Chapter 17
A Snapshot on the Internal Quality Assurance in EHEA

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17.1 Introduction

The central role of developing higher education institutions' (HEIs) internal quality assurance (QA) was recognised by the 2003 Ministerial Communiqué, which stated that 'consistent with the principle of institutional autonomy, the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself' (BPMC 2003: 3). Respect for institutional autonomy was included also in the fundamental principles permeating the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESGs), which further underlined that it is 'tempered by a recognition that this brings with it heavy responsibility' (ENQA 2005: 10–11).

In line with this principle, nowadays, most quality assurance agencies (QAAs) in Europe count among the objectives of their work to support the development of internal quality assurance processes within institutions, regardless of the approach they apply to their own processes (accreditation, evaluation or audit, whether it is at institutional or programme level).

While the Bologna Process remains the primary reference framework for European higher education institutions (HEIs), in parallel, the European Commission (EC) has – through its Modernisation Agenda (EC 2006b, 2011a) – also strongly argued in favour of promoting autonomous, accountable universities as drivers for innovation in the European Union. In this context, the quality of European higher education has been seen as a key success factor and, in 2006, a Council recommendation recognised the importance of internal QA in this regard (EC 2006a). The consequent progress report issued by the EC saw the role of internal QA to 'monitor and enhance quality and to develop a real "quality culture"' (EC 2009: 3).

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At national and institutional levels these policies meet. While there is an agreement on the importance of institutional autonomy and responsibility for quality, external quality assurance processes have attracted more attention and been the subject of more studies. This paper aims at presenting the main trends in the development of internal quality assurance. The key questions to be addressed are:

- To what extent are the ESGs implemented in the institutional quality processes?
- Are internal quality assurance processes supporting the modernisation agenda of higher education institutions, their strategic orientations?
- Are internal QA processes improving quality levels?
- How do external quality assurance processes relate to internal quality assurance?
- What kind of challenges can be identified for the future development of internal QA?

The main source of information will be the research undertaken by the European University Association (EUA) in the framework of the project 'Examining Quality Culture in European Higher Education Institutions' (EQC), but other sources will also be explored. Furthermore, the author will draw on informal discussions with quality assurance practitioners during various meetings and events.

In the context of the EQC project, EUA conducted in spring 2010 a survey among the European HEIs with the aim of identifying internal quality assurance processes in place. Two hundred and twenty two institutions from 36 countries answered the survey, which paid particular attention to how the institutions had implemented the part of the ESGs dedicated to internal QA within HEIs (Loukkola and Zhang 2010: 13–14).

17.2 Why Quality Culture?

While HEIs are expected to develop their internal QA processes, there is also a common understanding that they should strive for a quality culture (for e.g. ESGs, EUA 2006; EC 2009). Considering the specific nature of the universities as expert organisations with diverse missions, it is generally recognised that the formal processes alone do not lead to quality enhancement; instead, a commitment to quality shared by the university community, e.g. quality culture, is required.

In order to develop meaningful QA processes that foster this commitment, one has to balance with the accountability requirements and institutional cultures, which ultimately greatly influence the acceptance and efficiency of these processes.

The concepts of quality culture and quality assurance are sometimes even used as synonyms, which they, however, are not. As one respondent to the EQC survey wrote: 'Quality culture and quality assurance are not the same thing. You can have good QA in place, but not necessarily a quality culture. The challenge is linking the outcomes of QA to the development of a quality culture that enhances the student experience' (Loukkola and Zhang 2010: 16). Therefore, it is worthwhile reflecting on these concepts and on why quality culture has proven so challenging to grasp.

In the context of the recent EUA projects – including the EQC project – internal quality assurance was used in the broad meaning of the term, which includes 'all activities related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality of an HEI',

not only specific quality monitoring or evaluation processes (EUA 2009: 13; Loukkola and Zhang 2010: 18). This same approach – quality assurance covering also enhancement – has been adopted for the purpose of this paper.

In terms of quality culture, EUA's Quality Culture project saw it consisting of two complementary elements: 'shared values, beliefs, expectations and commitments toward quality' and 'a structural/managerial element with defined processes that enhance quality and aim at coordinating efforts' (EUA 2006: 10). This definition has since been applied in other EUA projects, which have, therefore, considered quality assurance as an integral part of the culture.

However, some researchers have articulated the relationship between QA and quality culture differently. For example, Harvey has argued that a quality culture is independent from specific QA procedures (Harvey 2009: 3). Even if a link between QA processes and quality culture is established – as EUA argued above – it is impossible to define quality culture because every HEI is different and, hence, has its own organisational culture, while it can be acknowledged that this unique culture can be fostered and strengthened by QA processes (Harvey and Stensaker 2008: 434).

