



Phare Multi-Country Programme in Higher Education

ZZ-95.20 Quality Assurance in Higher Education

MANUAL OF QUALITY ASSURANCE: PROCEDURES AND PRACTICES

European Training Foundation

November 1998

The project Quality Assurance in Higher Education, part of the Phare Multi-Country Programme in Higher Education, was undertaken by a consortium of organisations led by the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information (QSC).

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PART A

BACKGROUND

2 A FRAMEWORK FOR QUALITY

2.1 The concept of quality

Quality is a core value in higher education, but one about which much confusion continues to persist. Some views, however, are more suited to higher education systems - systems which play a dynamic and positive role in society, culture and the economy. Hence, a deliberate choice for a specific view of quality is made here which has consequences for the way in which the evaluation of quality is approached.

Conceptions of quality can be grouped into several categories as Harvey and Green showed, the most important of which are¹:

- **Quality as excellence.** This is the traditional academic view which holds as a goal to strive to be the best. Often this concept of quality is held implicitly by academics as well as policy-makers in debates about quality in higher education.
- **Quality as “zero errors”.** Standards and “zero errors” can be defined most easily in mass industry where product specifications can be established in detail and standardised measurements of uniform products can show conformity to them. In higher education, however, graduates are not expected to be completely alike; therefore, this view is not really applicable to this sector.
- **Quality as “fitness for purpose”.** One of the most important insights from the quality literature is that an operational definition of quality must always be specific: quality of something for a specific purpose. There is no “general quality”. In terms of higher education, this view implies that, for instance, a study programme may be good at preparing researchers but not professionals to work in practice, or the other way around. This view implies a conception of quality that focuses on “customers’ needs” (sometimes known as stakeholders) - however difficult it may be to define “customers” in higher education (students, employers, the academic community, government as representative of society at large, etc., are all customers). A major weakness of this conception is that it seems to imply that “anything goes” in higher education as long as one can formulate a purpose for it. Accordingly, a “fitness for purpose” conception needs to be complemented with a conception of the “fitness of purpose” for higher education. In this respect, an evaluation can discuss (and challenge) the comprehensiveness and relevance of purposes in order to insure improvements.
- **Quality as transformation.** In this view, the focus is firmly on students: the better the higher education institution, the more it achieves the goal of empowering students with specific skills, knowledge and attitudes that enable them to live and work in the knowledge society. This view implies that during their studies, students’ views and goals

¹ Harvey L. And Green D., 1993, Defining quality, *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 18: 9 - 34

are changed.

- Quality as threshold. To define a threshold for quality means to set certain norms and criteria. Any unit that reaches or surpasses these norms and criteria is deemed of quality. The advantage of setting a threshold is that it is objective, certifiable and uniform across the higher education system. The disadvantage is that it is a static notion: it cannot be adapted to changing circumstances except through a cumbersome political process. Therefore, standards almost always lag behind. This implies that a threshold conception of quality does not stimulate units to adapt to new opportunities, incorporate new insights with respect to education or the state of the art in a discipline, in short to enhance their quality.

In most European higher education systems, a variant is used that can be called minimum standards. These minimum standards are often defined concisely: all that is needed is a broad definition of desired knowledge, skills and attitudes of graduates. They ensure a certain minimum quality and a certain minimum comparability of units or programmes across the higher education system. All units or programmes, however, are expected to surpass these minimum standards by adding their own goals and to keep enhancing quality through the attainment of these specific goals.

- Quality as enhancement. This conception emphasises precisely the aspect of continuous improvement. It centres on the idea that achieving quality is essential to the academic ethos and that it is the academics themselves who know best what the maximum quality is at any point in time. This conception stresses the responsibility of academia to make the best use of the institutional autonomy and teacher's academic freedom. The disadvantage of an enhancement conception of quality (as the opposite mirror image of the threshold conception) is that it is difficult to objectify it.

It is noteworthy that all western European evaluation procedures of higher education are based on quality as enhancement rather than as standards.

The conception of quality proposed here conforms to the mainstream view and can be seen as a sophisticated version of the "fitness for purpose" conception. Namely that:

- quality in higher education needs to be defined in light of specific purposes;
- these purposes must be suited to a higher education system;
- different categories of customers (or "stakeholders") hold legitimately different opinions; academic excellence is one of these opinions;
- as the primary users of higher education, students are an important category of customer;
- with increased mass higher education, students' needs become ever more varied;
- and for these reasons, "purposes" are best defined at the level of individual higher education institutions, faculties or study programmes, taking into account the national context.

A procedure for the evaluation of quality in higher education must be in line with the conception of quality that one chooses.

2.2 Evaluation and other key terms

Evaluation is used here as a general term denoting any process leading to judgements and/or recommendations regarding the quality of a unit. "Unit" refers to an institution, a faculty or a programme of study. Evaluation has an internal dimension (self-evaluation) and an external one (conducted by external experts, peers or inspectors).

Quality assessment, quality measurement and review of quality are all taken here to be synonymous with evaluation, especially if there is an external element to the procedure (i.e.,

an external review).

Quality control is also synonymous to evaluation but tends to be used more narrowly for the internal measurement of quality in a unit, without an external element to the procedure. Quality control is often used synonymously with quality management, although “management” emphasises the enhancement aspects while “control” has a more static, threshold or “zero errors” connotation. Quality management, therefore, can be seen as focusing on the goal of improvement (cf. Part A, 1.4.1).

Quality audit is usually reserved for evaluation of an institution’s processes for quality management.

Quality assurance is used as an all-embracing term to include all the policies, processes and actions through which the quality of higher education is maintained and developed. It emphasises the external aim of evaluation: one aims to assure students, society and government that the unit manages its quality well. Therefore, quality assurance focuses on the accountability goal (cf. Part A, 1.4.1).

Accreditation is primarily an outcome of evaluation. Accreditation is the award of a status and signals approval, recognition and sometimes a license to operate. As a process, accreditation is generally based on the application of pre-defined standards.

In some higher education systems, a distinction is made between accreditation - which can only be awarded to existing programmes or units on the basis of achieved results - and licensing. Licensing is then the awarding of the permission to operate a new higher education institution or a new study programme based on an *ex ante* evaluation of appropriate plans. Licensing also generally proceeds from pre-defined standards.

2.3 The political context for the evaluation of quality

The historical reasons for establishing an evaluation agency have been typically:

- an awareness that both granting increased autonomy to institutions and imparting greater importance to leadership roles in higher education institutions must be associated with a concomitant increase in accountability, such as evaluating the extent to which resources are well spent, decisions rationally taken and effectively implemented, and quality levels maintained;
- mass higher education, the associated expansion of institutions and their increased diversity must be accompanied by a willingness to improve the higher education system to respond to new needs.

In many countries of western Europe, the main goal of evaluation is often improvement and accountability. Accreditation, if done at all, is the responsibility of the Ministry responsible for higher education while evaluation is done by an independent agency.

By contrast, in central and eastern Europe, the main goal is often accreditation and funding. Many of these countries saw a significant growth in the number of private institutions and degree programmes. They have turned to evaluation to stem that growth and control it through a process that results in decisions regarding funding and accreditation (cf. Part A, 2.2.4 below).

Thus, in western Europe, evaluation agencies have generally been established, while in central and eastern Europe there are often evaluation AND accreditation agencies.

Both different types of legislation and evaluation procedures reflect these diverging goals (cf. Part B).

2.4 Framework and scope of the evaluation

When a country decides to conduct evaluations, there are several levels of decisions that need to be taken.

2.4.1 *The goals of the evaluation*

The first major decision to take concerns the goals of the evaluation. These goals can be improvement on the one hand, or control (accreditation or funding) on the other. Evaluation for the purpose of accreditation (or evaluation that results in decisions to fund or not, or to fund at a certain level) implies an ambitious evaluation programme that covers almost all institutions and almost all degree-granting programmes. While evaluation for the purpose of improvement leads to an evaluation schedule that can be less intense and requires fewer resources.

Furthermore, evaluations for the purpose of accreditation and funding result in different procedures. These will typically stress a range of indicators and require a summative judgement at the end. While evaluations for improvement will typically be more qualitative in nature and result in conclusions and recommendations.

2.4.2 *The types of evaluation*

The second major decision to take concerns the type of evaluation that could be chosen. There are two types of evaluation: institutional and programme level evaluations (for examples see Part A, 2.2.1 and 2.2.2) ².

Institutional evaluations can be of several sorts, but generally speaking, institutional evaluations emphasise the governance of an institution and its management - both financial and academic - and evaluate activities and their priorities.

Programme evaluations focus on one department, say sociology, and look at the teaching and learning.

2.4.3 *The scope of the evaluation*

Once the type of evaluation is established, it is important to define more precisely the scope of the evaluation. The question of scope is particularly crucial for institutional evaluations.

For institutional evaluations, it is essential to decide the aspects that will be taken into account. Theoretically, an evaluation could take into account all aspects of an institution and evaluate all its units, degree-granting programmes and activities; alternatively and more pragmatically, it usually focuses on some aspects of an institution - carefully selected to allow for meaningful conclusions.

2.4.4 *The boundaries of the evaluation*

In addition to defining the scope of an evaluation, it is important to also define its boundaries. This is a crucial issue for both programme and institutional evaluations. For programme evaluations, first, it is essential to take into account the institutional context and to look at the management links between the department and the wider institution of which it is part. Second, it is important to decide if comparison will play a role. That is, will all sociology departments be evaluated and compared or just one department evaluated?

² There can also be subject-based evaluations where all or almost all degree programmes in a discipline are evaluated to assess the national level of teaching and learning in one discipline.

In terms of boundaries, the institutional evaluations also present options. Will one institution or a group of institutions be evaluated? France, for instance, now looks at several institutions in a given region in order to determine the extent to which a region is well served by its cluster of institutions.

2.4.5 *The costs of the evaluation*

Ultimately, what is decided in terms of focus, scope and boundaries has to be related to the issue of cost and that of the purpose of the evaluation.

Evaluation costs include human and financial resources. The more ambitious the evaluation schemes are, the greater the costs in human and financial resources. In making decisions regarding costs and ultimately the type of evaluation to conduct, countries take into account the number of institutions they have, their available resources and what can be carried out on a practical level. In a country such as France for instance, which has 90 universities and over 300 higher education institutions, it would be too costly to conduct programme evaluations because they are so numerous. Therefore, the focus in France is on institutional evaluations, carefully focused on certain aspects of an institution. Alternatively, countries that have few institutions, could afford to study all programmes or all aspects of an institution.

2.4.6 *The evaluation method*

Almost invariably, international experience shows that the self-evaluation and the external expert review are the two methodological cornerstones of any successful evaluation procedure in higher education.

Self-evaluation is a most important procedure in evaluation for several reasons. First, it is a necessary step because only the professionals involved in the unit have detailed knowledge of its activities and operation. Second, it is those professionals who will have to implement the necessary changes for continuous improvement. Third, and closely related to the previous point, to motivate these professionals to make such changes, it is essential to give them a sense of ownership of the evaluation procedure to ensure that they feel the evaluation contributes to the quality of their own work. Finally, it is important to stress that a well-performed self-evaluation can be an invaluable experience in its own right which will allow the professionals involved to gain a renewed view of their work and ultimately to implement important quality improvements. In summary, a good self-evaluation phase is a necessary and, possibly, a sufficient condition to reach the improvement goal of an evaluation procedure.

Equally unchallenged is the notion that an external dimension needs to be added to evaluation procedures to insure that they meet their goals. With respect to the improvement goal, the informed outsiders' view given by an external expert team may help to keep the self-evaluation honest and critical. Moreover, the external experts can bring additional perspectives on opportunities and possibilities for improvement not thought of internally.

With respect to the accountability goal, an external dimension of the evaluation is even more necessary since it gives credibility to the evaluation procedure in the eyes of society. It does so by imparting additional authority to the conclusions of the self-evaluation.

Thus, it is important that the methodological choices to be made result in ensuring that the two steps - self-evaluation and external expert review - support each other.

The self-evaluation guidelines (see 1.4.7) should give the necessary structure to enable the external expert team to gather the needed information but should leave enough flexibility to enable both staff ownership and internal suggestions for improvement.

The external review should support both the improvement function of the self-evaluation and

the goal of accountability - the balance between these two goals having been decided beforehand. This depends partly on the details of the procedure, especially the requirements set for the report written by the external expert team. It also depends, for a large part, on the academic and social authority of the expert team members. Thus, depending on the aims of the evaluation procedure, the right mix must be found of representatives from the national (and international) higher education community as well as from other stakeholders in higher education (especially the profession, employers or graduates). Formal selection criteria may need to be adapted to each specific evaluation (e.g., in medicine or law, the inclusion of professionals in an external expert team is more important than in fundamental physics).

The procedural design of the external review should serve the purpose of supporting the experts in fulfilling their functions and ensuring “due process”, with opportunities for all stakeholders and all views to be taken into account.

The training of external experts is essential to develop the skills and attitudes needed. These include objectivity, fairness, courtesy, persistence, intuition, good humour and, above all, the desire to see that learning, research and scholarship reach high standards as a result of good teaching and management.

2.4.7 The evaluation guidelines

The purpose of the evaluation (whether improvement or a summative judgement), the type of the evaluation (whether just a programme or an institution), the scope of the evaluation (whether a whole institution or just some of its aspects), the boundaries of the evaluation (whether one or several programmes, one or several institutions) - these four levels of decision are important before proceeding to the next step, which is to establish guidelines for the specific evaluation at hand for both the self-evaluation and the external review processes. The guidelines of an evaluation have to take into account three or four contextual levels:

- the national context (type of institution, legal framework governing higher education),
- the institutional context (the type of institution, its mission and goals),
- the academic context (the academic culture),
- and finally, in the case of programme evaluations, the specific nature of the disciplines to be evaluated.

Thus, each evaluation requires that guidelines are revised and tailored to take into account these contexts in which the institution or programme operates.

In conclusion, in order to design an evaluation programme, several elements must be defined first:

- its aims must be clarified (e.g., improvement, accountability, control) as well as its possible links to funding;
- its approach must be rigorously defined, e.g., whether it is an institution, a programme or a discipline;
- its scope must be precisely identified in terms of the boundaries of the unit to be evaluated (e.g., a programme, a set of programmes, a faculty, an institution); in terms of its focus (e.g., teaching and learning, research activities, management); and in terms of its comparative or lack of comparative dimension (all or a few degree-granting programmes in a discipline);
- its framework must be contextualised to each national, institutional and academic context.

2.5 Evaluation and documentation

The purposes of collecting information in an evaluation procedure are to draw conclusions and make judgements founded on facts. Before starting to collect information for a specific

evaluation, however, the type of conclusions and judgements aimed for need to be clarified first. In particular, the difference in aims between control and improvement may have large consequences for the type of information to be sought out. The more the emphasis is on control and on consequences of a legal nature (e.g., official recognition/accreditation, or funding), the greater the focus on “hard data” such as formal staff qualifications or graduation percentages. While the more the emphasis is on improvement, the greater the focus on “soft data” such as students’ opinions about courses or peer judgement regarding the soundness of a curriculum (which, in turn, may also be based on “hard data”). In practice, evaluation procedures must find a balance between the broad aims of control and improvement, hence also a balance between “hard” and “soft” information.

Much depends on the actual methods used in evaluation. One can focus on input factors (e.g., teaching facilities, teachers’ formal qualifications), process factors (e.g., curricula, programme schedules) or output criteria (e.g., specific knowledge or skill levels required from graduates).

