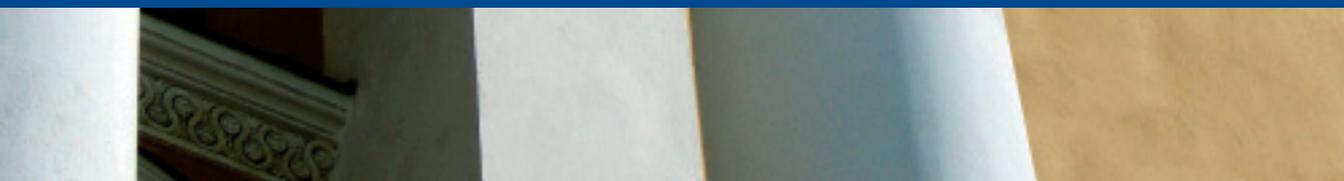




Internal Quality Assurance – Enhancing quality culture

**A sample of good and ineffective practices on internal quality assurance
as presented in the ENQA IQA seminar in June 2010**



Introduction

The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), in cooperation with the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA, UK), organised a seminar on theme 'Internal Quality Assurance - Enhancing quality culture' which was held on 8-9 June, 2010 in London, United Kingdom. The seminar marked the fourth annual meeting of the ENQA IQA Group with the ENQA IQA Steering Group being the main responsible for planning and organising the event.

The purpose of this seminar was to unite quality assurance (QA) agencies and other stakeholders that are interested in operational internal quality assurance (IQA) systems, and/or who are planning to implement such a system. The seminar provided a platform for the staff of QA agencies for discussing shared challenges, concerns, innovative ideas and future expectations which may then be applied to individual IQA practices and/or future IQA processes.

This report collects some good practises that are implemented for internal quality assurance in different QA agencies, with the intention to share them for the benefit of other quality assurance agencies or institutions interested in these issues. In addition to good practices, the participating agencies were encouraged to openly share what processes they find challenging or ineffective in their agencies. This report thus provides a short list of both good and ineffective practices as they were presented in the seminar in London.



Quality Assurance in Commission des Titres d'Ingénieur (CTI)

Teresa Sánchez Chaparro

About CTI :

Commission des Titres d'Ingénieur (CTI) is an independent body involved in the development of the European Higher Education Area, established by the French law in 1934.

Its missions are respectively:

- The evaluation and accreditation of higher education institutions in the fields of engineering, computer science, applied mathematics, project management, etc;
- the development of quality in engineering education;
- the promotion of engineering curricula and careers in France and abroad (e.g. Germany, Switzerland, Bulgaria, Vietnam).

Source : <http://www.cti-commission.fr/>

Recent issues and organisational changes

Following its external review of 2009 carried out for ENQA membership purposes, CTI has introduced a number of organisational changes in order to introduce the recommended improvements in two main domains:

1. The reinforcement of its organisational structure;
2. the development of information tools in order to facilitate the traceability of its evaluation and accreditation process (evaluation and accreditation of engineering programmes in France).

Up to 2009, CTI's administrative functioning was based in a non permanent structure composed by people belonging to different organisations and partners, which lead to coordination difficulties. Two persons have been recruited in order to create a permanent team: a person in charge of coordinating all administration activities, and a programme director, with tasks related to internal quality assurance and international relations.

Quality assurance issues are addressed through ad-hoc projects, coordinated by the programme director and supervised by one of CTI's member organisations. The first quality assurance project launched under the new structure is the development of an Internet-accessible internal information system (MySQL database). This has been created to improve process traceability.

This project is a continuation of an initiative launched in 2008. A first pilot was built at that time in collaboration with the Conference of Directors of French Engineering Graduated Schools (CDEFI). The idea was to develop CTI's database using CDEFI's development capabilities. A developer from CDEFI was assigned to the project and a specific Internet development environment was taken into use, which was already in

use at CDEFI. The collaboration between CTI and CDEFI offered potential additional benefits, such as the possibility of establishing a common database between the two organisations (with some basic information).

