quality assurance is perceived as an externally imposed phenomenon, reluctantly accepted by academics who consider it as a threat to institutional autonomy and academic freedom. It is important to promote shared values and attitudes, rather than imposing managerial processes.

Some academics are strongly opposed to the self-repeating nature of evaluation schemes and to their global propagation. Kells<sup>10</sup> proposed that evaluation systems will not transport between very different cultures; countries must individualize the evaluation and the accreditation system they adopt so that it becomes compatible with specific cultural and national factors, while upholding international norms of quality. He is critical of the national or institutional agenda, which follows the “fashion” without being sincere. Although cultural differences present challenges to direct transfer of experience Billing<sup>3, 11</sup> was more optimistic about the transferability of international accumulations: “Given enough careful preparation through practically based training (which promotes attitude change), awareness raising and staff development, external QA frameworks are **transferable at the level of aims, principles, concepts, style and approach**. Provided that these are safeguarded, then there is considerable room for customization of the actual details to meet local conditions, and indeed it is important that this should be done. Whether the resulting QA frameworks, after customization, are sustained and effective has less to do with transferability itself, and much more to do with the client (i.e. government) having the necessary clarity of purpose and priorities, determination (and resources) to make changes and the continuity to carry them through.”

Hofstede<sup>12</sup> developed **four general dimensions of culture** within organizations: ‘power distance’, ‘uncertainty avoidance’, ‘masculinity/femininity’, ‘individualism/ collectivism’, which reflect national characteristics, hence compare national attitudes to international practices. Based on these dimensions, for example, Turkey falls close to France (in three attributes out of four), and Portugal (in all four). A centrally designed system based on accountability and benchmarking, using objective measures and performance indicators fits Turkey’s characteristics. The tendency, then, should be towards one high standard, one model with firm deadlines and firm schedules for review as opposed to Sweden, for example, where longer term, improvement oriented approaches, with local university based evaluation systems of a wide variety form the basis of the national system<sup>10</sup>. Some obvious differences such as between Mexico and the Netherlands yield credibility to Hofstede’s attributes; fine tuning is not tested, however.

### **Internal quality management systems of universities**

The basic responsibility of quality assurance in HE lies with the institutions. Thus the internal quality mechanisms and processes gain a priority. The prerequisite for developing an effective internal QA system is the commitment of the institutional **leadership**. It is almost impossible to start it without a strong support from the rector directly. The rector’s ability to recruit enough champions usually determines the sustainability of the initiative. His leading role, possibly backed by the continuous monitoring of a vice rector spreads the sense of ownership in time to individual units and eventually to individual members of the university.

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<sup>10</sup> Kells 1999

<sup>11</sup> Billing and Thomas 2000

<sup>12</sup> Hofstede 1991

The quality loop can be shortly summarized as: plan – perform – assess – improve. The planning phase includes setting up performance indicators, assessment methods, actors, and timing. Collecting data and analyzing the situation is the more mechanical phase. Comparing the findings with the stated objectives, introducing corrections, improvements, enhancement where necessary is the closure of the loop which is only possible if there is enough power backing the quality process. All the tools and mechanisms to plan, measure, evaluate, assure and enhance quality together with the system to manage them make up the **quality management** of the university, which is by nature a top-down approach. Quality management describes the total process of judgment, decision and action. Being a management tool covering all processes of quality assurance, it flourishes in managerial environments. Institutional quality management is as much about accountability as it is about improvement, and therefore, emphasis is placed on regularized and systematic processes rather than one-off, ad-hoc reviews for specific purposes<sup>13</sup>. It is getting increasingly formal, explicit, more comprehensive and managerially organized and run.

As the sense of ownership to quality diffuses to ‘files and ranks’ over the years one starts talking about a “quality culture”; each member of the university voluntarily and systematically performs along the defined quality processes and a community of shared commitment to quality is thus established. Such a quality culture represents the ultimate stage in the development- only approachable asymptotically- to become the bottom-up approach to quality. It is crucial to remind that there is a fundamental link between autonomy and the robustness of internal quality arrangements in a university; institutional autonomy is almost a precondition for the quality culture to develop.