With respect to methods one can rely on a “paper exercise” by checking indicators (e.g., number of computer terminals per 100 students, number of library books lent per student per year, percentage of students passing examinations) or - much more commonly - one can rely on expert teams visiting the higher education institution/programme.

The mix of quality indicators and methods can turn the evaluation process into a bureaucratic exercise that hardly assures a quality threshold (e.g., a paper exercise of input factors) or, alternatively, into a process that not only assures the public of minimum quality but also induces the higher education institution or programme to strive for the highest possible quality in an innovative way. The latter, of course, is much more difficult and demanding for all parties involved than the former. A good example of practice is exemplified by the new approach of the US Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) with its Engineering Criteria 2000³.

The term “performance indicator” is often used synonymously with indicator. The term performance, however, points to selecting indicators of output of higher education units in terms of the unit’s goals, e.g., minimising student drop-out in the first years, minimising time to graduation, maximising the number of graduates relative to enrolment of the past x years, optimising the profile of the first job sought by graduates. Performance goals can also be set with respect to the educational process, e.g., maximising student satisfaction with courses, minimising the number of cancelled lectures and seminars.

Other indicators, not always directly linked to performance, can be (among many examples): the proportion of teaching staff with advanced qualifications, student-to-staff ratio (in full-time equivalents), the availability of learning resources for students (libraries or computer services), academic advising, cost per student (in full-time equivalents), income per student (in full-time equivalents).

In developing a set of indicators, the aim is to find a balance between measurability and relevance for drawing conclusions and making judgements. Measurability (“reliability”) is often the prime consideration in developing indicators. Relevance (“validity”) is less often taken into account sufficiently. What is the relationship between a single indicator and the concept of quality? Any indicator in itself measures a small aspect of quality and is often rather remote from that concept (e.g., the capacity of lecture rooms in relation to student numbers). How to combine indicators? Specifically, can different indicators be added? Do they multiply one another’s effect on quality? Are they of different importance (weight)? For these and other reasons, indicators are best viewed as signals that show where strengths and weaknesses can be found, as question marks for external review, not as quality judgements in and of themselves (cf. Part B, 2.1.3).

³ <http://www.abet.org/cac/cac2000.htm>

The alternative to focusing on measurable indicators is the *peer review*. In scientific fields, peer review is the basic method to judge scholarly and research work. Peer review can be used for evaluation in higher education in two ways, namely as a basis for indicators and as a method for judgement. First, results of a peer review such as decisions by editors to publish manuscripts, decisions by scholars to cite articles or decisions by research councils to support projects financially can be used to construe indicators. These indicators based on peer review are close to conceptions of quality - at least to academic conceptions of research quality - than most indicators, although that does not imply that they are necessarily better for an evaluation because that depends on the purpose of the evaluation. For example, in an evaluation of teaching and learning, staff research performance might be an indication of teachers' qualifications but need not be connected to the quality of student learning.

Second, peer review can be used as an evaluation method in itself. The well-known procedure of site visits relies on the idea that experts come to an institution to judge and form their own impression of its quality. Peer review judgements are considered to be highly valid because they are holistic in nature (not judgements of small aspects). On the downside, peer reviews remain subjective to a certain extent because even if they are based on objective indicators, a judgement is never the same as these indicators.

In practice, peer review, in a pure form, is never used in external evaluation of higher education. The peer review is based on the self-evaluation report which, itself, is founded on indicator-based information. Judgements should be compatible with the available indicators and peers should be very careful, even reluctant, to judge if indicators are not available as the basis for analysis.

Furthermore, the term "peer review" has to be used with caution: strictly speaking, peers are academics of the same discipline as the ones whose work they are going to judge. In practice, the external evaluators are chosen from a broad set of persons: they may be fellow academic leaders, educational experts, experts in evaluation, users of higher education such as employers or "experiential experts" such as students. For this reason, it is best to use the term (external) "expert review" while the principle and the validity of judgement remain the same as for the peer review in the strict sense of the word.

3 EUROPEAN EXPERIENCE FOR THE EVALUATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

3.1 Four basic principles

There are differences among countries already conducting evaluation but there are also common features that are part of the accepted international standards. These standards include four principles:

- Autonomy of the evaluation process from both government and institutions. This means that the agency in charge of the evaluation must be independent, as regards the methods and the outcomes, of both government and institutions (cf. Part B, 1 and 2).
- The self-evaluation is the first step in the evaluation process, and a very important step in initiating an internal process of evaluation. Through the self-evaluation report, the external review group gets a description and analysis of the institution. The report illuminates strengths and weaknesses within the general context of constraints and opportunities in which the institution operates (cf. Part B, 3.1).
- **The major aim of the external review visit is to enhance the positive effects of the self-**

evaluation. The external review group's functions are: to verify the content of the self-evaluation report, to give recommendations on areas that could be further developed, and to provide an opportunity for dialogue between evaluators and "evaluatees" that will strengthen the self-knowledge developed during the self-evaluation process (cf. Part B, 3.2).

- The external review group writes an evaluation report which is published. The major function of the report is to provide the institution and its major stakeholders with a written document that serves as a record of its present state and a foundation for future developments and improvements. In other words, the public report ensures that the institution is accountable to its stakeholders (but, for an alternative view, cf. Part B, 3.3).

These four principles - autonomy of the evaluation process, the self-evaluation, the external review, and the public report - are the international standards of quality evaluation worldwide.

3.2 Selected European experiences

The first three examples chosen here - the European Pilot Project, the CRE Institutional Review and the Phare Multi-Country Project Quality Assurance in Higher Education - were selected because they are the most ambitious programmes conducted in Europe in the recent past.

3.2.1 *The European Pilot Project*⁴

The pilot project involved evaluations conducted simultaneously in 17 countries and 46 institutions from November 1994 to June 1995. The evaluation process itself covered less than a year, and resulted in five to nine reports for each participating state: a self-evaluation and an evaluation report for each evaluated department and one national report for each state.

The main objectives of the project were to enhance awareness of the need for evaluation in higher education, enrich existing national evaluation procedures, further experience transfer, and impart a European dimension to evaluation. The pilot project was designed to achieve these aims by testing a common methodology while allowing for national interpretations.

It is important to stress that the project did neither aim at ranking departments in terms of their results, nor at establishing a system of government control in the participating states. Far from intending to create a single European evaluation system, the project aimed at developing in each participating state a culture of evaluation.

The project design, outlined in the Guidelines, rested on the four principles which were common to the four comprehensive evaluation systems in Europe at the time (Denmark, France, the Netherlands, United Kingdom), namely:

- autonomy and independence in terms of procedures and methods concerning quality evaluation both from government and from higher education institutions;
- self-evaluation;
- external evaluation by a peer review group (group of experts) and site visits;
- publication of a report.

The project focused on the evaluation of teaching and learning (and the impact of research activities on the educational process), in two broad subject areas - engineering sciences and communication/information sciences or art/design - in the university and non-university

⁴ European Commission, 1995, European Pilot Project for Evaluating Quality in Higher Education: European Report, Brussels: SOCRATES/European Commission

sectors. Each country - depending on its size and following criteria set by the European Commission - was asked to select two to four institutions in these two fields and two sectors.

At the conclusion of the project, it is possible to say that its goals have been reached. Although the focus of evaluation was relatively narrow, the realisation of this project - which was ambitious if only because of the number of countries involved - constituted a decisive step toward increasing the awareness of the need for evaluation in each participating state.

The implementation of the pilot project has shown that the four principles on which the method rested were sound and validated by all participating states:

- The autonomy of the evaluation process was guaranteed. It is important that each participating state establishes a national co-ordinating body which will ensure the legitimacy of the external review and prepare all aspects of an evaluation: the design, the planning, and the process of adapting the method to the specifications of the evaluation undertaken.
- It is clear that the self-evaluation process requires wide participation within a degree-granting programme or institution as well as a regular internal evaluation process based on ongoing data collection.
- A good external evaluation requires a competent and balanced external review group that includes academic and non-academic members; the participation of an international expert gives an added perspective. The external review group must be supported by a national co-ordinating body and a professional staff.
- The major purposes of the evaluation report are to identify strengths and weaknesses and suggest improvements. The final judgement should take into account the context and, particularly, the programme's (or institution's) stated mission and goals. The evaluation report must be published.

The implementation of these principles can vary as demonstrated by the significant differences among established evaluation systems. The project did not intend to design an evaluation model that would be generalised, as is, to all participating states. Several national reports emphasised that each country must design its own evaluation framework and that there should not be a single European evaluation model applicable everywhere.

3.2.2 The CRE Institutional Review

In 1993, following two conferences on the theme of *quality and evaluation*, the CRE Permanent Committee (the European Association of Universities) decided to offer its 500 member universities the opportunity to be reviewed to assess their strengths and weaknesses in the areas of quality and strategic management.

The CRE offers the institutional review as an external diagnostic tool which investigates the nodes and main actors in the university's daily decision-making processes as they relate to quality and strategic management. The review is meant as a tool for institutional leadership preparing for change. The CRE does not wish to provide the university with a blueprint for its development; rather the review is meant as a consultative process, an "external supportive review"⁵.

By reviewing institutions in different countries, the CRE also hopes to disseminate examples of good practice, validate common concepts of strategic thinking and elaborate shared references of quality that will help member universities to reorient their strategic development while strengthening a quality culture in Europe. During the review, the university is helped:

- to examine how it defines *long- and medium-term aims*;
- to look at the *external and internal constraints shaping its development*; and

⁵ Trow M., "Academic reviews and the culture of excellence", *Studies of Higher Education and Research*, 1994/2.

- to discuss *strategies to enhance its quality* - if quality is defined as the fit of means to purpose - while taking into account the constraints under which the institution operates.

A set of guidelines defines the structure of the process⁶. Since 1995, 10 to 15 universities a year, in western, central and eastern Europe participate in the programme⁷.

Starting from the general four-stage model (self-evaluation, external review, publication, follow-up), three elements are characteristic of the CRE institutional reviews.

First, it must be emphasised that the review does not concern the actual quality of education and research provided by the institution but concentrates on the quality control mechanisms set up by the institution (it is an *audit* as defined in Part A, 1.2). Indeed, the matter of quality is seen as a core value in higher education. The link between quality management and strategic management of the institution is made because CRE assumes that quality enhancement should play a crucial role in the strategic development of a university. Because of these aims, the CRE institutional reviews result in review reports that are tailored to the individual university's needs; they can neither be used for ranking nor for accreditation purposes.

Second, the CRE procedure is characterised by *two* visits of the review team to the university. In the first, *preliminary* visit, the emphasis is placed on the review team getting to understand the specific institution within the context of both its individual mission and particular situation. About three months later, the review team returns for the second and *final review* visit. The emphasis then is on evaluative questions which are phrased practically in the same way as the core questions in the Guidelines for the Pilot Evaluations of Higher Education Institutions of the Phare Multi-Country project (see Part C)⁸.

The third distinguishing characteristic of the CRE institutional review is that (since 1998) the CRE also offers the reviewed institution the opportunity to be involved in a follow-up stage after about three years. The purpose of such a *follow-up visit* depends on the individual university. It may wish to use this self-created "pressure" to keep the attention of actors within the university focused on the process of improvement in the areas of quality and strategic management. Alternatively, it can request reinforcement of the previous review's outcomes and further recommendations from a group of reviewers who, by then, have a good knowledge of the university's goals and situation.

Each individual institution's review results are presented in a review report. Because the process is focused on supporting the university's leadership, it is left up to the university to decide whether to publish the review report, although the CRE encourages universities to do so.

The CRE summarises the experiences in yearly public reports which focus on the general issues encountered during the reviews⁹.

3.2.3 The Phare Multi-Country Programme in Higher Education: Quality Assurance in Higher

⁶ Vught F.A. van and Westerheijden D.F., 1996 Institutional evaluation and management for quality: The CRE programme: Background, goals and procedures, *CRE-Action*, vol. 107, pp. 9 - 40.

⁷ Moreover, through CRE's co-operation with Latin American universities' association, the method has been piloted in Brazil in 1997 and 1998.

⁸ The core questions for both the CRE and the Phare Multi-Country project guidelines are based on the UK's Higher Education Quality Council's framework for institutional quality audit [HEQC, 1995, Notes for the guidance of auditors, London].

⁹ Barblan A., 1996, Institutional evaluation: Assessing the pilot phase, *CRE-Action*, vol. 107, pp. 55 - 73; Kanaan S., 1997, Institutional evaluation as tool for change, *CRE-Doc* No 3.

Education

The present Manual of Quality Assurance is one of the main products of the Phare Multi-Country Project: Quality Assurance in Higher Education. Implemented in 1997 - 1998, this project was the first multi-country evaluation experience that took place outside national quality assurance and accreditation procedures.

The project included a legislative review and needs analysis, seminars and training events and 28 pilot evaluations of institutions and programmes (in the fields of electrical engineering, economics and sociology) in 12 participating countries.

The methodological guidelines for the programme pilot evaluations were based on the European Pilot Project and for the institutional pilot evaluations on the CRE methodology (cf. Part C).

The major objectives of the project were to promote co-operation among countries of central and eastern Europe in the development of higher education quality assurance systems and ensure that there is compatibility between national developments and international standards of quality assurance.

At the time of writing this Manual, the project had not ended and the final conclusions and recommendations had not been drafted. It is fair to say, however, that dissemination of information has taken place and that there is increased awareness in participating countries of the need to distinguish between accreditation and evaluation procedures, better understanding of procedures in different countries, and more sensitivity to the role of the state in quality assurance procedures.

3.2.4 Accreditation in central and eastern Europe

In central and eastern Europe, interest in accreditation arose after the changes of 1989 - 1991. Since then, two major developments occurred to which accreditation was thought to be the answer. This section reviews these developments briefly and then turns to the question of whether accreditation is indeed "the answer" to these newly-created needs.

Higher education at the European level

After over 40 years of communist regimes, policy-makers and leaders in higher education institutions in the Phare countries were equally anxious to know where they stood in terms of quality level with respect to the "West". Contacts with western higher education had not been cut off completely in all countries but had been insufficient to be fully informed about the state of the art. Moreover, especially in the areas of the humanities (e.g., philosophy, history) and social sciences (e.g., sociology, political science, economics), radical curricular changes had to be made. Furthermore, new fields emerged in higher education such as business studies. Accreditation seemed to offer the possibility of ascertaining whether the new and reformed as well as the more or less unchanged curricula were at a "European level".

The rise of private higher education

After 1989, several factors caused the rise of private higher education institutions in many Phare countries where such private institutions were not prohibited by (new) laws:

- **Increased student demand for high-level education in new or radically reformed fields (e.g., business, law).**
- Quickly growing student demand for any type of higher education. Until 1990, the Phare countries had relatively low participation rates of young generations in higher education that made their higher education system elitist (i.e., less than 15 percent of each age cohort entered higher education; usually the percentages were in fact closer to 5 percent). The "massification" of higher education started immediately after 1990.

- Wages in the public sector - including public higher education institutions - deteriorated quickly in relation to rising market prices and rising wages in the private sector. Many academic staff in higher education institutions found teaching in the new private higher education institutions a necessary addition to their meagre income.

Teachers' qualifications, curricula, course literature and teaching facilities of these new private higher education institutions were not under the control of the laws that governed public higher education. In many Phare countries it was felt that lack of public control left students open to too low quality for their money - if not to fraud and deceit. Additionally, the proliferation of private higher education institutions made the situation for employers opaque: were graduates of private institutions of equal quality to those from public institutions? Again the answer to these questions was sought in accreditation.