At this stage of the project, the structure of the database has been redefined in order to assure an efficient and effective organisation of information. A set of key strategic issues regarding confidentiality and property of information and access rights have been identified and clarified. The development phase began in February 2010. A number of difficulties have come up since the start, coming from different origins, such as a challenge in the sharing of human resources between two different organisations, technical rigidities of the chosen development platform and difficulties due to the coexistence of two different data structures in the same database. CTI is currently trying to address these challenges in order to get the best benefits from the project.

DOCUWARE – ACSUCYL's Document Management System

Sandra Marcos Ortega

About ACSUCYL:

ACSUCYL is the external assessment body for the university system in Castilla y León in Spain and is aimed at the assessment, accreditation and certification of quality at Universities and research and higher education institutions in Castilla y León.

In addition, ACSUCYL can also collaborate in the processes of assessment, accreditation and certification of universities and higher education institutions outside the Autonomous Region of Castilla y León in the context of the European Higher Education Area.

The activities of assessment, accreditation and certification developed by the agency, aim at achieving the following general purposes:

- a. To foster the improvement of teaching and research activity and management of Universities and research and higher education institutions, encouraging the improvement of competitiveness and economic development of Castilla y León.
- b. To provide adequate information about the university system to public Administrations, the productive sector and society in general, for making decisions in their areas of action.

ACSUCYL undertakes the functions which have been legally assigned to it in an autonomous manner and in accordance with European standards for quality assurance agencies.

Source: <http://www.acsucyl.com/>

In order to enhance and speed up internal handling of documents, ACSUCYL uses an automatic document management system. This application, called DOCUWARE, covers all of the documents involved in internal quality management and information security management systems.

Documents included in the application are grouped into various files depending on the area to which they belong. There are four different files:

1. **SGC documentation:** Contains all the processes and procedures relating to the activities conducted by the agency as well as any documents which affect or might affect its running, such as legislation, rules governing internal functioning, European criteria etc.
2. **SGC registers:** Contain evidence of compliance with quality criteria. Amongst other things, these files contain a record of the planning behind each assessment process, follow-up indicators, non-compliances within the system, corrective and preventive measures to be implemented, staff training files etc.
3. **SGSI documentation:** Contains all documents related to the information security management system in place at ACSUCYL.
4. **SGSI registers:** Contain evidence of compliance with ISO 27001 regarding information security systems, such as a record of all outgoing material, follow-up indicators, non-compliance within the system, corrective and preventive measures to be implemented in relation to information systems etc.

DOCUWARE also provides a common tray which all ACSUCYL employees have access to and which they can use to share information. In addition, each employee has their own personal tray within the application through which they can manage their own documents.

The main advantages of a document management system are:

- Easy access to well organised and structured information.
- A common repository where all the documents relating to internal quality assurance systems can be stored.
- Control over the versions of documents, thereby ensuring that all employees are working with the latest version of any document.
- System for digital signatures, thereby facilitating and streamlining internal handling of documents.
- Centralised handling for planning assessment and follow-up processes.

DOCUWARE is managed through authorisation which is allocated by the system administrator, thus ensuring that access to the information and documents is controlled. In general, all employees have access to documents describing how ACSUCYL conducts its activities and how the agency works. The application contains a powerful search engine enabling fast and easy access to information.

In order to use this application in their everyday work, the ACSUCYL staff are trained in its use and handling. The staff are given regular refresher courses in the use and functions of the application, thereby enabling them to obtain the maximum benefit from it.

Since March 2010, the document management system has been functioning via Internet, thereby providing a more user-friendly environment for access to information, as well as the access to the supplier management database.



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Good and Ineffective Practices in IQA at ACSUG

Luis Carlos Velón Sixto

About ACSUG:

The Axencia para a Calidade do Sistema Universitario de Galicia (Agency for Quality Assurance in the Galician University System, ACSUG) was legally established on 30 January 2001 as a consortium between the Regional Government of Galicia and the three Galician universities. ACSUG has full legal personality and the necessary independence to be able to achieve its objectives to rigorous standards fully respecting university autonomy.