Surveys of students, graduates, employers and **performance indicators** (relating to student performance, dropout rates, graduation rates, employment rates, research outputs, faculty-student ratios, budget, students satisfaction, etc.) , stocktaking exercises, interviews (entrance, exit, annual) provide valuable information to assess quality. Student participation proves to be weak in surveys. There are criticisms that performance indicators trivialize comparisons, do not relate to quality and are open to manipulation; but systematic use of surveys and performance indicators is widely accepted as practical tools for accountability and diagnostic purposes. Self-evaluation report is another instrument which serves to critically review the conditions surrounding the university, raise the awareness for quality issues and guide external review processes. It is mostly produced for peer evaluation. Wide circulation, even open publication, of structured quality documentation, including the self evaluation reports and the review reports of external agencies, are recommended to keep the quality issue on the agenda within the university and to build up trust and motivation.

Some institutions set up structures termed typically as ‘office of institutional analysis’ to develop and maintain accurate, comprehensive databases, hence to serve as a reliable source for comprehensive and authoritative information about the institution. Such management information systems prove to be invaluable not only to support quality management and but also to support strategic planning and management in general by providing high quality information-analyses-research studies to those officers of the university charged with developing and implementing policy.

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<sup>13</sup> Brennan and Shah 2001

## CASE STUDY

The following text is a shortened and slightly adapted version of “Institutions’ policies, visions, missions and aims; Policies of Institutional Governance: IEP Review and Bogazici University” by Üstün Ergüder<sup>14</sup>. It describes the process of the adoption of an Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) review by Boğaziçi University (Istanbul, Turkey), the immediate impact it has had on the quality culture of the institution and whether the process has led to a long-term transformation of the quality culture of the institution and in the adoption of specific quality procedures.

The author Üstün Ergüder served as rector of the university during this period when the university underwent through two external evaluation processes: (1) The Faculty of Engineering faculty and six departments (programs) were reviewed by the United States Accreditation Board for Engineering Technology (ABET) and (2) Boğaziçi became the first institution in Turkey to go through the Institutional Evaluation Programme of the Committee of European Rectors (CRE), the predecessor of the EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme. Furthermore, the period from 1992 to 2000 witnessed the beginning of a growing interest in quality assurance.

### **The Turkish Higher Education System and Boğaziçi University**

In order to put into perspective the process of quality assurance it will be proper to look into the setting of the Turkish higher education system and the underlying “governance culture and conflicts.” Therefore, first a cursory look at major developments concerning higher education since 1960 will be undertaken.

The higher education model that existed in Turkey before 1980 may be described as a “democratic-collegial”; universities had both administrative and scientific autonomy and were governed and supervised solely by organs members of which were to be elected by their peers. The military intervention of 1980 and the following Higher Education Act 2547 aimed at making universities more manageable by introducing a strong system of executive leadership as opposed to a horizontal system of governance emphasizing rule by committees. The new law emphasized system autonomy as opposed to university autonomy. The Council of Higher Education (CHE) was established as a sort of a ministry of education for higher education. Major goals were, faced with a young population, to increase the student intake of the university and to improve the research output of the universities. Centralization and uniformity was the trademark of the system.

This highly centralized, hierarchical and top to down model of governance was modified especially during the 1990s with some collegialism creeping in under the slogan of “democratic university.” There was also considerable modification, through loopholes and grey areas, in the implementation of Law 2547 in different universities; and practice varied from one university to the other. The rectors who were elected by the academic staff and appointed in line with preferences of their electors responded by becoming more sensitive and responsive to the demands of the academic staff. The governing organs of the universities started acting more like decision making bodies.

BU is a unique institution, both nationally and internationally, in terms of its history and heritage. It is the successor to Robert College which was the first American institution of education established abroad (1863). It was converted into a state university in 1971 when the Board of Trustees discontinued Robert College due to financial problems. The University remained very proud of its culturally and organizationally rich and diverse tradition, the traces of which can be seen in its institutional commitment to liberal values, respect for cultural differences, and a strong emphasis on academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

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<sup>14</sup> Reprinted from Üstün Ergüder (2008): ‘Institutions’ policies, visions, missions and aims; Policies of Institutional Governance: IEP Review and Bogazici University’. In Amaral, A., Rovio-Johansson, A., Rosa, M. J., Westerheijden, D.F. (eds.): *Essays on Supportive Peer Review*, Hauppauge/NY: Nova Science Publishers, pp. 153-170. With permission from Nova Science Publishers.