*Accreditation: "An American in Europe"*¹⁰

The answer could not be sought in western Europe because, until at least the 1980s (and up to the foreseeable future in most countries), higher education was relatively tightly controlled by national governments. Accreditation is not a general practice in western Europe. It only has marginal importance, existing only in some countries for some professions (e.g., engineering) that require governmental or self-organisational licenses to practice.

Accreditation in higher education started in the United States of America around the turn of the 20th Century. It became the most systematic assurance of quality in the higher education system.

Professional accreditation is the accreditation of study programmes in certain areas of knowledge such as medicine, law, teaching or engineering. Professional accreditation is implemented by private agencies, owned by the profession in question, which work USA-wide. Professional accreditation bodies, however, do not exist for all types of higher education programmes, only for those with organised professional communities.

Institutional accreditation is a statement about a whole higher education institution and not about individual programmes. Strictly speaking, institutional accreditation does not imply that the study programmes at that higher education institution are of high quality. Rather, it means that it is a "legitimate" higher education institution with appropriate aims and governance structures which should ensure, amongst others, that it guards the quality of its programmes. As a rule, institutional accreditation is a precondition for professional accreditation. Institutional accreditation is implemented by non-governmental regional agencies. It covers public and private higher education institutions in the United States and is thus much more widespread than professional accreditation. There are, however, numerous, small, fringe, usually proprietary private higher education institutions that are not accredited. Moreover, in addition to accreditation, all federal States have the right to inspect their public higher education institutions.

It is from these US practices - often only half-way understood - that Phare countries took the idea of accreditation. Accreditation, therefore, is like Gershwin's "An American in Paris", albeit in a wider "European" context.

As indicated above, accreditation leads to summary statements about meeting or exceeding minimum standards. What accreditation can do for constituencies ("stakeholders") external to the higher education institutions or programmes is to give an assurance that a threshold of minimum quality is met or surpassed. In principle then both questions (the European level and private higher education above) with which Phare countries struggled after 1989 could be

¹⁰ A somewhat longer summary, under the same title, can be found in Westerheijden D.F. 1995, "Quality and accreditation in higher education: practices and possibilities in Europe", in Wnuk-Lipinska E and Wójcicka M. (Eds), Quality Review in Higher Education, Warsaw, TEPIŚ Publishing House.

answered through some process that could be called accreditation. It should be added, however, that the type and level of quality thresholds have to be chosen in what is essentially a political process. There is no such thing as a general European or international level of quality. Of course, a variety of international organisations have defined norms and criteria (e.g., European engineers, European veterinary medicine programmes) but these are not official norms prescribed by an imaginary higher authority.

Practice of accreditation in central and eastern Europe

How is the situation in the Phare countries? As of 1997 - 1998, almost all Phare countries have developed quality assurance mechanisms. In Albania, however, there are other priorities at the moment. The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is only now thinking of introducing quality assurance procedures. Other countries (e.g., Bulgaria, Poland) are still in the early stages of introducing accreditation and will not be included in this brief overview. Only Lithuania has introduced a quality assurance procedure that does not include accreditation explicitly.

In countries with established accreditation procedures it is difficult to conclude from official documents how they are working out in practice. Usually, accountability and recognition or accreditation are mentioned as well as improvement of quality, but the actual balance between these aims depends on the procedures and their consequences, on the external experts involved, and the way in which self-evaluation is performed and used within higher education institutions. The general impression is that there is a tendency in some countries (e.g., the Czech Republic, Romania) to emphasise input factors over both process and output factors and checking indicators rather than developmental aspects, while other countries (e.g., the Baltic States) seem to work more on the developmental aspects. Empirical research is needed, however, to make a more definitive statement regarding the actual impact of accreditation practices.

What does become clear from official documents, however, is that in contrast to the USA where accreditation started as a self-regulation of the higher education system, those Phare countries with accreditation procedures introduced them through government legislation. This primacy of legal national regulations is in keeping with the tradition of much of continental Europe and certainly of the previous 40 years.

The prime purpose of the new (post 1989/1991) legislation was to reinstate institutional autonomy. Quality assurance, often in the form of accreditation, was developed to safeguard minimum quality of the more autonomous higher education systems, including the private sector where this is allowed. Indeed, it seems that the expectation of Phare countries' governments regarding quality assurance is that it would allow a smooth transformation of higher education.

PART B

ORGANISATION OF EVALUATIONS

4 THE NATIONAL LEGAL CONTEXT

Different evaluation procedures require different legal systems. Furthermore, different regulations are called for depending on the institutional location of the evaluation agency. The following guidelines, however, should apply to most cases.

Government regulations - constitution, laws or ministerial regulations - could include:

- establishment of the need for evaluation in the higher education system, including the aims of evaluation (e.g., improvement or accreditation);
- recognition or recognition procedures of the evaluation agency or agencies;
- responsibility (both who and how) for the evaluation of the evaluations (meta-evaluation) in terms of their validity, effectiveness and results;
- possible consequences of the evaluation results (e.g., who is primarily responsible for quality improvement? who accredits institutions/programmes? what are the consequences in terms of state funding?)

In most cases, it is best if government regulations do not include details regarding procedures for both the internal and external evaluations as well as the composition of the evaluation teams so that the system remains flexible and is allowed to adapt to changing circumstances, new insights or goals.

The regulations that govern the evaluation agency (composition of boards and committees, etc.) and its functioning (evaluation procedures, frequency of the evaluation, etc.) can either be part of governmental regulations or left to the decision of the evaluation agency (under the supervision of the meta-evaluation agency).

The evaluation agency should make regulations for the following aspects of the evaluation procedures:

- guidelines for the self-evaluation process and the self-evaluation report;
- training provisions for self-evaluation and for external evaluators;
- composition of external evaluation teams;
- protocols for site visits by external evaluation teams (visiting programme proposals, roles of the chairpersons, secretaries and other team members, basic issues to be addressed during the site visits, expectations and limits with respect to hospitality/gifts, etc.);
- guidelines for the evaluation reports addressed to the external evaluation teams;
- rules about the acceptability of evaluation reports (including the possibility for comments or appeal by the evaluated units regarding facts or judgements);
- consequences of evaluation outcomes;
- publication of self-evaluation and external evaluation reports and of any other document made

during the evaluation procedure.

5 THE AGENCY

5.1 Human and financial resources

It is essential that the agency - which as stated earlier, is autonomous in terms of process and outcomes - has a budget that it can spend at it sees fit. In other words, while the budget comes from the government (sometimes through the Ministry of Education), the agency determines independently the evaluation schedule for the year, pays its permanent staff and meets the expenses associated with an evaluation: e.g., travel costs, experts' fees.

5.2 The tasks of the evaluation agency

The tasks of the evaluation agency could include:

- deciding on the institutions, faculties or disciplines to be evaluated;
- deciding on the focus of the evaluation and design of the guidelines;
- guiding the institution during the self-evaluation phase;
- selecting and briefing the external experts;
- selecting the types of group which will be involved in the external review site visit;
- defining the responsibilities of each external expert;
- giving the external review group all the background information and practical support they need;
- briefing the external review groups, just before they leave for the site visit;
- organising the practical aspects of the site visit;
- writing and publishing the final evaluation report.

6 THE EVALUATION PROCESS

6.1 Self-evaluation

The purposes of the self-evaluation are for the institution or programme to evaluate its own strengths and weaknesses and formulate suggestions for improvements. The self-evaluation is the key element in an external evaluation process.

The self-evaluation is conducted under the responsibility of the higher education institution's management: in programme evaluations, the relevant unit's leadership should be involved in the evaluation process while in institutional evaluations the institutional management holds the main responsibility for the internal review (for a definition of types of evaluation cf. Part A, 1.4.2).

6.1.1 Self-evaluation guidelines

To fulfil the objectives of the self-evaluation process it is important that the institution¹¹ work on the basis of self-evaluation guidelines which cover all appropriate themes and questions.

The self-evaluation guidelines can be of two types:

- The open type of guidelines which indicate the main aims and key questions to address, e.g., what are the goals of the institution? how are they met? what is the institution doing to improve? This type of guidelines leaves decisions on structure and specific content with the institution.
- Alternatively, the guidelines can specify precisely the questions and themes to be included in the self-evaluation report.

Regardless of the type of guidelines used, however, it is important that they result in an analytical and self-critical self-evaluation report. In other words the questions should be formulated in such a way as to elicit an analysis rather than simply a description.

It is also essential that the self-evaluation report both leads to the initiation of internal processes of quality improvement and provides the external experts with the necessary information to carry out an external review.

6.1.2 The self-evaluation team

The self-evaluation should be prepared under the responsibility of a self-evaluation team which includes representatives of the area under evaluation: management, staff (permanent and part-time, academic, technical and administrative) and students to ensure that the self-evaluation reflects the observations of all those involved. The chair person of the self-evaluation team need not necessarily be the head of the institution or one of his/her deputies.

It is unfortunate that the administrative staff is often overlooked in the self-evaluation phase. However, since they are responsible for both central support functions and data collection, they should be involved in the self-evaluation process to assist in interpreting the quantitative data.

¹¹ This section refers almost always to institution because it would have been too cumbersome to always refer to institutions and programmes. Only when there is a difference in procedures between the two type of evaluation will it refer specifically to one or the other.

Generally speaking, it is important to involve as many staff and student representatives as possible which will consequently assure a sense of ownership and a commitment to bring about changes suggested in both the self-evaluation and the final evaluation reports. Their involvement could take place during an open hour where students and staff would be invited to comment on a draft self-evaluation report or through surveys which will be included in the report.

6.1.3 Quantitative data

Typically, the main emphasis in the self-evaluation guidelines is on the qualitative analysis. The self-evaluation, however, should also include sets of quantitative data such as enrolment, drop-out rates, average study time, staff numbers, international exchange, etc., to provide an overview of the size and activity of the institution. Furthermore, it is of the utmost importance that the institutions themselves take the results of these data into account in planning their various activities.

Indicators, however, should be interpreted with care as their meaning is often ambiguous (cf. Part A, 1.4). It can be misleading to believe that indicators necessarily reflect quality. Failure rate is an example of a relevant indicator for the analysis of an institution's effectiveness that, in itself, does not reflect quality. A low failure rate can indicate a low academic level (low quality) or highly effective student support (high quality). Alternatively a high failure rate can indicate that only the most qualified students pass (high quality) or that the institution has not developed sufficient student support (low quality). Therefore, it is necessary to interpret the quantitative data within the context of the institution and specifically its goals and objectives.

To avoid misinterpreting the quantitative data, the guidelines should define clearly how these data should be presented. If an institution is unable to present the data according to these definitions, it should explain how the calculations are done. Furthermore, the quantitative data should be integrated in the guidelines instead of being relegated to the appendices. This provides the institution with the opportunity to analyse the quantitative data itself and explain the results within the relevant context. For the same reason, it will require the experts to interpret the quantitative data in light of the qualitative context.

6.1.4 Training in self-evaluation

When self-evaluation is introduced at an institution, it is useful if the evaluation agency offers training to the participants and if participants meet with evaluation experts or representatives of the national agency responsible for the evaluation process to understand the focus and scope of the evaluation. The meetings and training will typically review the self-evaluation guidelines and examples of good practice in the self-evaluation process.

6.1.5 The duration of the self-evaluation process and length of the self-evaluation report

Ideally, an institution should be given a minimum of three months to carry out the self-evaluation. There should be sufficient time to conduct internal discussions about both the guidelines and the draft report. The self-evaluation process, however, should not exceed six months to ensure the relevance of the information and argumentation at the time of both the site visit and the external review report. As a general rule, the whole evaluation process (external and internal) should fit within the academic year.

It is advisable that the guidelines indicate the maximum length of the self-evaluation report and clarify what type of supplementary information is needed.

6.1.6 Language

When international experts with no mastery of the national language are involved, it is best that the self-evaluation be conducted in the experts' working language. The institution could either write the self-evaluation report in that language or have it translated from the national

language.

When working in a foreign language, however, three issues need consideration:

- If the report is written in a foreign language, the author should be selected carefully as problems of overconfidence in language mastery could lead to poor reports.
- If the report is translated from the native language, it is not enough that the translator has mastery of the foreign language; he or she should also be knowledgeable about higher education and evaluation as well as the academic field in case of programme evaluations.
- If the evaluation process (self-evaluation, site visit and final report) cannot be conducted in the native language, there is a risk that participants will not be able to express their opinions as well as if the evaluation were carried out in the native language, thus endangering the internal ownership process and the quality of the evaluation.

6.1.7 The status of the report

Last but not least, the agency should decide whether the self-evaluation report is public or to be used only by the external experts. Confidential self-evaluation reports tend to be more self-critical and analytical while public reports provide higher education users (e.g., students, employers) and other higher education institutions with valuable information.

The self-evaluation report is prepared by the self-evaluation team. Before sending it to the experts, however, the institutional management should have the opportunity to read and sign it. The purpose of the signing procedure is not to make sure that management agrees with the content of the report - which is the responsibility of the self-evaluation team - but rather to provide proof that the report has been prepared with the knowledge and under approval of the management who is formally responsible for all activities taking place in the institution.

6.1.8 In conclusion, a good self-evaluation process requires:

- guidelines for self-evaluation enabling the institution to prepare an analytical and self-critical self-evaluation report;
- a self-evaluation team with representatives of the institution's key stakeholders;
- sufficient time to prepare an analytical report which has been discussed internally.

6.2 The external evaluation

A team of external experts is responsible for carrying out the site visit and drafting the evaluation report. The external experts' responsibilities are to verify the content of the self-evaluation report, establish a dialogue with the institution, form an opinion on the area under evaluation and make recommendations for improvements.

Two decisions are crucial in connection with the appointment of external experts: the definition of an expert and whether international experts should be used.

6.2.1 The definition of external experts

In the evaluation terminology, the term peer review is often used to describe the involvement of external experts in the evaluation process (cf. Part A, 1.4). The peer concept implies that the evaluation is done by someone with the same level of knowledge as those being evaluated (e.g., professors evaluating professors). Thus, in higher education, peers are academic and management staff from other institutions.

Depending on the area under evaluation, however, a group representing several rather than one profession could be used. For instance, in programme evaluations, representatives from employers, educational experts (e.g., in didactic, management or quality assurance) are often

used as experts together with academic peers because it is felt that the wide range of qualifications will lead to better analysis of all aspects of a programme. In institutional evaluations, experts typically hold (or have held) senior management positions in higher education (e.g., rectors, vice-rectors, deans, administrative directors).

6.2.2 International external experts

The external expert team can comprise both international and national experts. It is almost always an advantage to include national experts to assure a thorough knowledge of the higher education system and of the national situation of the particular field to be evaluated. International external experts bring with them more independence from the institution, especially in countries whose higher education sector is fairly small or in cases where the programme under review is represented at only a few national institutions. They also come with a greater degree of objectivity, having no pre-conceived notions regarding the specific institution to be evaluated. Countries just introducing evaluation procedures, might want to turn to international external experts with good evaluation experience to ensure that good practices are followed.

The disadvantage of using international external experts is that they lack in-depth knowledge of the higher education system and thus have difficulties understanding the political and institutional context of the evaluation. Therefore, a thorough briefing of international experts is necessary. To overcome this problem, some countries have turned to nationals who live abroad and who have all the advantages of international experts (independence and objectivity) with more in-depth knowledge of the national higher education system and often national language mastery.

As mentioned above, the use of international experts implies that the self-evaluation has to be prepared in the international expert(s)'s language and that the site visit will either be conducted in the foreign language or in the presence of interpreters. This is another consideration to take into account (along with the costs of international travel and interpretation/translation services) when considering the use of international experts.

