

Developing the institutional quality management system

The case of the Corvinus University of Budapest

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Abstract

From 2004 to 2007 period the Corvinus University of Budapest has developed and introduced a modern and consistent quality assurance system. The new model takes the concepts of the TQM and EFQM as its foundation. An essential part of the system is inquiry of the opinions of staff members, students, institutions and individuals with external relations, and regular feedback based on these results. In the 2007/2008 academic year the CUB participated in two external accreditation/evaluation programmes. The institutional accreditation by the Hungarian Accreditation Committee took place (conducted every 8 years), and in 2007 the CUB applied for an institutional evaluation by the European University Association. The aims, legal status and central points of the two evaluations are different from each other. The statements prepared through the two types of processes arrived to similar conclusions on several issues. The proposals compliment each other and emphasise various viewpoints.

Hungarian higher education system

Due to the social, economic and political changes in the 1990s, reform initiatives have been developed which aim to adapt the Hungarian higher education and research system to European standards. The reform process started with the Higher Education Act of 1993 which focused on the institutional system and on the content of operation. Universities gained autonomy and regained their rights to award scientific degrees. Other major aims were to increase the number of students and to modernize the content of education. The process of institutional integration (merger of institutions) started to take place in the late 1990s. The goal of institutional integration was to replace a large number of small and specified higher education institutions with a smaller number that can be operated and managed more efficiently.

The new Higher Education Act came into force in 2005. , a year after Hungary became a member of the European Union. The Act gave the framework for participating in the European Higher Education Area which Hungary joined as a signatory in 1999. The Act specified regulations in terms of institutional financing and management, and quality assurance.

Before the implementation of the Bologna system Hungary had a dual system with universities providing research-based and –oriented education while colleges offering applied training. The transition to the two (tree) cycle system started in 2005, and it was completed in 2007 (the new BA programmes were introduced class by class, starting with only freshman classes).

The higher education quality assurance system in Hungary

The Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC), as the national quality assurance agency was established by the Higher Education Act of 1993. (Since 2001 the HAC has been a member of the European Association of Quality Assurance in Higher Education.) One of its main scopes was to accredit existing higher education institutions, which it did in the first round that ended in 2000 by assessing all study programmes at the evaluated institutions. This evaluation must be repeated regularly, at least once every 8 years. Its other mission is to issue statements about the foundation of new universities or colleges, the creation and introduction of new training programs and qualification frameworks.

The position of the Corvinus University of Budapest

As a result of a merger, Corvinus University of Budapest was established by integrating the Budapest University of Economic Sciences, the College of Public Administration and three faculties of the University of Horticultural Science and Food Science. Since 2003, the University has operated on three campuses with seven faculties: The Faculty of Food Science, The Faculty of Business Administration, The Faculty of Horticultural Science, The Faculty of Economics, The Faculty of Public Administration, The Faculty of Landscape Architecture and The Faculty of Social Sciences. It adopted the new name of Corvinus University of Budapest (CUB) in 2004. The predecessors of the University were leading institutions of their scientific fields in Hungary. The short term goal of the University is to maintain its leading position in Hungary and enhance its international reputation.

The number of students was 17,708 in the academic year 2007/2008. Considering the number of students, the CUB is the seventh largest higher education institution in Hungary. The total number of employees is about 1500, 48 % of them are members of the academic staff and 52% are non-academic employees.

Design and introduction of the quality assurance system at the CUB

One of the major tasks the new University decided to undertake was the formulation of the quality concept and the establishment of a quality assurance system. The uniform procedural system has been introduced gradually from 2004 onwards and has been adopted throughout the University since 2007. In 2004 the Ministry of Education and Culture put out a tender for the development of the culture of quality in higher education. The CUB was a member of the consortium that won the tender. The content and methodological elements of the modern quality assurance system were developed as a part of this programme, a model that several Hungarian institutions have adopted. The model takes the concepts of the TQM and EFQM quality assurance system as its foundation,

An essential part of the system is inquiry of the opinions of staff members and students as well as institutions and individuals with external relations, and regular feedback based on these results. The quality assurance system observes the principles of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (Bergen, 2005). These guidelines were discussed with university citizens at in-house training programmes, conferences, university forums, committees, by internal mails and on the quality website of

the University. If university citizens can identify with the concept of quality culture that the University fosters, they may sign the Quality Declaration. Many of them have. The operation of the quality management system is guided by the Quality Handbook, drawn up in 2006-2007 and approved by the University Senate.