ACSUG was founded in order for the university system in Galicia to attain high levels of prestige and recognition among Spanish, European and international universities.

The agency was established based on two points of view. The first is the principle that the new financing programme will take the quality of universities into account, allocating part of the resources to the improvement of teaching, management, etc., and the second arises from previous experiences in the field of assessment of new international trends and mainly from the recommendations by the Council of Europe on European co-operation in order to ensure quality in higher education.

The aim is for Galician universities to be distinguished firstly by the development of their autonomy, responding to the specific socio-economic and cultural needs that arise in the immediate context of the Autonomous Region of Galicia and secondly, by their competitive integration in the Spanish and international university context. These two points can be summarised as autonomy in order to promote their distinguishing features, and integration in order to promote innovation and development.

ACSUG creates a framework for co-operation and co-ordination between the government, the Galician universities and other higher education and quality assessment bodies, both in Spain and abroad, to exchange opinions, debate and join forces. This will undoubtedly lead to the improvement of quality and the prestige of our university system.

Source: <http://www.acsug.es/>

1. Introduction

It is vital that the channels of internal and external communication within agencies are well defined and effective. Information has to be communicated to the staff in due time. Achieving this will prevent problems of coordination and help to organise projects better. Other possible benefits are the improvement of working environment and a greater involvement of the staff.

2. Internal communication in ACSUG

Good practices:

- Periodic staff meetings: Organisation of the meetings sufficiently in advance, agenda for issues to talk about, discussion item of general information about the current activities, an item for improvement proposals from the staff.
- Tools to share information: Internal information network; databases of legislation, suppliers, agreements etc; shared folders divided in different activities; calendar with the activities of each day.
- It is important to clearly appoint a person responsible for internal communication and for fostering the general participation of all staff.

Ineffective practices:

- Agency directors and coordinators have to promote and emphasise the importance of internal communication.
- The information interchange has to occur in all directions: not only in top-down direction (which is a common direction). At the same job level, transversal and down-top communication are necessary. All staff can have good ideas to improve the agency's activities: "Several little improvements can cause a great change".

3. External communication in ACSUG

Good practices:

- Satisfaction surveys on the activities: It is important to insist in the relevance of participation in surveys.
- Information meetings with university stakeholders, not only with rectors or people with high level responsibilities.
- Computer applications provide a fast tool to manage requests, to include information and share it, and to allow remote access to agencies' websites/ institutions' databases.
- Website: It is very important to have a well organised and updated website, because most people have contact with the agency only through the website.

Ineffective practices:

- Suggestion box on the website and in the main office: The main idea is good but people usually prefer to make phone calls for suggestions.
- Computer applications: People may have insufficient computer skills, and legislation may limit the level of computerisation implementation.
- Website: As it is said above, if you do not dedicate the necessary time to update the website, the general opinion of the users will be not very good.



IQA at AEQES

Caty Duykaerts

About AEQES:

AEQES is funded by the Ministry of the French Community of Belgium. It is independent of both the institutions of higher education and the government of the French Community.

AEQES is responsible for the external evaluation of the quality of higher education in the French Community in Belgium. The agency evaluates universities, “hautes écoles” (non-university HEIs), art academies and conservatoires, higher institutes of architecture and adult learning institutions.

AEQES is the only agency officially recognised in the French Community. It aims at stimulating co-operation among HEIs, developing quality culture and disseminating good practices. It is in charge of the policies and guidelines concerning the external evaluation of HEIs and their programmes in the area.

Source : www.enqa.eu

1. Assessment of programme clusters

The main objective of assessing programme clusters is to get an overview of similar (or almost similar) programmes in the process of a peer-review evaluation conducted by one panel. The challenge is to compose such a panel (different profiles of peers with a wide scope of disciplines to deal with); and for the HEIs, to write a coherent self evaluation report, integrating sometimes different faculties.