6.2.3 Appointment of experts

The experts can either be appointed for a specific evaluation or a permanent corps of experts can be established for a pre-defined period and used for more than one evaluation.

The external expert team should be presided by a chairperson who is responsible for the team's work and chairs the meetings at the site visit.

A secretary is, at a minimum, responsible for taking notes during the site visit and drafting the evaluation report. The secretary can be either one of the external experts or an agency staff member.

Training and briefing of experts is necessary. The external experts need information on the purposes of the evaluation and the expectations regarding their work.

In sum, a good expert team requires that:

- the experts are independent of the institution under review;
- the experts are respected by the institution under review;
- the expert team's skills cover all key aspects of the area of evaluation;
- there are clear definitions of the tasks of chairpersons and secretaries.

6.2.4 Site visit

The site visit takes place after the self-evaluation report is available. The purpose of the site visit is to allow the experts to get a comprehensive and clear view of the institution through

discussions and interviews with the institution's stakeholders and to clarify unclear aspects of the self-evaluation report in order to prepare recommendations. Prior to that, the experts meet once or twice to prepare for the site visit.

6.2.5 Preparation for the site visit

Before meeting as a group, each expert should examine carefully the self-evaluation report to determine the aims and goals of the institution, whether and how they are met, if strengths and weaknesses are clearly stated, and if there is any missing information.

The first meeting of the expert group is also the first opportunity for the experts to work together as a team. Two important themes must be discussed at this meeting:

- The self-evaluation report and the framework of questions that need to be asked. These questions will structure the interviews and discussions during the site visit.
- The practical aspects of the site visit: the programme for the site visit is drafted and sent to the institution for comments a month before the visit is scheduled. The institution is responsible for planning the site visit, e.g., inviting the relevant participants in accordance with the experts' wishes, booking the necessary rooms and briefing the participants on the purposes of the evaluation and the site visit.

6.2.6 Length of the visit

Both the length of the visit and the types of groups that are relevant for the experts to meet depend on the type and purpose of the evaluation as well as the size and complexity of the institution or programme under review. For programme evaluations, site visits typically span from one to two days while for institutional evaluations, they can last from two and a half to five days.

Regardless of the type of evaluation, the experts meet, at a minimum, the rector and senior management, the self-evaluation team, staff representatives (permanent and part-time, academic, administrative and technical) and students. Furthermore, it can be relevant to interview academic counsellors and members of various committees (e.g., examination, curriculum, finance).

The visit should be rounded off with a final meeting with the institutional management. The purpose of the meeting can be either to discuss or clarify issues which arose during the visit or to present an oral report on the provisional findings of the expert team. If the latter option is selected, it is important that the experts have sufficient time during the visit to agree on the main issues of the oral report as it is of the utmost importance that the conclusions presented will not be changed when the evaluation report is written.

The self-evaluation report and the site visit constitute the two critical phases in an evaluation process. Therefore, the quality of these two phases has a major impact on the quality of the evaluation report and the evaluation process. The site visit is the only opportunity for the experts to enter into a dialogue with the institution. Therefore, a successful site visit is of the utmost importance.

A successful site visit requires that:

- the experts have agreed on a division of labour;
- the team is well prepared and has read thoroughly the self-evaluation report;
- the experts ask open and non-rhetorical questions;
- the institutional representatives are given the opportunity to express their opinion - the experts are there to listen and learn.

6.3 Evaluation report

It is a good idea if the experts prepare the evaluation report as soon as possible after the site visit to ensure that impressions are still fresh in their minds. This can either be done at a meeting following the visit or through the circulation of notes on important conclusions and recommendations. It is of vital importance that both the chairperson and the secretary have a clear impression of the team's opinion and judgement when drafting the report.

The structure and content of the report can vary. As a rule, however, it is necessary that the report contains precisely formulated, substantiated and operational conclusions and recommendations for improving quality to enable the institution to prepare for the follow-up activities. Furthermore, the report should reflect the self-evaluation and emphasise strengths and weaknesses.

The institution should be given the opportunity to comment on the report and correct factual errors before it is finalised by the experts.

A decision must be taken regarding the publication of the report. In most established evaluation procedures, the evaluation report is public since it contains a great deal of information valuable not only to the institution itself but also to external stakeholders (e.g., government, potential students, employers). Furthermore, the report can be used to promote the institution and show it is ready to change.

The argument against public reports is that experts might be more guarded in their evaluation of weaknesses and less explicit in their formulations. Furthermore, in a very competitive market, it can be detrimental for the institution to publicise its weaknesses while others can copy its strengths.

A good report has the following characteristics:

- it is based on a thorough analysis of the self-evaluation report and the results from the site visit;
- it contains precise, operational and unambiguous recommendations;
- it constitutes a good starting point for follow-up activities.

6.4 Follow-up

The external evaluation process is officially brought to a close with the evaluation report. The main responsibility for the follow-up rests with the institution. Very few countries with systematic national evaluation procedures have initiated follow-up procedures. The examples include Denmark which has introduced a Ministerial order for follow-up, the Netherlands where the Inspectorate evaluates the quality of the evaluations (meta-evaluation), and Sweden where the University Chancellor visits the institution a year after the publication of the evaluation report to discuss with management the follow-up measures and the effects of the evaluation. It could be argued, however, that it is just as important to set up follow-up procedures as it is to set up an evaluation process.

A number of criteria are important to initiate follow-up procedures at the institution:

- If the evaluation process - both internal and external - is considered by the institution to have been successful and relevant, the institution tends to be more willing to improve weaknesses identified in the evaluation process.
- It is essential that no doubt lingers as to who is responsible for the follow-up. In most cases, it is appropriate that management takes the lead in initiating follow-up activities. If the staff, as have been stressed, has been involved in the evaluation process, they will be more committed to participate actively in the implementation of improvements. As mentioned earlier, the main purpose of the self-evaluation process is to initiate internal processes of quality improvement at the institution. If this objective is fulfilled, there will be considerable overlap between the recommendations of the self-evaluation and the evaluation report.

First and foremost, however, it is important that the status of the evaluation report is clarified at the start of the evaluation, i.e., what will be the consequences of the evaluation process?

does the institution have to follow the solutions suggested by the experts to remedy identified weaknesses or can it choose other solutions and thus use the report as a source of inspiration for possible solutions for improvements? are there sanctions tied to the process (e.g., funding consequences)? These questions not only have an influence on the follow-up but also on the evaluation process as a whole.

7. GUIDELINES FOR THE PILOT EVALUATIONS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

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INTRODUCTION

Background to the pilot evaluations

The main objectives of the pilot evaluations are:

- to enhance awareness of the need for evaluation in higher education;
- to contribute to the development of evaluation systems or enrich existing ones;
- to further experience, transfer and impart a European dimension to evaluation.

The pilot evaluations are designed to achieve these aims by testing a common methodology while allowing for national interpretations. The evaluations are meant to be a learning process in each country.

It is important to stress that the pilot evaluations do not aim at ranking institutions in terms of their results, nor at accrediting degrees or institutions. Far from intending to create a single European evaluation system, the pilot evaluations aim at developing in each participating State a culture of evaluation which reflects the circumstances and traditions of that country.

The design of the pilot evaluations outlined in these Guidelines, draws on three sets of experience: the experience of European countries with established evaluation systems, the results from the European Pilot Project for Evaluating Quality in Higher Education which took place in 1995 and which involved 17 countries (European Union Member-States and EEA) and the ongoing CRE (Association of European Universities) Institutional Review Programme.

The four principles at the foundation of these Guidelines are:

- autonomy and independence in terms of procedures and methods concerning evaluation both from government and from higher education institutions;
- self-evaluation;
- external evaluation by a group of external experts (the external evaluation group) and site visits;
- publication of a report.

Definition of the unit of evaluation

As opposed to an institutional evaluation which takes into account a higher education establishment as a whole, this section of the Guidelines focuses on the evaluation of a unit. A “unit” refers to a semi-autonomous, degree-granting structure, housed within a larger establishment to which it is accountable. Depending on the country, this unit is called a programme, a department, an institute, etc. The major purpose of the evaluation is to bring improvements to the quality of teaching and learning. Therefore it is the teaching and learning activities which constitute the foci of the evaluation.

Summary of the Phare Multi-Country pilot evaluations

Below is a brief summary of the three phases of the evaluation process.

1. Self-evaluation

The self-evaluation is the first step in the process. It is undertaken by the staff of the unit to be evaluated. Through the self-evaluation report, the external evaluation group (cf. 2) will get a description and analysis of the unit. A good self-evaluation illuminates strengths and weaknesses within the general context of constraints and opportunities in which the unit operates.

Through a specific action plan, widely discussed internally, it will encourage the unit to think of ways to implement change and introduce quality control mechanisms for ongoing improvement and strategic planning and development.

The ultimate purpose of the self-evaluation is to encourage all members of a unit to think that each of them is responsible for the quality and for the improvements introduced.

2. External evaluation

The major aim of the external evaluation visit is to enhance the positive effects of the self-evaluation. The external evaluation group's functions are: to verify the content of the self-evaluation report, to give recommendations on areas that could be further developed and to provide an opportunity for dialogue between evaluators and "evaluatees" that will strengthen the self-knowledge developed during the self-evaluation process.

The visit will take two days and one half. The external experts will be selected on the basis of their knowledge and experience in the discipline and/or evaluation, and whenever possible, according to their knowledge of the country's higher education system and foreign language skills.

The composition of the external evaluation group may vary depending on national circumstances. Ideally, however, it will include one expert in the discipline, from each of the following categories: within the country; another Phare country; a European Union country, but with evaluation experience; another Phare country, but with evaluation experience. In addition, each team will be accompanied by a consortium expert.

3. Evaluation report

The external evaluation group will write an evaluation report which will be sent to the unit to correct any factual errors. Once this is done, the report becomes a public document. The major function of the report is to provide the unit and its major stakeholders with a written document that serves as a record of its present state and a foundation for future developments and improvements.

SELF-EVALUATION

As the first step in the evaluation process, the self-evaluation has three major purposes:

- to present a succinct, but comprehensive statement of the unit's view of its teaching and learning within its institutional context, taking into account the impact of research activities on the educational process;
- to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the unit and to propose an action plan;
- to provide a framework against which the unit will be assessed by the external evaluation groups.

The self-evaluation will result in a report, one of the key documents along with the external evaluation report. The self-evaluation report is the main vehicle for the unit to convey information about itself. But equally, and perhaps even more importantly, it is the place for a critical reflection of the unit about the way it manages itself and it handles quality as a central value in its strategic decision-making.

Therefore, the self-evaluation report should not be only descriptive, but needs to be *evaluative and synthetic*, that is, it should evaluate strengths and weaknesses in the context of constraints and opportunities and show the interconnectedness of the various elements of strategic planning and quality management. In addition, the analysis should take into account the changes that have taken place in the recent past as well as those that are anticipated in the future.

1. The self-evaluation team

To ensure the success of the self-evaluation, it is important that a group be created which represents a broad view of the unit rather than the partial view of its management.

The following characteristics are desirable:

- its members are in a good position to judge strengths and weaknesses;
- the group is fairly small (3 - 5) to ensure that it is efficient;
- the group represents the major constituencies in the unit (academic staff, students, and administrative staff) to maximise involvement of all major stakeholders;
- the group will select a secretary who will write the report under the chairperson's responsibility (cf. below).

The group will be led by a chairperson whose responsibilities include:

- plan and co-ordinate the work of the self-evaluation group: e.g., tailor the checklist (cf. 2 and 3) to the national context and the particular subject area, gather and analyse the data;
- provide opportunities for a broad discussion of the self-evaluation within the unit to promote a broad identification with the report;
- act as a contact person with the external evaluation group, with the country contacts established by the project consortium, and with the Management Group of the Phare Multi-Country Project.

The leadership of the unit will:

- clarify the responsibility of the self-evaluation team towards staff members who are not on the team, i.e., the self-evaluation team should not work in isolation but seek, through unit-wide discussions, to present as broad a view as possible of the unit;
- support and spur the process along by explaining its worth and allaying fears.

2. Purpose and handling of the checklist

Although the pilot evaluations do not aim to establish comparisons among the units assessed, it will be important to receive comparable self-evaluation reports from the various institutions in order to compare the implementation of the methodology. The checklist was developed to help achieve this particular objective.

Since this checklist will be used both for the self-evaluation and the external evaluation, it is important that all points on the list be addressed. If some questions are not relevant or if specific pieces of information are impossible to provide, this should be noted in relation to the questions. As a general rule, an answer or comment should be given to all questions.

It is expected that each question will be interpreted and assessed bearing in mind the characteristics of the national system and of the institution concerned. Therefore, it might be helpful that before the self-evaluation team starts its work, it meets with some members of their national networks and the country liaison to tailor the checklist to their national context and to the specific subject area.

Every item of the self-evaluation will consist of both a description and analysis including comments on how the unit plans to remedy problems identified. Facts and evaluations will be verified by the external evaluation group at a later stage.

The general context for the analysis, both at the self-evaluation and at the external evaluation stage, will be the extent to which the unit's mission and goals have been met.

3. The checklist

3.1. National context

Brief overview of the national education system for the benefit of the international members of the external evaluation group (e.g., number and type of institutions, relationship with the state, funding).

3.2. Institutional context

- **Brief presentation of the institution¹² (e.g., brief historical overview, size, number of faculties).**
- Brief description of the institutional management structure, role and function of the rector and deans as well as the committees (committees, councils, etc.), decision-making process. Please include an organisation chart if available.
- Organisational structure and position of the unit within the overall institutional structure.
- Brief description of the unit's management structure, role and function of the unit's decision-making bodies (committees, councils, etc.), decision-making process, funding principles and impact on quality. Please include an organisation chart if available.
- Procedure and criteria for:
 - appointment of staff to the university
 - conferment of doctorates

¹²The institution refers to the wider establishment of which the unit is part.

- *Identify the extent to which the aims, objectives and priorities at the institutional level are in synergy with those at the programme (or faculty) level.*

3.3. Aims and objectives

Description of the aims and objectives of the unit with respect to teaching and learning in the context of:

- national objectives
- institutional missions and goals.