BU went through a very rapid and painful process of growth and transformation during the period 1971-81. Just when the institution was about to complete its transition into the state system Law 2547 discussed above arrived. The University now was facing another period of adjustment, this time into a very centralized state system with not much room for institutional autonomy. Minus the centralization at the national level, centralized, hierarchical governance structure that Law 2547 created for internal governance was not very inimical to what BU was used to as a campus university modeled after American institutions. Yet, the collegial institutional culture of the university emphasizing diversity and uniqueness, that came into conflict with the centralized system envisioned by Law 2547 was retained.

### **The “Quality Culture” of the University**

A very important part of this culture was and still is an unwavering belief on the part of the academic staff and the alumni that the institution is a centre of excellence, especially in teaching, in Turkish higher education. Perhaps the most important factor that helps fortify this culture is the fact that BU is preferred by exceptionally good undergraduate students. Average performance of students admitted corresponds to the top 1100 in the central exam taken by close to 2 million candidates. The “quality culture” of the university was shaped not only by a strong belief by the faculty that the institution enjoyed a highly respected reputation in Turkey and the USA and that it was the top choice of students but also that it was the top choice of fresh PhDs returning from the United States to pursue an academic career in Turkey. For the core of Boğaziçi faculty quality of the institution needed no further scrutiny.

Competitive pressures in 1990’s put external evaluation on the agenda of the university. Major competitors such as Middle East Technical University and Bilkent had subjected some of their engineering programs to the review of the American Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology. BU also applied to ABET ; all six departments of the Faculty of Engineering were visited by an ABET team in 1998 and received substantive equivalency. Despite the earlier scepticism about the ABET process and the complaints associated with considerable amount of work involved in preparing for the visit, the aftermath witnessed a rise in the morale and a demonstration of satisfaction among the academic staff of the Engineering Faculty.

The growing competitive milieu in higher education in Turkey led the university leadership to look for other international stamps of approval for the quality of the work done in the university. It was also becoming apparent that the university had to think more in global terms and benchmarks. The special relationship that the university enjoyed with American universities would not anymore suffice in terms of internationalization for an institution that was proud of being an “open window of Turkey” in higher education to the outside world.

CRE membership was important at the time in introducing quality review to the university. The growing European perspective of Turkey pushed the University leadership towards closer involvement with the CRE and its programmes during the 1990s. Reporting about CRE activities in the governing councils of the university became a common practice. Furthermore, CRE meetings were also attended by members of the executive leadership other than the rector. The rector and the vice rectors participated in CRE management seminars for new leaders. Two of these management seminars were also held on campus at BU:

### **CRE is Invited for Institutional Review**

The decision to invite the CRE for institutional quality review was taken by the Senate of the university in 1998. It did not meet with much enthusiasm nor was there any resistance even though such opposition was expected. Once the decision was adopted, there was a considerable team effort by a core faculty to spread the “good word” around and to prepare the self-evaluation report with maximum faculty support. Positive ABET experience of the Faculty of Engineering also helped. One must also note that no public funds were available neither for the ABET process nor for the CRE institutional review. All the costs involved were met from income generated by the university.

The CRE review of BU turned out to be a success in terms of its acceptability by the members of the academic and top administrative staff. In fact the smoothness of the whole procedure created a very

positive feeling towards quality review, even though temporary, throughout the institution. Some of the suggestions in the final report of the CRE were found relevant and implementation started immediately. For example, BU always prided itself on its open door policy by the academic and administrative staff (including the rector's office) to students and the richness of student social and cultural activities so much so that it served as a very popular model for other universities. The CRE report, however, pointed out that there was no institutionalized representation of students in governing bodies. Following CRE recommendations immediate steps were taken to institutionalize student participation in the governance of the institution. Looking in retrospect, however, the impact of the CRE review could be best described by a Turkish saying: like "hay fire" (*saman alevi gibi*) temporarily lighting and heating up the environment.