Organisational background of the quality assurance system

The creation of the quality management organization started with the setting up of the University Quality Coordination Committee in 2004, and sub-committees were created to support quality enhancement in highlighted areas. An independent university quality coordinator was appointed in 2006, and then Faculty Quality Coordination Committees were formed. In 2007 the Quality Office was set up to strengthen collaboration across the University. The main tasks of the quality assurance bodies are as follows.

The University Quality Coordination Committee (UQCC) was established by the Senate, and was intended to develop, coordinate, monitor and review the tasks and activities in terms of quality management and quality assurance. It is not a decision-making body, it only takes positions and provides recommendations regarding university quality issues.

Day-to-day management and operation of the UQCC are supervised by the University Quality Coordinator whose work is supported by the Quality Office. The Quality Coordinator supervises and monitors the quality management system of the University, develops quality management procedures and processes, manages regular data collection and makes results available internally and externally. Faculty Quality Coordinators operate and supervise the quality management system at the faculty level, and their work is supported by Faculty Quality Coordination Committees.

Concept of quality management

Quality management is not a subsystem of University operations rather an approach which should permeate the day-to-day operation of the university. The task of quality management and the role of the Quality Handbook are not to create a separate quality subsystem but to review and coordinate the operation of different subsystems that are critical for achieving quality requirements.

Quality management is intended to create system-wide mechanisms that enable the University to monitor and improve its operations and enhance quality.

Regulation as a background ensures that the quality management system is well coordinated and complete, and the terms of reference and responsibilities are well defined. It also ensures the anonymity of respondents and easy access to findings.

Assessment of satisfaction with certain activities or resources means that end users are requested to give about them. This stage in its narrow sense comprises procedures to collect and analyse data in terms of satisfaction (such as student or academic staff satisfaction), and in its broader sense it covers procedures to collect data in relation to any activity or resource (such as academic staff appraisal system).

Channelling findings into the Management Information System (MIS) intends to substantiate management decisions. For this purpose data should be part of the MIS which in turn requires that data be processed (half automated), analysed and complemented with other existing data (e.g. financial facts and figures).

Internal quality assurance processes

The quality assurance process within the University quality management system covers several fields of activity and development.

The **quality assurance of study programmes** includes rules and regulations concerning programme launch and continuous monitoring of programmes, data gathering, decision-making and information. Rules and regulations regarding programme launch specify conditions of programme and subject announcement as an “external accreditation mechanism”. (There are special additional requirements and procedural regulations of establishing and launching programmes in a foreign language.) Study programmes are monitored by continuous satisfaction surveys: questioning students about the courses and the whole programme, career surveys of graduates, inquiring from employers, external members of final examination boards and lecturers. Survey results can be used to substantiate study programme development. Survey results are publicly available to internal and external stakeholders.

The **quality assurance of research programmes** includes mechanisms, rules, regulations and feedback elements that enable the University to focus its research activities on essential problems and at the same time satisfy high quality requirements. The quality of research programmes is assured by the central publication registry of the University, which is public, and by the uniform performance appraisal system of lecturers and researchers.

The **quality assurance of the management system** is intended to enable the University to carry out its core activities efficiently and in an orderly way, in line with the expectations of those involved. This system includes rules, regulations, data gathering and feedback mechanisms concerning organization, operation, goal-setting and strategy formulation for the faculties and the departments as well as leaders at all levels. The self-evaluation and data gathering system is fundamentally about requesting staff members to voice their opinions and the system can be complemented through guided evaluation by leaders. Internal publication of these results can foster internal improvement at the University.

The **quality assurance of infrastructure** is based upon the quality assurance regulations of the library and computer services. The efficient operation of different devices and services that are intended to support learning activities are reflected in the level of satisfaction of users (lecturers and students).

The **quality assurance of human resource management** is based on the concept, that highly qualified lecturers supported by well-prepared administration staff are preconditions for quality education and research. The establishment of such conditions is achieved by suitable employment practices, performance appraisal and qualification practice, in addition to other regulatory, data collection and internal publicity elements are added (e.g. rankings of lecturers and researchers). Also satisfaction can be achieved if employees find the assessment and evaluation systems of the University reasonable, fair and forward-looking. Thus measuring

the degree of satisfaction in this respect is an essential part of recruiting and retaining lecturers and researchers. As for external relations, existing and potential employers are asked in a survey about the quality of our graduates whom they employ, also lecturers and researchers with outstanding achievements can be sponsored by the business sector.