3.4. Programme

a] Organisation of the programme

- Study structure (degrees and levels)
- Educational requirements: what is the balance between specialist and general education requirements, required and optional courses, theoretical and practical courses, discipline-based and multidisciplinary courses? Is the curricular structure consistent with the aims and objectives of the unit?
- What are the academic principles guiding decisions regarding curricular content (e.g., produce well-rounded students or specialists)? How often is curricular content reviewed? What are the major changes brought to the curricular content in the past 5 years? And for what reasons?
- *Identify strengths and weaknesses*
- *Proposed action plan to remedy weaknesses and to develop strengths further.*

b] Teaching and learning practice

- Teaching methods applied (e.g., lectures, seminars, laboratories): description, justification for the choices made and analysis
- Overview and evaluation of research activities
- Impact of professors' research and scholarly activities (e.g., attending conferences, involvement in research peer review) on teaching
- Study skills courses (e.g., learning note taking, learning how to learn, critical thinking)
- Encouragement of independent (individual work) and team learning (group work)
- *Identify strengths and weaknesses*
- *Proposed action plan to remedy weaknesses and to develop strengths further.*

c] Evaluation of students

- Assessment methods used (examinations about multidisciplinary/disciplinary knowledge, written/oral examinations, etc.): description, justification for the choices made and analysis
- Frequency of assessment (continuous assessment/end of term examinations only): description, justification for the choices made and analysis

- Responsibility for setting the level and standards for the assessment (institution/national authority/etc.)
- Responsibility for the content of the examinations and other forms of assessment
- *Identify strengths and weaknesses*
- *Proposed action plan to remedy weaknesses and to develop strengths further.*

3.5. Students

a] **Quantitative data over a three- to five-year period to analyse trends. Moreover, please specify if these are full or part-time students: these data should be placed in an appendix:**

- Admission data: ratio of applicants to admitted students, ratio of admitted to enrolled students
- Total number of students in the unit
- Composition of student body (e.g., number of first-year students; breakdown: men/women, national/ international students or any other relevant category)
- Period of study of the student population (how many years to graduation)
- Drop-out and completion rate
- Average study time (how much time does a student devote to studying per week)
- Average study load (how many classes a student takes during the year)
- Success in gaining employment (e.g., how many graduates (graduates mean students who have earned a degree) have obtained employment within 6 months, within 12 months; how many are employed in their fields).

b] **These data are significant only if they are interpreted in the national and institutional context. No comparison with other countries will be done. Please *analyse* the quantitative data and explain it in relation to the qualitative data with the ultimate goal that the interpretation of the quantitative data support the analysis of strengths and weaknesses.**

Issues that could be *analysed* include:

- Number of students in relation to number of academic and administrative staff
- How the composition of the student population (e.g., number of first-year students; breakdown: men/women, national/international students or any other relevant category) fits with the stated mission of the unit and with national educational goals
- Drop-out and completion rate compared with national averages
- Entrance requirements and admission criteria in the context of the unit's mission and national goals
- *Identify strengths and weaknesses*
- *Proposed action plan to remedy weaknesses and to develop strengths further.*

3.6. Academic and administrative staff

a] **Quantitative data over a three- to five-year period to analyse trends. These data should be placed in an appendix:**

- Total number of staff in the unit
- Composition of staff (teaching, research, administrative, technical, etc.)
- Breakdown of staff by other criteria (grade, men/women, etc.)
- Breakdown between full/part time staff
- Unfilled appointment

b] **These data are significant only if they are interpreted in the national and institutional context. No comparison with other countries will be done. Please *analyse* the quantitative data and explain it in relation to the qualitative data with the ultimate goal that the interpretation of the quantitative data support the analysis of strengths and weaknesses.**

Questions that could be answered include:

- Does the unit have an adequate number of academic and administrative staff for the number of students enrolled?
- Do the staff have the qualifications needed to carry out the aims and objectives of the unit?
- Is staff work load adequate to carry out their duties?
- Does the proportion of full-time staff allow the unit to meet its stated mission?
- Policies with respect to staff recruitment, renewal, training and promotion
- Special problems with respect to staff which affect the teaching programme
- *Identify strengths and weaknesses*
- *Proposed action plan to remedy weaknesses and to develop strengths further.*

3.7. Libraries, instructional resources and technology

- Are libraries and instructional facilities (e.g., computer resources, laboratories) adequately staffed in terms of staff number and their qualifications? Do they have an adequate budget to support the unit's mission? Are they organised to enhance students' use (e.g., access, reference and information resources, technical support)? Are library holdings and laboratory equipment appropriate for the size and the breadth of the unit? How are decisions regarding new library acquisitions and laboratory equipment taken?
- Lecture halls and classrooms: are the number, size, and condition of lecture halls and classrooms adequate?
- Accessibility of learning resources for students (study centre, computer centre, etc.)
- *Identify strengths and weaknesses*
- *Proposed action plan to remedy weaknesses and to develop strengths further.*

3.8. External relationships

a] **Exchange programmes**

- Ties with industry, commerce, government agencies and professional bodies (e.g., associations) in the context of the unit's mission and goals
- Ties with similar units nationally and internationally in the context of the unit's mission and goals
- Participation in ERASMUS or other European exchange programmes such as Phare and Tempus (supporting quantitative data over a three-year period to be placed in an appendix):
 - foreign students enrolled in the unit for a period of at least three months, with a breakdown by country of origin;
 - national students who studied abroad for a period of at least three months with a breakdown by host country)
- *Identify strengths and weaknesses*
- *Proposed action plan to remedy weaknesses and to develop strengths further.*

b] International aspects of the programme

- International dimension of the curriculum (e.g., comparative studies, international subjects, cultural area studies)
- Use of foreign literature in translation and in the language of origin
- Courses taught in other than the national languages
- *Identify strengths and weaknesses*
- *Proposed action plan to remedy weaknesses and to develop strengths further.*

3.9. Quality management

- Procedures for monitoring student and graduate progress
- Policy for staff contact hours
- Procedure for evaluating teaching, including students' involvement in the evaluation of teaching, follow-up procedures
- Procedure and responsibility for curricular innovation
- Results of any recent student and employer satisfaction surveys
- Effectiveness of liaisons between the unit and institution-wide services
- Student support services (advising, counselling, tutoring, remediation)
- Student access to reasonable appeal procedures if they fail
- *Identify strengths and weaknesses*
- *Proposed action plan to remedy weaknesses and to develop strengths further.*

4. The self-evaluation report

- By way of an introduction, the unit is asked to explain the way the self-evaluation process was performed: who were the self-evaluation team members? With whom in the unit did they collaborate? To what extent was the report discussed? What were the positive elements and the difficulties encountered in the self-evaluation process?
- The body of the self-evaluation report will follow the checklist headings 1 through 9. Throughout, the report will strive to strike a balance between description and analysis. The starting point of the analysis is the unit's mission and goals; it is against these that the unit will be assessed. The description will be used to substantiate the analysis. The analysis will illuminate the strengths and weaknesses for each heading.
- The conclusion will analyse the strengths and weaknesses and will offer a specific action plan to remedy weaknesses and to develop strengths further.

A useful conclusion has the following characteristics:

- since the goal of an evaluation is to promote ongoing quality improvement it is advantageous to be as open and as self-reflective as possible. Therefore, strengths and weaknesses need to be stated explicitly; specifically, it is advantageous to avoid de-emphasising or hiding weaknesses;
- strengths and weaknesses that are not discussed in the body of the report should not suddenly appear in the conclusion because they will be unsubstantiated and will transform the conclusion into a lobbying effort on the part of department;
- strengths and weaknesses that are discussed in the main part of the report will be addressed again in the conclusion;
- plans to remedy weaknesses will be offered in the conclusion in the form of action plans.
- The maximum length of the self-evaluation report is 20 - 25 pages excluding the data appendices and other possible appendices.
- The self-evaluation report is partly written for an internal audience (the unit's staff members and the students) and partly for the external evaluation group. The external evaluation group is knowledgeable about higher education and higher education management but some of them are foreigners, without in-depth knowledge of higher education in your country. Units should keep this fact in mind when writing their report.
- The self-evaluation report should be read and signed by the institution's management before sending it to the experts to ensure that they have seen it.
- The self-evaluation report should be made available to all participants of the meetings that will take place during the site visit.
- The report should be written in the national language, with English translation provided. The report should be sent to the Country Liaison Expert and QSC (in the national language and in English)
- It is of the utmost importance to the running of the project and especially the site visits that deadlines are respected by all parties involved in the project. The major reason for this tight schedule (which is a standard procedure world wide) is that there should be no more than three to four months between the self-evaluation and the external evaluation visit because institutions change overtime.

THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION

Most evaluation systems are based on both a self-evaluation and an external review. After the completion of the self-evaluation report, a group of external experts will undertake a site visit of each participating unit. Its assignment is defined as follows:

- to form an opinion about the quality of the programme (e.g., the educational process, the curricula, and the students) on the basis of the self-evaluation report and by means of discussions held on site;
- to form an opinion on the relationship between the unit and its home institution and consider the links between teaching and research;
- to make recommendations to improve the quality of teaching.

1. The selection of the external experts

The external experts will be selected on the basis of their knowledge and experience in the discipline and/or evaluation, and whenever possible, according to their knowledge of the country's higher education system and foreign language skills.

Selected experts will undertake at least two evaluations in different Phare countries in order to ensure the multi-country context of the evaluation.

The composition of the external expert team may vary depending on national circumstances. Ideally, however, it will include one expert in the discipline, from each of the following categories:

- within the country
- another Phare country;
- an European Union country, but with evaluation experience;
- another Phare country, but with evaluation experience.

Each team will be accompanied by a Consortium expert (usually the Country Liaison Expert) to provide advice (to the evaluation team and the evaluatees), facilitate the process where necessary and to evaluate the process.

2. The preparation for the visit

The chair and the secretary of the team will be identified from within the external expert team:

- The chair is responsible for the division of labour among the external expert team, decision regarding who will chair which meeting, structure of the discussion, keeping to the schedule, and supervising the secretary.
- The chair will be in contact with the Country Liaison Expert should any problem arise.
- Under the supervision of the chair, the secretary is responsible for organising the work of the external expert group (e.g., liaison with the unit, programme of the site visit), taking notes of all meetings during the site visit and writing the report.

The members of the external expert teams will be appointed by the Project Management Group, on the basis of nominations put forward by the Phare countries and the consortium experts.

The primary objective of the site visit is to discuss with a large number of stakeholders - i.e., institutional management, administration, staff, students - the self-evaluation report and the analysis it presents of the unit under review.

Before the site visit, the external experts will meet to identify general themes, key problems areas as well as areas needing clarification that will be discussed with the various groups during the site visit. This discussion should result in a common framework of questions which will function as a frame of reference for the experts during the site visit. A good framework is one that is precise, comprehensive, clear in its outline and, as far as possible, referencing the self-evaluation report and the aims and objectives of the unit.

The preparation for the site visit will include two steps:

- a analysing the self-evaluation report as well as any other available evaluation report on this institution (e.g., CRE, unit evaluations)
- b a pre-visit meeting

In addition, the team will receive training.

2.1 Analysing the self-evaluation report

The first task of each expert is to read the guidelines provided for the unit's self-evaluation, the self-evaluation report and all supporting documentation provided by the unit, with the goal of extracting questions and issues that deserve more in-depth treatment during the site visit.

General questions to be borne in mind include:

- Is the report sufficiently self-reflective and analytical?
- Are the aims and objectives clearly expressed and academically rigorous?
- To what extent are the aims and objectives met?
- Are the strengths and weaknesses clearly formulated and substantiated?
- Are the recommendations to correct weaknesses and to build on strengths clearly presented and practical?
- Is there any information missing?
- How did the self-evaluation process go?

At this phase of the work, the external experts are not tied to a final judgement. This is only a first impression, based on written information. This impression will become more considered and precise during the site visit and the discussion among experts.

Each expert is asked to prepare a list of comments and questions for debate during the next phase of the process: the pre-visit meeting.

2.2 The pre-visit meeting

The pre-visit meeting - which will take place on the eve of the site visit - will be the first opportunity for the external expert group to work as a team.

The session will focus on the following:

- *Framework of questions: Each expert has implicit ideas about curricular quality. The first step in the session will be to make these ideas clear to the other group members and to arrive at a consensus on what constitutes curricular quality for this particular unit. In other words, each evaluation will set specific terms of reference adapted to the aims and objectives of the unit.*
- *Discussion of the self-evaluation report: This phase of the session will focus on a debate about all comments and questions that arose from the individual readings of the report. The goal here is to set an intellectual agenda for the visit and agree on which issues to pursue.*

- *Discussion of the site visit:* The secretary will describe the practical aspects of the site visit (travel arrangements, preliminary visit schedule, etc.).

3. The programme for the site visits

The visit will take two and a half days. All members of the external expert team will travel together and attend all meetings. The evaluation will be conducted in the language of the country in which the evaluation is taking place, or in another language (e.g., English, French, German) if those taking part are comfortable with its usage. Papers will be translated and interpreters available as necessary.

The external expert team will interview administration, staff and students as well as the team responsible for the self-evaluation report.

The purpose of the meetings is, first and foremost, to allow experts to receive additional information from all the participants. It is important that the experts do not perceive the site visit as the opportunity to present their own views on the unit under evaluation. These will be presented in the evaluation report. If the experts need to get a precise feedback on their own views, they should formulate them as hypotheses or simply as questions.

The guidelines for good practice at the site visit can be summarised as follows:

- The self-evaluation report should be made available to all participants in the meetings (e.g., staff and students).
- Each meeting that takes place during the site visit should be opened with a presentation of the external expert group and of the evaluation as well as the context of the evaluation project: i.e., the Phare Multi-Country Project.
- It is important to ask open rather than leading questions (leading questions give a clue to the judgement of the questioner).
- It is important to listen carefully to the answers and to follow up with other questions if the first answers were insufficient.
- It is best to avoid entering into a debate with the participants.

A typical visit is presented below:

- *First meeting with the institution's management:* The visit may start with an introductory meeting with the president and/or dean including a senior representative of the administration. During the meeting, the mandate and objectives of the external review should be presented. Issues relating to institutional priorities should be raised.
- *Meeting with the self-evaluation team:* In this interview, the external expert group can ask for clarification of how the self-evaluation process was conducted and how widely the report was discussed within the unit, as well as elicit explanation on any matter which is not totally clear and discuss with greater depth issues raised in the self-evaluation report.
- *Meeting with the academic staff:* The meeting with the staff will be used for a discussion on the content of the curriculum, the aims and objectives, the manners of student evaluation, examinations, the impact of research activities on the teaching, etc. It is particularly important to present the objectives of the evaluation and to explain the follow up to alleviate concerns regarding the evaluation process that can be perceived as threatening.
- *Meeting with representatives of relevant committees:* Depending on the country, the composition and mandate of these committees will vary. In some countries, it will be relevant to interview curriculum or examination committee members. During the

meeting with a curriculum committee, it will be important to discuss how the curriculum is updated and innovations introduced. During the meeting with an examination committee, the discussion could centre on the quality of examinations and the principles guiding the choice of examinations.

- *Meeting with students:* The students are a very important source of information regarding the workload, the staff's didactic qualifications, the programme coherence, the curricular organisation, etc.

The composition of student panels demand special attention:

- It is important that the group be as representative as possible of the whole student body in that field, and that the most gifted or politically active students are not the only ones represented.
 - It is essential that the unit staff does not select the students to this meeting but rather that students be invited randomly.
 - In addition, the meeting should be held in the absence of staff members to ensure that students speak freely.
 - It might be desirable to divide the students into two groups: first-year and more advanced.
- *Looking at the learning environment:* A small portion of the visit will be dedicated to the tour of the learning environment: lecture halls, laboratories, seminar rooms, libraries, learning support services, etc. For this part of the visit, the external expert group could be split up.
 - *Open hour:* It may be helpful to organise an open hour during which individual staff members and individual students could speak to the external experts. The unit will ensure that the open hour is made widely known in a timely manner.
 - *Internal meetings:* During the visit, the external expert team should find time to meet internally, at least twice (e.g., for dinner the first evening and at the end of the visit) to confront their views.

At least half a day will be allocated to the formulation of the findings. For this heavy task, the best method is that each expert complete a section of the report to avoid unequal treatment of any important issue. The goal is to produce a short version of the report (4 - 5 pages) in the working language of the external expert group.

- *Final meeting with the institution's management:* The visit will conclude with a discussion between the external expert group and the representatives of the institution who participated in the first meeting.

This meeting has two purposes: to thank the institution for its hospitality and to seek further clarification on some of the issues. In this discussion, the external expert group needs to keep in mind the final report: i.e., their comments and questions should reflect the broad lines of the draft evaluation report. Furthermore, any comment should be presented as a preliminary assessment, a first impression rather than a final judgement.

4. The Evaluation Report

After the site visits, the external expert team secretary writes a first draft of the evaluation report, drawing on the experts' reports and minutes (taken by the secretary) of the internal discussions that occurred in the external expert group during the site visits.