### **Changes in Institutional Leadership and its Impact on Quality**

BU went through two changes in leadership since the year 2000: the dean of the Engineering Faculty was elected and appointed as rector in 2000 with his term ending in 2004. His term could not be renewed because of limitations of retirement age. The dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences took over in 2004 for a term of four years. Her term can be renewed in 2008. Rector Sabih Tansal who served between 2000 and 2004 was in the leadership team of the university when both ABET and CRE procedures were adopted. He first served as vice-rector and subsequently as the dean of the Engineering Faculty. Similarly Rector Ayşe Soysal served as the dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences since 1992 until she took over the helm of the institution in 2004. She was involved in all the decisions concerning ABET and CRE.

It is felt in this paper that leadership and leadership changes are relevant intervening variables in the analysis of the perpetuation or the transformation of the quality culture of the institution. They, however, do not tell the whole story. The views and the discussion below are based on interviews and discussions with BU faculty and the casual but interested observation of a former rector who introduced the EUA (CRE) quality assessment to the university.

Did CRE review lead to the creation of a quality culture in the university based on systematic quality review? The answer is not a strong yes. It probably made a dent. Quality is on the agenda of the institution yet long term commitment is questionable. In terms of specific activities the following events took place:

- ABET was invited in 2002 for ABET 2000 review of the Engineering Faculty. The dean of the Faculty and the leadership of the university played an important role in supporting the review. In the words of some faculty members, however, invitation of ABET was not a commitment to a quality culture. The nature of the process is such (accreditation) that once you get caught in it you have no choice but to follow it up.
- The term 2000 – 2004 witnessed the participation of Boğaziçi as a leading institution in the EUA pilot projects. The member of the faculty who played a leading role in seeing this pilot project through was also a vice-rector during 1994 – 2000 and the most important figure in the ownership of the ABET and CRE projects. He is now working for a foundation university.
- The university was reluctant to invite the EUA for a follow-up.
- The participation of the university in the EUA and the Institutional Management in Higher Education (IMHE) projects of the OECD decreased over time.

In the words of one faculty member the attitude of the executive teams gradually changed over time from "leading" the faculty to "following" it; from "outward looking" to "inward looking". Thus the quality issue seems to have lost its value as a management tool. Furthermore, strategic thinking as an autonomous institutional exercise seems to have lost its momentum as the age old issue of teaching versus research, the objective of being a research intensive institution, the role of the university in terms of community services and technology transfer still seems to be unanswered after 15 years. In all fairness this transformation in leadership attitude is partially due to the fact that the institutional decision making process has become over time more collegial and horizontal. The post-1992 period was a period of transition – or a period of honeymoon, if you will, between the leadership and the academic staff – from a more executive model to one of collegialism. Happy to be rid of unresponsive leadership of an executive model, the academic staff of the university was more tolerant of a leadership of their own choice. Gradually, however,

the system started to become more collegial as years passed and leadership changed hands through elections. Burton Clark is probably right in claiming that strong leadership needs to accommodate itself with collegialism to get sustainable results. Collegialism which favors status quo is a fact of life in academic institutions. But, for change and entrepreneurial leadership, the institution needs a strengthened academic core which is supportive of strategic leadership for change. The academic core of BU that believed in quality assessment was gradually weakened.

### **Concluding Thoughts and Remarks**

The Boğaziçi experience discussed in this chapter is a case study. It could be instructive in terms of deriving some lessons on the development of quality culture in a higher education institution. Yet, it is difficult to generalize. It is tempting, based on BU experience, to argue that a horizontal collegial model of decision making model so common in academic institutions is not conducive to the establishment of a quality culture based on external review. Furthermore one may add that executive hierarchical models of governance based on appointment of top leadership for longer terms by lay boards (board of trustees or regents) may be more compatible with strategic planning and external quality review. This author has had the chance, in his capacity as a member of the board of trustees of different foundation universities, to observe that this may or not be true in each and every case. It is difficult to argue, even though tempting, that the executive model is compatible with creating a quality culture based on external review. Similarly it is difficult to conclude that a collegial model does not lead to a quality. Many Turkish universities so far have followed the lead of BU and have gone through EUA institutional evaluation programme. In fact the Turkish universities have become one of the best customers of the EUA-IEP programme. BU has pioneered a process that has created, if you will, an *avalanche* of interest by Turkish universities in quality review by the EUA. Yet perhaps, a good test of how much the EUA programme will contribute to an emerging quality culture in each one of these institutions is whether EUA is invited back for a second visit. The first candidate, Boğaziçi University, up for a second visit has not yet done so.