Along the same lines, Ehlers found, in light of dominant organisational theories, that 'quality culture is part of the overall organisational culture' and, thus, is 'always there, and not a phenomenon, which has to be established first.' He further continued by noting that a culture is a diverse phenomenon and an organisation usually display several cultures (Ehlers 2009: 350, 352).

Thus, while internal QA processes can be defined, identified and developed, it is worth bearing in mind that quality culture is a much more complex concept and difficult to manage as it is intimately connected to organisational cultures. And this is why developing QA becomes all the more challenging and the lesson learnt is that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution in terms of internal QA (see, for example, Newton 2002; EUA 2006; Sursock 2011).

17.3 The State of Play in Terms of Internal Quality Assurance Processes

The recent developments in European quality assurance are intrinsically linked to the Bologna Process (see Chap. 14 by Sursock). Thus, the ESGs, which were developed in this context and adopted by the European Higher Education Ministers, also quite understandably focus on the teaching and learning mission of the higher education institutions (HEIs).

Bearing this in mind, the EQC survey finding that quality assurance processes in European HEIs most commonly cover teaching and learning activities is rather natural.[1] It is, however, interesting to note that during various international meetings

[1] 98.2% of the survey respondents answered that their QA activities covered teaching and learning, whereas research (79.3%), governance and administration (65.8%) and service to society (47.7%) were less frequently covered. Not even QA of the student support services was nearly as common (75.7%), despite the fact that it is closely related to the teaching and also to some of the standards of the ESGs (Loukkola and Zhang 2010: 34).

where institutional quality assurance systems have been discussed, it has become apparent that it is not always evident that the focus is on teaching when discussing QA. Outside Europe, it seems more common for a HEI to develop a system that covers all activities from the start than, for example, to begin with teaching and only afterwards consider gradually extending it to cover other activities. However, in Europe, the focus of QA activities and the remit of QA units continue to be teaching.

When asked when their institution had introduced the quality assurance system, just less than half of the institutions (48%) responding to the EQC survey reported having begun in 2005 or earlier, while 16% stated that they are still designing the system. This clearly demonstrates that, while the maturity of the QA systems varies greatly, for the most part internal QA as it is understood nowadays, it is a recent phenomenon (Loukkola and Zhang 2010: 21).

The European higher education landscape is characterised by diversity: diversity of national systems, as well as institutional profiles. This is usually seen as one of the key strengths of the European framework. The diversity is very much present also in the internal quality assurance: while the focus of QA usually is on teaching and learning and the ESGs provide a common framework for what is considered as good practice in QA, the ways of implementation vary greatly. The EQC survey showed that the institutions, while complying with the external framework they operate in, still have searched for different structures and set up processes that are distinct from others, thus adapting them into their own internal context. For example, the structures to manage the processes vary from an institution to another, there is no model that would dominate and the same goes for processes, such as developing and monitoring the curricula, conducting internal self-assessments. The HEIs clearly have different combinations of various processes in place (Loukkola and Zhang 2010). This is important also from the perspective of the EQC final conclusion that a mix of several QA instruments is needed to ensure good intelligence rather than reliance on a single instrument (Sursock 2011: 50).

In terms of QA system models in use in the HEIs, less than 9.5% of the respondents to the EQC survey applied a ready-made model such as ISO, EFQM or QAF, whereas 27.5% considered their system to be tailor-made for the HEI in question. However, the majority (64.9%) of the HEIs characterised their system as being institution-specific while following national QA frameworks and guidelines (Loukkola and Zhang 2010: 28).

These results, therefore, confirm the conclusion of the 2009 Stocktaking Report: ‘the national reports demonstrate that HEIs in most countries are actively working to establish coherent internal QA systems and aligning them with the external assessment procedures’ (Rauhvargers et al. 2009: 55). What this alignment can entail will be discussed in Sect. 17.5.

17.3.1 Implementing the ESGs

Table 17.1 summarises the key findings of the EQC survey in terms of implementation of part 1 of the ESGs, which covers internal QA. For the most