The draft will be distributed to the external expert team members for input as well as for their personal observations on the evaluation process.

When it is finalised, it will be sent to the unit for comments with regards to corrections of factual mistakes and misunderstandings. Please note, however, that the borderline between, on the one hand, the opinion of the unit concerning "factual inaccuracies" and, on the other hand, disagreeing with the opinion of the external expert team, cannot always be sharply defined. Hence, the external expert team will decide what to do with the unit's comments.

The report, with the needed changes, will then be sent to the Country Liaison Expert, the institution and unit, as well as QSC.

4.1. The format of the report

Introduction

- the committee
- terms of reference
- working method
- short evaluation of the review process

Description and analysis

- short description of the unit in the context of the national higher education system
- analysis of the relationship of the programme with the home institution
- committees

The programme

- aims and objectives
- organisation
- content of the programme
- teaching and learning methods
- students' skills
- evaluation methods

The student body

- student numbers
- entrance requirements
- drop out and completion rates
- average study time
- study load
- study counselling

Staff and management of human resource

- staffing: numbers and composition
- teaching responsibility
- personnel management

Facilities

- budget and sources of funding
- infrastructural support
- lecture halls/laboratories/libraries/learning support services, etc.

External relations

- links with industry, professional bodies
- academic links with institutions abroad
- participation in European exchange programmes

- internationalisation of the curriculum

Quality management

- internal quality evaluation
- administrative efficiency
- procedure for curricular innovations

Conclusions

- mains findings
- recommendations

4.2. Note on the conclusion

The conclusion will analyse the strengths and weaknesses and will offer recommendations to remedy weaknesses and to develop strengths further.

A useful conclusion has the following characteristics:

- strengths and weaknesses need to be stated explicitly; specifically, it is advantageous to avoid de-emphasising or hiding weaknesses;
- strengths and weaknesses that are not discussed in the body of the report should not suddenly appear in the conclusion;
- strengths and weaknesses that are discussed in the main part of the reports will be addressed again in the conclusion;
- specific recommendations to remedy weaknesses.

4.3. Practical considerations

- The maximum length of the evaluation report is 20 pages.
- A short (4 - 5 pages) version of the report should be written in the working language of the external expert group, with the longer version (20 pages) in the national language and in English.
- It should be sent to the Country Liaison Expert and QSC (in English)

Guidelines For The Pilot Evaluations of Higher Education Institutions

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INTRODUCTION

Background to the pilot evaluations

The main objectives of the pilot evaluations are:

- enhance awareness of the need for evaluation in higher education;
- contribute to the development of evaluation systems or enrich existing ones;
- further experience, transfer and impart a European dimension to evaluation.

The pilot evaluations are designed to achieve these aims by testing a common methodology while allowing for national interpretations. The evaluations are meant to be a learning process in each country.

It is important to stress that the pilot evaluations do not aim at ranking institutions in terms of their results, nor at accrediting degrees or institutions. Far from intending to create a single European evaluation system, the pilot evaluations aim at developing in each participating State a culture of evaluation which reflects the circumstances and traditions of that country.

The design of the pilot evaluations, outlined in these Guidelines, draws on three sets of experience: the experience of European countries with established evaluation systems, the results from the European Pilot Project for Evaluating Quality in Higher Education which took place in 1995 and which involved 17 countries (European Union Member-States and EEA) and the ongoing CRE (Association of European Universities) Institutional Review Programme.

The four principles at the foundation of these Guidelines are:

- autonomy and independence in terms of procedures and methods concerning evaluation both from government and from higher education institutions;
- self-evaluation;
- external evaluation by a group of external experts (the external evaluation group) and site visits;
- publication of a report.

Definition of the unit of evaluation

An institution is meant here as a whole higher education establishment or a faculty within it. The major purpose of the institutional evaluation is to contribute to improvement of quality management and strategic planning. Therefore, the major foci of the evaluation are the quality control mechanisms in the institution's strategic management.

Summary of the Phare Multi-Country pilot evaluations

Below is a brief summary of the three phases of the evaluation process.

1. Self-evaluation

The self-evaluation is the first step in the process. It is undertaken by the staff of the institutions to be evaluated. Through the self-evaluation report, the external evaluation group (cf. 2) will get a description and analysis of the institution. A good self-evaluation illuminates

strengths and weaknesses, threats and opportunities (“SWOT”), to provide the strategic context for institutional management.

Through a specific action plan, widely discussed internally, it will encourage the institution to think of ways to implement change and introduce quality control mechanisms for ongoing improvement and strategic planning and development.

The ultimate purpose of the self-evaluation is to encourage all members of an institution to think that each of them is responsible for the quality and for the improvements introduced.

2. External evaluation

The major aim of the external evaluation visit is to enhance the positive effects of the self-evaluation. The external evaluation group’s functions are: to verify the content of the self-evaluation report, to delve deeper into the institution’s quality management, to give recommendations on areas that could be further developed and to provide an opportunity for dialogue between evaluators and “evaluatees” that will strengthen the self-knowledge developed during the self-evaluation process.

The visit will take two days and one half. The external experts will be selected on the basis of their knowledge and experience in the discipline and/or evaluation, and whenever possible, according to their knowledge of the country’s higher education system and foreign language skills.

The composition of the external evaluation group may vary depending on national circumstances. Ideally, however, it will include one expert in the discipline, from each of the following categories: within the country; another Phare country; a European Union country, but with evaluation experience; another Phare country, but with evaluation experience. In addition, each team will be accompanied by a consortium expert.

3. Evaluation report

The external evaluation group will write an evaluation report which will be sent to the institution to correct any factual errors. Once this is done, the report becomes a public document. The major function of the report is to provide the institution and its major stakeholders with a written document that serves as a record of its present state and a foundation for future developments and improvements.

SELF-EVALUATION

As the first step in the evaluation process, the self-evaluation has three major purposes:

- to present a succinct, but comprehensive statement of the institution's view of quality management and strategic planning;
- to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the institution and to propose a specific action plan;
- to provide a framework against which the institution will be assessed by the external evaluation groups.

The self-evaluation will result in a report, one of the key documents along with the external evaluation report. The self-evaluation report is the main vehicle for the institution to convey information about itself. But equally, and perhaps even more importantly, it is the place for a critical reflection of the institution about the way it manages itself and it handles quality as a central value in its strategic decision-making.

Therefore, the self-evaluation report should not be only descriptive, but needs to be *evaluative and synthetic*, that is, it should evaluate strengths and weaknesses in the context of constraints, threats and opportunities and show the interconnectedness of the various elements of strategic planning and quality management. In addition, the analysis should take into account the changes that have taken place in the recent past as well as those that are anticipated in the future.

1. The self-evaluation steering committee and the self-evaluation task forces

To ensure the success of the self-evaluation, the institution needs to set up a steering committee and several task forces. The function of each of these is detailed below.

The steering committee needs to represent a broad view of the institution rather than the partial view of its management and should have the following characteristics:

- its members are in a good position to judge strengths and weaknesses;
- the group is fairly small (about 5) to ensure that it is efficient;
- it represents the major constituencies in the unit (academic staff, students, and administrative staff) to maximise involvement of all major stakeholders;
- it will select a secretary who will write the report under the chairperson's responsibility (cf. below).

The steering committee will be led by a chairperson whose responsibilities include:

- plan and co-ordinate the work of the self-evaluation group: e.g., tailor the checklist (cf. 2 and 3) to the national context and the particular subject area, gather and analyse the data; co-ordinate the work of the task forces;
- provide opportunities for a broad discussion of the self-evaluation within the institution to promote a broad identification with the report;

- act as a contact person with the external evaluation group, with the country contacts established by the project consortium, and with the Management Group of the Phare Multi-Country Project.

The steering committee will also create task forces to examine specific issues such as management, resources and financial control, staff training and development, student services, external relationships, international activities, etc. Like the steering committee, it is best that these task forces represent the major constituencies of the institution (academic and administrative staff, students).

The leadership of the institution will:

- clarify the responsibility of the steering committee towards staff members who are not on the team, i.e., the steering committee should not work in isolation but seek, through institution-wide discussions, to present as broad a view as possible of the unit;
- support and spur the process along by explaining its worth and allaying fears.

The self-evaluation will result in a report to be submitted to the external evaluation group under the responsibility of the institution's leadership. This does not mean that the institution's leadership, or all actors in the institution, agree with all statements in the self-evaluation report.

2. Purpose and handling of the checklist

Although the pilot evaluations do not aim to establish comparisons among the institution assessed, it will be important to receive comparable self-evaluation reports from the various institutions in order to compare the implementation of the methodology. The checklist was developed to help achieve this particular objective.

Since this checklist will be used both for the self-evaluation and the external evaluation, it is important that all points on the list be addressed. If some questions are not relevant or if specific pieces of information are impossible to provide, this should be noted in relation to the questions. As a general rule, an answer or comment should be given to all questions.

It is expected that each question will be interpreted and assessed bearing in mind the characteristics of the national system and of the institution concerned. Therefore, it might be helpful that before the self-evaluation steering committee starts its work, it meets with some members of their national networks and the country liaison to tailor the checklist to their national context and to the specific subject area.

Every item of the self-evaluation will consist of both a description and analysis including comments on how the unit plans to remedy problems identified. Facts and evaluations will be verified by the external evaluation group at a later stage.

The general context for the analysis, both at the self-evaluation and at the external evaluation stage, will be the extent to which the unit's mission and goals have been met. Specifically, the self-evaluation is intended to address four strategic questions:

- What is the institution trying to do?
- How is the institution trying to do it?
- How does the institution know it works?
- How does the institution change in order to improve?

These are the questions that should be borne in mind constantly during both the self-evaluation and the external evaluation stages.

3. The checklist

3.1. National and institutional context

- Brief overview of the national education system for the benefit of the international members of the external evaluation group (e.g., number and type of institutions, relationship with the state, funding).
- Brief presentation of the institution (e.g., brief historical overview, size, number of faculties)

3.2. Institutional norms and values

A *What is the institutions trying to do?*

A.1 Mission

This section focuses on the institution's mission and goals. At this stage, the analytical focus is placed on the norms and goals that the institution sets for itself.

The institutional mission refers to the overarching formulation of what the institution wants to be. However vague mission statements tend to be, they should give the ultimate reason for the more concrete aims and goals.

The external evaluation group will be interested, in particular, with the strategic choices the institution made with regards the scope and profile of the institution, specifically:

- What balance is the institution trying to achieve among local, regional, national and international functions?
- What balance is the institution trying to achieve among its different activities: teaching, research and other services?
- What are the institution's academic priorities, i.e., which teaching programmes, areas of research, etc., does the institution emphasise?
- What are the institution's preferred didactic approaches (e.g., case-study, problem-based learning, seminars, etc.)
- What should be the degree of centralisation and decentralisation in the institution?
- What should be the institution's relationship to its funding agencies (state and others such as research contractors)
- What should be the institution's relationship to society (external partners, local and regional government) and its involvement in public debate
- What should be the institution's policy regarding international relations (European and world-wide)

A.2 Constraints

This section focuses on the constraints encountered by the institution in trying to meet its aims and goals. The approach here should be *evaluative and synthetic*: an evaluation should be given of how constraints and opportunities, both internal and external to the

institution, affect the institution's mission and goals. Issues that could be addressed include:

- *Evaluation of institutional autonomy (given the legal context) with respect to:*
 - selection and appointment of academic (teaching and research) and administrative staff
 - selection of students (traditional students and adult learners)
 - finance (degree of autonomy in the institutional allocation of government funds, ability to raise its own funds, asset management)
 - teaching and learning (creating and closing down faculties, levels of degrees, study programmes, specialities within a study programme, course units; didactic approaches)
 - research (individual and team projects)
 - development of entrepreneurial activities (spin-off companies, science parks)
- *Evaluation of the current regional and national labour market situation*
- *Evaluation of the infrastructure in relation to number of students and staff: number and size of buildings, laboratories, libraries, etc.; their location (e.g., dispersed over a large geographical area or concentrated on a single campus); age and condition of the facilities*
- *Evaluation of the student/staff ratio (lowest, highest and mean ratios)*
- *Evaluation of other constraints*

B How is the institution trying to do it?

In practice, the institution carries out its activities (teaching, research, and other services) and management in specific ways which embody its mission and goals (section A.1) and takes into account the specific constraints that it faces (section A.2). The inevitable discrepancy between what ought to be (norms and values) and what really is (specific organisation and activities) indicates the institution's strengths and weaknesses. It is the analysis of strengths and weaknesses which constitutes the next phase of the self-evaluation.

- Academic activities:
 - Description of the study programmes, research units, educational approaches, etc. This can be a brief description (with reference, as needed, to appropriate appendices), unless some programmes or approaches, teaching or research units deserve some specific mention because they reflect the institution's academic profile (e.g., case-method teaching, problem-based learning; a unique and very large research institute, etc.)
 - *Evaluation of how these programmes and organisational units reflect the mission and goals*
 - *Analysis of strengths and weaknesses and proposed action plan on how to remedy weaknesses and enhance strengths*
- Management activities:

- Description of the management practice: what are the respective roles of central-level administrators, offices and faculties/institutes? does co-ordination among faculties/institutes take place and how? what does the institutional leadership (e.g., rector, president, etc.) control and decide? what do the deans of faculty control and decide? with respects to:
 - the selection of academic and administrative staff
 - the selection of students
 - finance
 - academic activities (teaching and learning, research)
 - development of entrepreneurial activities
 - research policies
- *Evaluation of how the management practice reflect the institution's mission and goals*
- *Analysis of strengths and weaknesses and proposed action plan on how to remedy weaknesses and enhance strengths*

3.3. Quality management

The question "how does the institution know it works" refers to the quality control mechanisms available and operative in the institution.

A *Quality control or quality monitoring*

In the Phare Multi-Country Project, quality control or quality monitoring does not refer to rigid, "managerial" processes but to any mechanism - from individual course evaluation by students to national quality evaluation of research, teaching, international programmes, etc. - that includes data gathering and an evaluative judgement concerning the institution's activities. Major issues to address include:

- the available quality control mechanisms
- how frequently are they used?

B Quality management

How does the institution integrate quality control into institutional policy? This question refers to quality management: does the institution has standard procedures to ensure that *proposed action plans* are discussed and carried out?

The focus remains at the management level directly associated with quality control. For instance, if students' course evaluation are carried out, how does the unit concerned (programme, department, etc.) handle the results from these evaluations when they fall outside norms set by the unit? Or if a research institute is assessed regularly by an external body, to what extent does the institute's leadership act on the *proposed action plan* given?

Note that the Phare Multi-Country Project is not as much interested in the existence of extensive policy documents regarding this question as it is in the actual, regular practice of bringing about changes as a result of an evaluation. In other words, focus is placed less on elaborate quality handbooks and quality mechanisms and more on the activity and the practice of quality improvement.

3.4. Strategic management and capacity for change

How does the institution change in order to improve? So far, the analysis focused on the detailed description and analysis of quality management at all institutional levels. In this section, the analysis shifts to the role of quality as a leading value in strategic management of the institution as a whole. In other words, what is the institution's capacity for change? Questions to be addressed include:

- How responsive is the institution to the demands, threats and opportunities present in its external environment?
- How are representatives from its external environment involved in the institution's strategic management?
- Which changes can be expected to be made to the institution's aims?
- How can a better match be attained between, on the one hand, the current and future missions and aims and, on the other hand, the means (study programmes, research, etc.)?
- How do quality, quality control and quality management play a role in these developments?