Development of internal quality assurance processes and utilization of results

The University considers it strength that the individual elements of the system have developed into a complete network, so emphasis can now be shifted to the operation of the system. The established quality assurance process will primarily perform self-assessment and incorporate its feedback. The first survey that covered the entire “population” was in 2007 and the findings are currently being analysed (some of the elements have been functioning for a couple of years and the evaluation of lecturers by students is the most important). The questions however are closely linked to the content and implementation of the above-described strategy. Results can be used in decision making and strategic management. The system includes elements which allow staff members to voice their opinions about their leaders – especially about the University, faculty and department leaders – anonymously. It is believed that reviewing anonymous opinions will support the development of more effective leadership. Such a system will improve the organizational culture. The opinion research is carried out electronically which implies cultural change from students and staff. Findings are made available to students, members of the academic and administrative staff and the University leadership. The weakness of the survey-type data collection is that the response rate is rather low (10-30%). We can assume that this ratio will increase if those involved experience, that the leaders, managers in charge pay attention to their opinions when they make decisions (of course the methods of data collection need to be refined as well).

External evaluations in 2007/2008

In the 2007/2008 academic year the CUB participated in two external accreditation/evaluation programmes. The mandatory institutional accreditation by the HAC (conducted every 8 years) took place, which was the second such accreditation procedure. In 2007 the CUB applied for an institutional evaluation by the European University Association (EUA). These two external evaluations were very useful for the University, primarily because in both cases University had to prepare a self-evaluation report, which forced the management to systematically review the University’s strategy and its various areas of activity. In this process the results of the survey-type and other investigations that were done in the quality assurance system played a central role. During both processes an evaluation team visited the University. The teams met with university, faculty and departmental leaders, professors, administrative staff, groups of students and different partners of the University. The external evaluations also conducted assessments of the CUB’s quality assurance system. The two evaluation processes had many similar elements, but the different approaches, different goals, viewpoints were also worthy of notice. These are good examples of the process that is currently taking place in Europe concerning the external and internal evaluations, accreditation of quality assurance system as well as program accreditations, the design of accreditation and evaluation in theory and in practice.

The declared goal of the accreditation conducted by the HAC was to evaluate the University's activities in the past 4 years (not 8), but at the same time to achieve the possibility to search the ability of the institution to manage the new, two-cycle training system. Since the second accreditation was taking place while the training system, the study programme system was continuously changing, there was no programme accreditation at this time (the accreditation of the new Bologna-type study programmes took place in the past 2-3 years, and are also going on right now). In the future, the expert evaluation of study programmes and the accreditation focusing on the general management of institutions, their leadership and the internal quality assurance systems, will be separated both in time and concept. The 2007/2008 accreditation mirrors this transitional situation. The HAC published its evaluation on the 3rd of October 2008. Primarily it concluded that the CUB has been accredited for the next eight years. The document gives evaluation on the university as a whole and on its seven faculties. It includes references to the international (European, regional) position of the University but it mainly analyzes its performance in the context of the Hungarian higher education system. It outlines the processes of the recent years and it primarily focuses on the present situation, facts and the achievability of strategic goals.

The focus of the EUA evaluation was the institution as a whole, and not individual study programmes or units. Therefore the decision-making process, the institutional structures and effectiveness of strategic planning were considered. It evaluated the relevance of internal quality processes and the degree to which their outcomes have been used in decision-making and strategic planning as well as perceived gaps in these internal mechanisms. The evaluation was intended to address four central questions: what is the institution trying to do – how is trying to do – how does know that it works – how does it change in order to improve? Their strategic questions are closely connected to the SWOT analyses. The EUA document does not include “yes or no type” opinions instead it is the summary of the evaluation. It provides only a University level evaluation it doesn't deal with the faculties. It mostly evaluates the institution itself and it mentions its domestic, regional and international position mainly from the viewpoint of situation description and strategic analyses. It pays practically no attention to the past, it evaluates the current situation and it especially concentrates on the future and the ability to make changes. It considers the Quality Assurance System only as a tool for the effective operation of the institution it rather searches for the manifestations of Quality Culture. The main target audience of the document is: the Rector, the University's management and it addresses generalized and specific suggestions on strategy to them.

If we view the two types of evaluations in the context of quality assurance processes in European Higher Education Area we can draw the following conclusions. The HAS moved from the detailed institutional evaluation towards system evaluation (evaluation of the quality assurance system), but it still contains certain elements of the former. The question is to what extent this approach will be able to replace program accreditation in the future. A further question is how it will connect to regular national level evaluations of study programmes (of a specific field of study). In any case the EUA institutional evaluation compliments the national level accreditation very well, since it views institutions in an international (European) dimension, and it focuses on the inner strength of the institution, not consider to the outside circumstances.