AEQES has recently worked with a large cluster in sociology at a university level, and will soon work in a cluster of computer science programmes offered by universities and other HEIs.

In implementing its evaluation plans, AEQES tries to consider the double perspective of curricula logic and labour market reality in terms of employability of the degrees.

2. Building a framework for experts writing their reports

One major concern is how to build a framework that provides sufficient freedom to experts writing their reports and meets the minimum standardisation of layout for publication. For the time being, experts are asked to write their reports with the support of the agency. However, this may not be the best practice, given that different panels may produce different results. In fact, AEQES has just experienced the production of reports by four different panels with quite different results.

3. Selecting the right chair for a panel of experts

Presently, the selection of the chair to a panel of experts is made by the agency on the content of the CVs and other documents completed by the potential experts: academic background, professional experience, QA competencies, previous experience in peer-

reviews, etc. However, the satisfactory choice of a chair becomes visible only during the site visits and the production of the reports. The main problems that the chair may have are weak leadership or poor listening skills, or both. This may lead in the alteration of group dynamics.

4. Follow-up procedures

There are two aspects to consider:

- **Debriefing with HEIs**

When an external evaluation phase is over (including the publication of the individual reports, the global analysis and the follow-up strategic plan), HEIs are requested to answer a questionnaire about how the whole process was conducted. The results are analysed by the AEQES team and the institutions are invited to take part in a debriefing meeting to analyse the survey feedback and to discuss the various points. This is an important opportunity to collect perceptions on our practices, reflect on them and understand the institutions expectations better. In other words, it is definitely a good moment for communication.

- **Follow-up procedure for each institution**

Our agency is responsible for the formative assessment of study programmes, there's no accreditation and no formal consequence for HEIs. This quality enhancement perspective is balanced by the publication of the report (accountability perspective) and follow-up strategic plan of each institution. Within 6 months after the publication of its report, each institution sends the agency a follow-up strategic plan that is posted online in direct link with the report. The institution is allowed to update this strategic plan every three years. This legal procedure is described in the 2008 Act and since we are presently in the first implementation of it, it is too early to draw conclusions.



Internal Quality Assurance of Reviewer Selection and Monitoring at AKKORK

Yuri Rubin and Erika Soboleva

About AKKORK:

AKKORK is an independent professional agency in the field of consultancy, conduct of the reviews, accreditation and certification of the education institutions.

The key fields of activity:

- Consultancy on the issues of quality improvement and education quality assurance at the institutional and program levels;
- Consultancy on the issues of management quality improvement of the education institution;
- Education quality and quality assurance review;
- Independent accreditation and certification;
- accreditation of education programs and institutions at the institutional and program levels;
- Legal consulting;
- Financial activity effectiveness review of education institutions.

We are seeking to contribute to the development of education institutions and the whole education system and we will help you in optimization of management and internal control systems, as well as in discovering your education institution potential and competitiveness.

Independency and impartiality of AKKORK, as well as competence of our experts are corroborated by the accreditations in the leading international accreditation networks of education quality assurance and by the positive experience in the period of 6 years.

Source: <http://www.akkork.ru/e/>

The Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance and Career Development (AKKORK) uses the following internal quality assurance system in reviewer selection and the monitoring of their job performance:

1. **The recruitment of reviewers** consists of the following elements:
 - Selection of reviewers
 - Assessment of certain experts' adequacy to work at the agency
 - Training of reviewers
 - Certification of reviewers

2. **The specialisation of reviewers.** Reviewers specialise in areas of education or quality assurance. They are certified for these tasks and work only in the activities that they are certified for.
3. **The monitoring of reviewers.** The reviewers are organised in groups based on their specialisation. Each group has its own supervisor. These supervisors are experts both in the area of the reviewers' specialisation and in human resource management. The monitoring of reviewers includes the following elements:
 - Unofficial interviews of university clients are carried out;
 - Evaluation of the quality, professionalism and fairness of reviewer reports;
 - Reviewer files are placed on the agency's website.



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