3.5. Appendices

Because most of the external experts are foreigners, institutions are asked to include the following:

- Organisation chart of the institution's faculties (or any other relevant unit of teaching/research)
- Organisation chart of the central administration and support services (Rectorate's staff, campus maintenance, libraries, etc.)
- Organisation chart of the institution's management structure (Rectorate, Council/Senate, Faculty Deans and Councils, etc.)
- Student numbers for the whole institution, with a breakdown by faculty, over the last three- to five-year period

- Academic staff number (by academic rank and faculty) for the whole institution, over the last three- to five-year period, with a breakdown by levels and disciplines
- Indicators of the institution's spending on teaching and research per faculty over the last three- to five-year period.

Beyond this information, the institution is free to add any other information. For the comfort of its readers, however, it is asked to limit the number and lengths of appendices to what is strictly needed to understand the statements and argumentation in the self-evaluation report.

These data are significant only if they are interpreted in the national and institutional context. No comparison with other countries will be done.

4. The self evaluation report

- By way of an introduction, the institution is asked to explain the way the self-evaluation process was performed: who were the self-evaluation team members (steering committee and task forces)? With whom in the institution did they collaborate? To what extent was the report discussed? What were the positive elements and the difficulties encountered in the self-evaluation process?
- The body of the self-evaluation report will follow the checklist headings 3.1 through 3.4. Through out, the report will strive to strike a balance between description and analysis. The starting point of the analysis is the institution's mission and goals; it is against these that the institution will be assessed. The description will be used to substantiate the analysis. The analysis will illuminate the strengths and weaknesses for each heading.
- The conclusion will analyse the strengths and weaknesses and will offer a specific action plan to remedy weaknesses and to develop strengths further.

A useful conclusion has the following characteristics:

- since the goal of an evaluation is to promote ongoing quality improvement it is advantageous to be as open and as self-reflective as possible. Therefore, strengths and weaknesses needs to be stated explicitly; specifically, it is advantageous to avoid de-emphasising or hiding weaknesses;
- strengths and weaknesses that are not discussed in the body of the report should not suddenly appear in the conclusion because they will be unsubstantiated and will transform the conclusion into a lobbying effort on the part of department;
- strengths and weaknesses that are discussed in the main part of the report will be addressed again in the conclusion;
- plans to remedy weaknesses will be offered in the conclusion in the form of a specific action plan.
- The maximum length of the self-evaluation report is 20 - 25 pages excluding the data appendices and other possible appendices. The reason for this relatively short report is to maintain a focus on institutional strategic management without probing too deeply into the specifics of all faculties and all activities. The Phare Multi-Country Project is meant to be a "light" procedure, requiring no more "bureaucratic" work than necessary. Therefore, the institutions are encouraged to make use, to the extent that it is available, of any existing datum and document.

- The self-evaluation report is partly written for an internal audience (the institution's staff members and the students) and partly for the external evaluation group. The external evaluation group is knowledgeable about higher education and higher education management but some of them are foreigners, without in-depth knowledge of higher education in your country. Institutions should keep this fact in mind when writing their report.
- The self-evaluation report should be read and signed by the institution's management before sending it to the experts to insure that they have been it.
- The self-evaluation report should be made available to all participants in the meetings.
- The report should be written in the national language, with English translation provided. The report should be sent to the Country Liaison Expert and QSC (in the national language and in English)
- It is of the utmost importance to the running of the project and especially the site visits that this deadline is respected by all parties involved in the project. The major reason for this tight schedule (which is a standard procedure world wide) is that there should be no more than three to four months between the self-evaluation and the external evaluation visit because institutions change overtime.

THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION

Most evaluation systems are based on both a self-evaluation and an external expert review. After completion of the self-evaluation report, a group of external experts will undertake a site visit of each participating higher education institution.

Its assignment is defined as follows:

- to form an opinion about the quality of the quality management and strategic planning capacities of the higher education institution;
- to make recommendations to the higher education institution to improve its quality management and strategic planning capacities.

1. Selection of the external experts

External experts will be selected on the basis of their knowledge and experience in managing higher education institutions and/or in evaluation, and whenever possible, according to their knowledge of the country's higher education system and foreign language skills.

Selected experts will undertake at least two evaluations in different Phare countries to ensure the multi-country context of the evaluation.

The composition of the external expert team may vary depending on national circumstances. Ideally, however, the composition should be an expert on management of higher education institutions:

- from within the country;
- from another Phare country;
- from a European Union country, with experience in institutional evaluation;
- from another Phare country, with experience in institutional evaluation.

Each team will be accompanied by a Consortium expert (usually the Country Liaison Expert) to provide advice (to the evaluation team and to the evaluatees), to facilitate the process and to evaluate the process.

The chair and the secretary of the team will be identified from within the external expert team.

- The chair is responsible for the division of labour among the external expert team, decision regarding who will chair which meeting, structure of the discussion, keeping to the schedule, and supervising the secretary.
- The chair will be in contact with the Country Liaison Expert should any problem arise.
- Under the supervision of the chair, the secretary is responsible for organising the work of the external expert team (e.g., liaison with the higher education institution, programme of the site visit), taking notes of all meetings during the site visit and writing the report.

The members of the external expert teams will be appointed by the Project Management Group on the basis of the nominations put forward by the Phare countries and the Consortium experts.

2. Preparation for the visit

The primary objective of the site visit is to discuss the self-evaluation report and the analysis it represents of the higher education institution under review with a large number of stakeholders: amongst others institutional management, administration, staff and students.

Before the site visit, the external experts will meet to identify general themes, provisional judgements (as working hypotheses to be tested during the site visit), key problems areas as well as areas needing clarification to be discussed with the groups during the site visit. This discussion should result in a common framework of questions that will function as a frame of reference for the experts during the site visit. A good framework is one that is precise, comprehensive, clear in its outline and, as far as possible, referencing the self-evaluation report and the aims and objectives of the higher education institution.

The preparation of the site visit will include two steps:

- analysing the self-evaluation report as well as any other available evaluation report on this institution (e.g., CRE, unit evaluations);
- a pre-visit meeting.

In addition, the team will receive training.

2.1. Analysing the self-evaluation report

The first task of the each expert is to read the guidelines provided for the self-evaluation, the self-evaluation report and all supporting documentation provided by the institution, with the goal of extracting questions and issues that deserve more in-depth treatment during the site visit.

The four strategic questions of the evaluation are:

- What is the institution trying to do?
- How is the institution trying to do it?
- How does the institution know it works?
- How does the institution change in order to improve?

Additionally, the questions about the self-evaluation report include:

- Is the self-evaluation report sufficiently self-reflective and analytical?
- How does the self-evaluation report address the four strategic questions (see above)?
- Is any information missing?
- How did the self-evaluation process go?

At this phase of the work, the external experts are not tied to a final judgement. This is only a first impression, based on written information. This impression will become more considered and precise during the site visit and the discussion among experts.

Each expert is asked to prepare a list of comments and questions for debate during the next phase of the process: the pre-visit meeting.

2.2. The pre-visit meeting

The pre-visit meeting - which will take place on the eve of the site visit - will be the first opportunity for the external expert group to work as a team.

The session will focus on the following:

- **Framework of questions:** Each external expert has (implicit) ideas about institutional management with respect to strategy and quality. The first step in the session will be to make these ideas clear to the other group members and to arrive at a consensus at what constitutes a sound quality management and strategic change mechanism for this particular higher education institution. In other words, each evaluation will set specific terms of reference adapted to the mission and aims of the higher education institution.
- **Discussion of the self-evaluation report:** This phase of the discussion will focus on the working hypotheses, comments and questions that arose from the individual readings of the self-evaluation report. The goal here is to set an intellectual agenda for the visit and to agree on which issues to pursue.

- *Discussion of the site visit:* The secretary will describe the practical aspects of the site visit (travel arrangement, visit schedule, etc.).

3. The programme for the site visits

The visit will take two and a half days. All members of the external expert group will travel together and attend all meetings.

The evaluation will be conducted in the language of the country in which the evaluation is taking place, or in another working language (e.g. English, French, German) if those taking part are comfortable with its usage. Papers will be translated and interpreters will be available if necessary.

The external expert group will interview the institution's managers, administrative staff, academic staff and students as well as the team responsible for the self-evaluation report.

The purpose of the meetings is, first and foremost, to allow the external experts to receive additional information from all participants. It is important that the external experts do not perceive the site visit as an opportunity to present their own views on the higher education institution being evaluated. These views should be presented in the evaluation report. If external experts need to get precise feedback on their own views, they should formulate them as hypotheses or simply as questions.

The guidelines for good practice at the site visit can be summarised as follows:

- The self-evaluation report should have been made available to all participants in the meeting (e.g. staff and students).
- Each meeting during the site visit should be opened with a brief presentation of the external expert team and of the evaluation as well as the context of the evaluation project, i.e., the Phare Multi-Country Project.
- It is important to ask open rather than leading questions (leading questions tend to lead to the answer the questioners wants to get, instead of to the answer the interviewee wants to give).
- It is important to listen carefully to the answers and to follow up with other questions if the first answers were insufficient.
- It is best to avoid getting into a debate with the participants.

The meetings of a typical visit are presented below. Obviously, there will be variations depending on the focus of the evaluation (i.e., a whole institution or a faculty within it).

3.1. Central level

- *Meeting with the institution's leader:* It is important to start with an introductory meeting between the external expert team and the rector/president/dean of the higher education institution being evaluated. During this meeting, the mandate and objectives of the external review should be presented. Issues relating to institutional mission and priorities should be raised. In this meeting, too, questions can be addressed as to how typical or atypical the units are that will be investigated.
- *Meeting with the institution's leadership:* After the introductory meeting, a meeting with the full leadership (e.g., including vice-rectors) can be used to address in a wider circle issues relating to institutional mission and priorities as well as the institution's room for manoeuvre in strategically important issues and enhancement of quality, and the relationships with the units of the institution.
- *Meeting with the self-evaluation team:* In this interview, the external expert team may ask for clarification about the self-evaluation process and how widely the report has been discussed in the higher education institution. Also, explanations are expected on

any matter that was not totally clear in the self-evaluation report. Finally, issues raised in the self-evaluation report can be discussed in depth.

- *Meeting with senior administrators:* During this meeting, administrative aspects of strategic planning and quality management can be addressed, such as national funding formulas, internal reallocation of funds, staff appointment and staff development policy, quality management and accreditation requirements, etc.
- *Meeting with representatives of relevant committees:* Depending on the country, the composition and mandate of the institution's representative committees will vary. A senate or university council may have a role in mission formulation, priority setting, budget reallocation, quality assurance, etc. Research or curriculum committees may set institution-wide policies with respect to quality control, quality management and staff policy, etc.
- *Meeting with relevant decision-makers in government or other stakeholders (representatives of society):* In this interview, the external expert team meets the institution's most relevant 'stakeholders' in society. Depending on the country and/or on the status of the institution, these can be representatives of local, regional or national governments, or representatives of society (e.g. local industry). Questions to address are the relationships between the institution and its 'stakeholders', the external functioning of the institution and its adaptation to changing needs and wants of society.

3.2. 'Trail' of policies in a specific unit (faculty)

To investigate the reality of central level policies with respect to quality and strategic change, the external expert team will look at how policies are realised in one or a few units in the institution (e.g. faculties, research centres).

These units are not used to find fault with the institution, but to understand by an example how central level and basic units are connected. The following meetings can take place in each of the units investigated.

- *Meeting with the unit's leadership (e.g. dean and vice-deans):* The relationships between the unit and the decision-making at the central level are the main topic in this meeting, as well as the actual management of quality of teaching and/or research within the unit.
- *Meeting with academic staff in the unit:* Academic staff who are not part of the unit's leadership (and advanced students, e.g., Ph.D. students) can be asked about their experience of staff appointment and development policy, quality management in teaching and/or research.
- *Meeting with students in the unit:* Students are a very important source of information regarding their role in evaluation of the teaching and staff, and can be asked about their experience of quality control and quality management in the programme.

The composition of student panels demand special attention:

- It is important that the group be as representative as possible of the whole student body in that field, and that the most gifted or politically active students are not the only ones represented.
- It is essential that the unit staff does not select the students to this meeting but rather than students be invited randomly.

- In addition, the meeting should be held in the absence of staff members to ensure that students speak freely.
- It might be desirable to divide the students into two groups: first-year and more advanced.
- ***Looking at the learning environment:*** A small portion of the visit will be dedicated to the tour of the learning environment: lecture halls, laboratories, seminar rooms, libraries, learning support services, etc. For this part of the visit, the external expert group could be split up.

(Note: this can be part of either the unit part of the visit or the central level part of the visit, e.g., the institution's library and computing centre, a unit's laboratories and lecture rooms, etc.).

3.3. Concluding the site visit

- ***Open hour:*** It may be helpful to organise an open hour during which individual staff members and individual students could speak to the external experts. The institution will ensure that the open hour is made widely known in a timely manner.
- ***Internal meetings:*** During the visit, the external expert team should find time to meet internally, at least twice (e.g., for dinner the first evening and at the end of the visit) to confront their views.

At least half a day will be allocated to the formulation of the findings. For this heavy task, the best method is that each expert complete a section of the report to avoid unequal treatment of any important issue. The goal is to produce a short version of the report (4 - 5 pages) in the working language of the external expert group.

- ***Final meeting with the institution's management:*** The visit will conclude with a discussion between the external expert group and the representatives of the institution who participated in the first meeting.

This meeting has two purposes: to thank the institution for its hospitality and to seek further clarification on some of the issues. In this discussion, the external expert group needs to keep in mind the final report: i.e., their comments and questions should reflect the broad lines of the draft evaluation report. Furthermore, any comment should be presented as a preliminary assessment, a first impression rather than a final judgement.

4. The evaluation report

After the site visits, the external expert team secretary writes a first draft of the evaluation report, drawing on the experts' reports and minutes (taken by the secretary) of the internal discussions that occurred in the external expert group during the site visits.

The draft will be distributed to the external expert team members for input as well as for their personal observations on the evaluation process.

When it is finalised, it will be sent to the institution for comments with regards to corrections of factual mistakes and misunderstandings. Please note, however, that the borderline between, on the one hand, the opinion of the institution concerning "factual inaccuracies" and, on the other hand, disagreeing with the opinion of the external expert team, cannot always be sharply defined. Hence, the external expert team will decide what to do with the institution's comments.

The report, and its summary, with the needed changes, will then be sent to the Country Liaison Expert, the institution, as well as QSC.

4.1. The format of the report

Introduction

- the committee
- terms of reference
- working method
- short evaluation of the review process

Description

- short description of the national higher education system
- short description of the institution
- committees

Constraints and institutional norms

- in terms of resources
- in terms of development
- in terms of quality
- in terms of organisation

The capacity for change

- the mission
- the institutional policies
- mid - and long term strategies
- the operation of change

Review summary

- in terms of academic leadership
- in terms of accounting
- in terms of management capacity

4.2. Note on the conclusion

The conclusion will analyse the strengths and weaknesses and will offer recommendations to remedy weaknesses and to develop strengths further.

A useful conclusion has the following characteristics:

- strengths and weaknesses needs to be stated explicitly; specifically, it is advantageous to avoid de-emphasising or hiding weaknesses;
- strengths and weaknesses that are not discussed in the body of the report should not suddenly appear in the conclusion;
- strengths and weaknesses that are discussed in the main part of the reports will be addressed again in the conclusion;
- specific recommendations to remedy weaknesses.