Perhaps the most important factors in the emergence of an institutional quality culture may be summarized as follows:

- The presence of a competitive national milieu and institutional autonomy.
- Internationalization of institutions and international benchmarking in higher education.
- Emergence of international networks in higher education. EUA appears to play a very important role in the emergence of such a network.
- The distance from or the lack of a direct link of the quality review system to national governing agencies.

There does not seem to be a magic governance formula to institutionalize a quality culture in institutions. Older and more established institutions with a strong institutional culture may be more resistant to external quality review. A lesson that can be drawn from the Boğaziçi experience is that a horizontal collegial model of governance may accentuate the difficulties to adopt external quality review given such an entrenched institutional culture. Yet, executive models and entrepreneurial leadership models are no guarantee as well. The emergence of a quality milieu of both national and international coupled with a competitive environment is probably the most important factor in motivating universities toward a quality culture.

### **REFLECTIONS**

The international HE market will become more competitive and more diversified in the future, and quality will become the decisive criterion for students and employers. It is not easy, however, to institutionalize a quality culture in institutions, as the case study points out. Initial attempts may at times bounce back, returning to box one, if sustainable environmental pressures do not help institutions to reach a critical momentum. Existence of a quality assurance mechanism does not

automatically mean national or institutional education provision is of good quality. If the system or the institution is severely lacking in human resources and infrastructure or if system is unstable resource supplement and stability arrangements gain priority. In South Eastern European countries where HE is supply controlled and private institutions try to exploit this situation, state initiated QA may be the least to safeguard the minimal quality standards. Accountability in that respect may outweigh the improvement orientation; they are not necessarily mutually exclusive, however.

Majority of countries use today accreditation at the establishment stage of programs and/or institutions and also to meet the ongoing need of accountability. But it looks that in the near future rather than program accreditations, institutional review/ audit /evaluations will be preferred. Professional fields such as engineering or medical may continue with the accreditation based licensing mechanisms.

The pressing issue in HE quality environment is to provide for transparency. To boost information flow and transparency in the public institutional **rankings** and league tables gained some popularity. In spite of the enormous shortcomings associated with the rankings and absolute rejection of the idea by academics they seem to satisfy a public demand for information. The reduction of the multiplicity of activities into a single number and heavy emphasis on research potential makes them hardly a tool for enhancing teaching and learning quality. No matter how controversial they are there is an international effort to improve ranking systems (Berlin Principles<sup>15</sup>). Availability of information and easy access to institutional performance indicators may be the effective way to fight against rankings.

The issue of linking quality assessments to **funding** is another delicate problem in HE. Some argue that direct link eliminates the enhancement feature of quality assessments, requiring just compliance; universities may fear to reveal any weaknesses and openly address them. Others claim that excellence should be awarded; this stimulates low performers. In any case, rewarding institutional level of teaching excellence is not as straightforward as of research excellence. Policies tend to favor correcting teaching deficiencies in low performing universities.

Universities profit most if their quality management system is intertwined with their strategic management as quality is a unique change agent. Different ideologies, approaches can be melted down in the quality pot and opposing quality per se is politically not correct. Assessment of four key issues<sup>16</sup> of EUA helps to reiterate institutional identity, commitment to policies, strategies and change:

- **What is the institution trying to do?** Mission, goals, strategic choices, constraints.
- **How is the institution trying to do it?** Strengths and weaknesses (discrepancies between intentions and outcomes) in academic, financial, and managerial activities.
- **How does the institution know it works?** Quality monitoring mechanisms and quality management practices.
- **How does the institution change in order to improve?** Quality management's role as driver of change.

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<sup>15</sup> CHE 2006

<sup>16</sup> EUA 2005

This last set of discussion is expected to contribute to mission diversification of universities especially in countries where uniformity is the norm.

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