4.3. Practical considerations

- The maximum length of the evaluation report is 20 pages.
- A short (4 - 5 pages) version of the report should be written in the working language of the external expert group, with the longer version (20 pages) in the national language and in English.
- It should be sent to the Country Liaison Expert and QSC (in English)

8 SAMPLE SCHEDULES FOR SITE VISITS

8.1. Sample Site Visit Schedules taken from the Pilot Evaluations

Institutional Pilot Evaluation

VISIT PROGRAMME

Evening meeting

18.30 Private meeting of the external evaluation team
To meet in lobby of hotel to review the schedule of meetings and visits and identify the principal issues for discussion.

Day 1

09.00 Meeting with the Rector and any colleagues he/she wishes to invite.
To allow the Rector to meet the external evaluation team and present whatever issues he/she regards as being the most important for the University.

09.45 Meeting with the self-evaluation team.
To discuss the self-evaluation report, and determine which issues the self-evaluation team regards as the most important.

11.15 Meeting of the external evaluation team on its own.
To review the schedule of meetings and determine the team's agenda.

12.15 Lunch

13.30 Meeting with Rectorate and Heads of principal units (including Deans).
To discuss the following, including any intended developments:

- (a) *the University's mission;*
- (b) *the structure of the University (i.e. Faculties, Institutes and Non-Faculty Centres);*
- (c) *executive structure (i.e. the respective roles of the Rector, Pro-Rectors, Deans, Heads of Department, etc.);*
- (d) *committee structure (i.e. the respective roles of the Senate and any sub-committees; Faculty Council and any sub-committees; etc.);*
- (e) *inter-campus relationships.*

15.00 Break

15.30 Meeting with heads of budget centres.
To discuss the following and their implications:

- (a) *the financing of higher education in country X;*
- (b) *the funding of the University by the Ministry of Education;*
- (c) *the University's non-governmental income;*
- (d) *the allocation of funds within the University, including the criteria by which funds are allocated;*
- (e) *spending controls.*

17.00 End of meetings at the University.

Day 2

- 09.00 Meeting with appropriate staff to discuss:
(a) *staffing;*
(b) *the maintenance of staff quality and its development;*
(c) *research.*
- 11.30 Meeting with the Students' Union.
To discuss the students' perception of the University and the objectives and activities of the Students' Union.
- 12.30 Lunch (with employers/industrialists)
- 14.00 Visit to the University Library and the Computer Centre.
Including discussions with the staff involved.
- 15.30 Meeting with appropriate staff
To discuss:
(a) *policies for curriculum development;*
(b) *procedures for curriculum development;*
(c) *quality assurance.*
- 17.00 End of discussions at the University.

Day 3

- 09.00 Meeting with self-evaluation team.
To discuss any outstanding issues.
- 09.45 Private meeting of external evaluation team in University.
To agree the initial conclusions of its report, and draft these on word processor (if available).
- 12.00 Meeting with the Rector and colleagues.
To present draft conclusions.

Programme Pilot Evaluation

VISIT PROGRAMME

Day 1

- 15.00 Private meeting of the external evaluation team at the University
To review the schedule of meetings and visits and identify the principal issues for discussion.
- 16.00 Meeting with Rector, Dean, Head of Department and Chair of self-evaluation team.
To review the schedule of meetings and give provisional notice of issues for discussion.
To introduce the place of the programme in the context of the aims and objectives of the University and the Faculty.
- 17.00 External evaluation team leaves for hotel.

Day 2

- 09.00 Meeting with self-evaluation team.
To discuss the self-evaluation report, and determine which issues the self-evaluation team regards as the most important.
- 10.30 Tour of laboratories and other facilities
Including meetings with technical staff.
- 12.00 Visit to Faculty library
Including discussion with staff.
- 13.00 Lunch (with relevant employers/industrialists)
- 14.30 Meeting with appropriate staff
To discuss the following:
(a) the aims and objectives of the programme;
(b) graduate employment;
(c) the structure of the programme;
(d) admissions policy and procedures;
(e) assessment policies and procedures.
- 16.00 Break
- 16.30 Meeting with students on the programme, and any graduates who are available.
- 17.00 External evaluation team leaves for hotel.

Day 3

- 09.00 Meeting with staff teaching on the programme
To discuss the following:
(a) the content of the programme;
(b) teaching and learning methodology.
- 10.30 Break
- 11.00 Meeting with the Faculty Council
To discuss any outstanding matters which are within the terms of reference of the Faculty Council.
- 12.30 Lunch
- 14.00 Private meeting of external evaluation team in University.
To agree the conclusions of its report and draft these on word processor (if available).
- 16.15 Meeting with Rector, Dean, Head of Department and colleagues
To represent draft conclusions of programme evaluation.

17.00 External evaluation team leaves.

8.2. Sample Site Visit Schedules taken from Evaluation Agencies in Western Europe

Programme Evaluations

Sample A

- Meeting with the rector/dean/head of programme
- Meeting with the self-evaluation team
- Meeting with the academic staff
- Meeting with the external academic staff
- Tour of the facilities
- Meeting with students

Sample B

- Observation of the various form of teaching and learning (direct observation of classroom, seminar, workshop and laboratory situation as appropriate)
- Meeting with current students
- Meeting with teaching staff
- Meeting with non-teaching staff
- Meeting with graduates, diplomates and employers where appropriate
- Scrutiny of institutional and course documents, reviews and reports
- Scrutiny of examination scripts, courseware, projects and dissertations
- Examination of the student learning resources
- Examination of the academic and pastoral support for students

Institutional Evaluations

- Meeting with the Rector of the university and the Vice-Rectors
- Meeting with selected deans of the faculty
- Meeting with student representatives
- Meeting with the administrative staff
- Meeting with academic staff (to discuss research)
- Meeting with the Scientific Council
- Meeting with selected heads of department
- Meeting with the technical staff

9 RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING

The Quality Concept

- Barnett, R., Power, Enlightenment and Quality Evaluation, *European Journal of Education*, vol. 29, No. 2, pp. 165-179, 1994
- ☞ A typology of evaluation types from the point of view of power relations
- El-Khawas, E., External Review: Alternative Models Based on US Experience, *Higher Education Management*, vol. 7, pp. 39-48, 1995
- ☞ Putting US experiences in an international perspective
- Harvey, L. & Green, D., Defining quality, *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, vol. 18, pp. 9- 34, 1993
- ☞ Overview of different uses of the concept of 'quality'
- Trow, M., Trust, markets and accountability in higher education: A comparative perspective, *Higher Education Policy*, vol. 9, pp. 309- 324, 1996
- ☞ Critical view of limitations of quality assessment
- Young, K.E. et al., *Understanding accreditation: contemporary perspectives on issues and practices in evaluating educational quality*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1983
- ☞ No longer up-to-date re political context in the USA, but conceptually still valuable source on accreditation in higher education.

Quality Assurance Design: Institutional, National, and International

- Banta, T.W. & Associates, *Making a difference: Outcomes of a decade of assessment in higher education*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993
- Banta, T.W., Lund, J.P., Black, K.E., Oblander, F.W., *Assessment in Practice: Putting principles to work on college campuses*, San Fransisco: Jossey-Bass
- ☞ US initiatives mainly at campus level, partly centering on student assessment
- Barnett, R., *Improving Higher Education: Total Quality Care*, Buckingham: Open University Press, 1992
- ☞ Using quality assurance to improve higher education.
- Bogue, E.G. & Saunders, R.L., *The Evidence for Quality*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992
- ☞ Quality assurance among other US quality mechanisms; using quality for innovation in higher education institutions.
- Brennan, J., Evaluation of Higher Education in Europe, in *Changing Relationships between Higher Education and the State* (M. Henkel and B. Little eds.), Higher Education Policy Series, pp 219-235, London, Jessica Kingsley, pp. 219-235, 1999
- ☞ ??????.!!!!
- Brennan, J., Vries, P. de & Williams, R. (eds.), *Standards and Quality in Higher Education*, London, Jessica Kingsley, 1997
- ☞ Conceptual issues and international developments in recent years.
- Craft, A. (ed.), *International developments in assuring quality in Higher Education*, Falmer Press 1994
- ☞ Selected papers from a conference of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education, Montreal 1993
- Dill, D., Quality by design: Towards a framework for academic quality management, in *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research* (J. Smart ed.), vol. VIII, 1992
- ☞ Opportunities provided and challenges posed by applying ideas from TQM to higher education.
- Donner, J. & Kells, H.R., The Evaluation of University Management: An important exploration in university quality assurance and control, paper EAIR, Turku, 15-18 August, 1993
- ☞ Internal institutional evaluation; an innovative case.
- Harvey, L., Beyond TQM, *Quality in Higher Education* 1 (1995): 123-146
- ☞ Limitations of a popular business approach in higher education.
- Kells, H.R., *Self-regulation in higher education: a multi-national perspective on collaborative systems of quality assurance and control*, London: Jessica Kingsley, 1992
- ☞ Designing sophisticated quality assurance aiming to improve higher education in a self-regulatory policy framework.
- Kells, H.R., *Self-Study Processes*, 4th ed., New York: ACE / McMillan, 1995

- ☞ Self-evaluation and external evaluation in higher education; strongly improvement oriented.
- Mets, L.A., Program Review in Academic Departments, *New Directions for Institutional Research*, vol. 86, pp. 19- 36, 1995
- ☞ Internal evaluation put in its organisational context.
- Sherr, L.A. & Teeter, D.J. (eds.), Total Quality Management in Higher Education, *New Directions in Institutional Research*, # 71, 1991
- Teeter, D.J. & Lozier, G.G. (eds.), Pursuit of Quality in Higher Education: Case Studies in Total Quality Management, *New Directions in Institutional Research*, vol. 78, 1993
- ☞ Collections of (mainly) success stories from the USA.
- Vroeijenstijn, A.I., *Improvement and accountability: navigating between Scylla and Charybdis: Guide for external quality assessment in higher education*, London: Jessica Kingsley, 1994
- ☞ External evaluation and self-evaluation in higher education; oriented towards design of evaluation systems.
- Vught, F.A. van & Westerheijden, D.F., *Quality Management and Quality Assurance in European Higher Education: Methods and Mechanisms*, Luxembourg: Office for official publications of the EC, 1993
- ☞ Developments of quality assurance in Western Europe until 1992, common elements and an overview of national practices (overview partly superseded by the one in Scheele *et al.* 1998).
- Vught, F.A. van & Westerheijden, D.F., Towards a general model of quality assessment in higher education, *Higher Education*, vol. 28, pp. 355- 371, 1994
- ☞ Common elements of quality assurance systems
- Vught, F.A. van & Westerheijden, D.F., Institutional Evaluation and Management for Quality: The CRE Programme: Background, goals and procedures, *CRE-Action*, vol. 107 pp. 9–40, 1996
- ☞ Principles of the CRE institutional evaluation programme
- Westerheijden, D.F., Brennan, J., Maassen, P.A.M. (eds.), *Changing Contexts of Quality Assessment: Recent Trends in West European Higher Education*, Utrecht: Lemma, 1994
- ☞ Overview of quality assessment systems in a number of West European countries, no longer fully up to date. Putting quality assessment in its decision context.

Methods in Quality Assessment

- Alstete, J., *Benchmarking in Higher Education*, Washington D.C., G. Washington University/ASHE-Eric, 1996
- ☞ Uses and usability of a fashionable term
- Brennan, J., Frazer, M., Williams, R., *Self-Evaluation in Higher Education: a pack of materials for groups undertaking self-evaluation*, London: QSC/Open University Press, 1998
- ☞ Practical guidance and materials on how to carry out a self-evaluation.
- Cave, M., Hanney, S., Henkel, M., Kogan M., *The use of performance indicators in higher education: The challenge of the quality movement*, 3rd ed., London: Jessica Kingsley, 1997
- ☞ Critical perspective on usability and limitations of performance indicators in quality management.
- Gardner, Don E., Five Evaluation Frameworks: Implications for Decision-Making in Higher Education, in *ASHE Reader Series* (CF. Conrad, J Grants Harworth eds.), pp 383-398, 1990
- ☞ Alternative approaches to evaluation and when to use them.
- Kells, H.R. (ed.), *The Development of Performance Indicators for Higher Education, Second Edition: A Compendium for Twelve Countries*, Paris: OECD, 1993
- ☞ Uses and limits of performance indicators.
- Rinia, E.J., Th.N. van Leeuwen, H.G. van Vuren, and A.F.J. Van Raan, Comparative analysis of a set of bibliometric indicators and central peer review criteria. Evaluation of condensed matter physics in the Netherlands. *Research Policy* **27** 1(1998) 95-107
- Spruyt, E.H.J., Bruin, R.E. de & Moed, H.F., Are Bibliometric Indicators Appropriate Policy Tools in a Young University?, *Higher Education Management*, vol. 8 pp. 141- 154, 1996
- Van Raan, A.F.J., Assessment of social sciences: the use of advanced bibliometric methods as a necessary complement of peer review, *Research Evaluation*, **7** 1(1998) 2-6
- Yorke, M., Siamese Twins? Performance indicators in the service of accountability and enhancement, *Quality in Higher Education* **1** (1995): 13-30
- ☞ Uses and limits of performance indicators; requirements for indicators.
- Westerheijden, D.F., Peers, Performance and Power: Quality Assessment in the Netherlands, in Goedegebuure, L.C.J., Maassen, P.A.M. & Westerheijden, D.F. (eds.), *Peer Review and*

Performance Indicators: Quality Assessment in British and Dutch Higher Education, 1990, Utrecht: Lemma

☞ The dilemmas of quality assurance, data and the link to sanctions.

Effects and Effectiveness: Impacts and follow-up

Brennan, J., M. Frederiks & T. Shah, 1997, *Improving the Quality of Education: The Impact of Quality Assessment on Institutions*, Milton Keynes: The Open University

☞ How external evaluations affects higher education institutions in the United Kingdom

Frederiks, M.M.H., Westerheijden, D.F. & Weusthof, P.J.M., Effects of Quality Assessment in Dutch Higher Education, *European Journal of Education*, vol. 29, pp. 181- 200, 1994

☞ How introducing external evaluations affects higher education institutions in the Netherlands

Bauer M., Henkel M., Academic Responses to Quality Reforms in England and Sweden Compared, in *Changing Relationships between Higher Education and the State* (M. Henkel & B. Little eds.), Higher Education Policy Series, pp 236-262, London: Jessica Kingsley, 1998

☞ The impact of two contrasting evaluation systems compared.

Scheele, J.P., Maassen, P.A.M. & Westerheijden, D.F. (eds.), *To be Continued Follow-Up of Quality Assurance in Higher Education*, Maarssen: Elsevier/De Tijdstroom, 1998

☞ Conceptual issues of organising follow-up after (external) quality assessment, overview of West European quality assurance systems (focusing on follow-up mechanisms)

Some Relevant Journals

Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, information: Carfax, P.O. Box 25, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 3UE, United Kingdom

European Journal of Education, information: Carfax, P.O. Box 25, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 3UE, United Kingdom

Higher Education in Europe, information: Carfax, P.O. Box 25, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 3UE, United Kingdom

Higher Education Management, information: OECD Publication Service, 2 Rue André-Pascal, 75775 Paris Cedex 16, France

Higher Education Policy, information: Elsevier Science, P.O. Box 211, 1001 AE Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Higher Education, information: Kluwer Academic, P.O. Box 322 3300 AH Dordrecht, the Netherlands

New Directions in Institutional Research, information: Jossey-Bass, 350 Sansome St., San Francisco, California 94104-1342

Quality in Higher Education, information: Carfax, P.O. Box 25, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 3UE, United Kingdom

Studies in Higher Education, information: Carfax, P.O. Box 25, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 3UE, United Kingdom

Tertiary Education And Management, information: Jessica Kingsley, 166 Pentonville Road, London N1 9JB