Table 17.1 Key findings corresponding to ESGs part 1 of the EQC survey

Corresponding ESG	Summary findings based on the survey
1.1 *Policy and procedures for quality assurance*: Institutions should have a policy and associated procedures for the assurance of the quality and standards of their programmes and awards. They should also explicitly commit themselves to the development of a culture which recognises the importance of quality and quality assurance, in their work. To achieve this, institutions should develop and implement a strategy for the continuous enhancement of quality. The strategy, policy and procedures should have a formal status and be publicly available. They should also include a role for students and other stakeholders	Two thirds of the respondents had a separate institutional QA policy statement (67.1%) and in a quarter (24.8%) of the cases the quality statement was included in another institutional policy document. 4.5% do not have any QA policy document 98.2% of the respondents answered that their quality assurance processes cover teaching and learning
1.2 *Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards*: Institutions should have formal mechanisms for the approval, periodic review and monitoring of their programmes and awards	95.5% of the respondents have defined explicit learning outcomes for all or some of the study programmes and 71.7% have made them publicly available In most cases (85.1%), the curriculum is designed by a working group consisting of various stakeholders and ultimately approved at institutional level (41%) or by an external body (30.6%) Processes for reviewing and monitoring programmes vary greatly and most institutions use combinations of various processes The involvement of stakeholders is not always transparent or structured. Students are involved in 40.5% of HEIs in measuring student workload and, when a working group prepares the curriculum, 50.8% of HEIs report that students are part of the group
1.3 *Assessment of students* Students should be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures which are applied consistently	75.7% of institutions have clear, pre-defined examination or other assessment methods in place, including, for 66.7%, regulations covering student absence, illness or other mitigating circumstances. Most institutions have a mix of several features as mentioned in the guidelines 82.4% of institutions make the assessment methods and criteria publicly available through their website, study guides or equivalent. In about the same number of institutions, teachers inform the students about these methods and criteria at the beginning of the course 60.8% of institutions ensure that assessments are conducted securely in accordance with the institution's stated procedures, and 48.2% of them have their administration checking that the procedures are followed

(continued)

Table 17.1 (continued)

Corresponding ESG	Summary findings based on the survey
1.4 *Quality assurance of teaching staff*: Institutions should have ways of satisfying themselves that the staff involved in teaching the students are qualified and competent to do so. They should be available to those undertaking external reviews, and commented upon in reports	71.8% of institutions conduct student surveys, 63.1% have specified their own requirements for competencies of permanent teaching staff when hiring them. 61.7% offer optional pedagogical training for teachers whilst 26.1% organise compulsory training 59% of institutions keep the information on teachers' aptitudes and performance confidential and available only at leadership level (institution and/or faculty and/or department) In the case of 22.3%, the legal framework does not foresee the possibility of removing an ineffective teacher
1.5 *Learning resources and student support*: Institutions should ensure that the resources available for the support of student learning are adequate and appropriate for each programme offered	Learning resources are quite commonly offered, the most common being library (93.2%) and computer services (90.1%). However, their regular monitoring and evaluation is not quite as common
1.6 *Information systems*: Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes of study and other activities	93.2% of the institutions have centralised information systems in place that include information on their teaching mission. Most commonly, this information includes: student progression and success rates (87.7%), profile of the student population (83.2%) and teacher-student ratio per faculty/department/institute (65.5%)
1.7 *Public information*: Institutions should regularly publish up-to-date, impartial and objective information, both quantitative and qualitative, about the programmes and awards they are offering	The most commonly published information is on qualifications granted by the programme (86.9%), the teaching, learning and assessment procedures used within the programme (82.0%) and the intended learning outcomes of the programme (81.5%). All institutions offer, with a variety of features, some sort of information on their programmes

Source: Loukkola and Zhang (2010: 33–34)

part the findings appear to mirror the findings of the 2009 Stocktaking exercise (Rauhvargers et al. 2009).

Since the ESGs were adopted in 2005, the focus on learning outcomes has increased and it is worth exploring some additional results related to them. The guidelines related to the standard on the approval of the programmes, ESG 1.2, include a suggestion of explicit learning outcomes being developed and published. According to the national reports of the Stocktaking report, in a quarter of the countries, all HEIs have described their programmes in terms of learning outcomes, while slightly more than a further quarter of the countries said that most HEIs have done it (Rauhvargers et al. 2009: 52).

The authors of the report found this result rather optimistic and asked whether this was 'partly due to confusion between "learning outcomes" as statements of what the learner will know, understand and be able to demonstrate after completion of a programme of learning (or individual subject/course) and the overall aims or expected "outcomes" of programmes, which, of course, have always been defined for courses of study in higher education' (Rauhvargers et al. 2009: 56).

This kind of confusion might also explain the finding of the EQC study with 95.5% of HEIs responding that they have defined explicit learning outcomes for all or some of the programmes (see Table 17.1).

Moreover, the demand for transparency has grown in recent years and, in this light, the ESG 1.7 on public information has been under scrutiny, many expectations being loaded on quality assurance in this regard. The Stocktaking report found that nearly all countries have answered that either all or most HEIs publish up to date, impartial and objective information about the programmes and awards offered (Rauhvargers et al. 2009: 55) and Table 17.1 lists the information most commonly provided.

To conclude this short review on the state of affairs in terms of internal QA, it is important to underline that the institutional QA systems are, by no means, restricted to the processes and structures that have been included in this section. Nor are they restricted to those mentioned in the ESGs. This only offers a tiny peek into the institutional reality, which is usually composed of a variety of activities and structures in place.

17.4 The Impact on Quality

EUA's Trends 2010[2] concluded that one of the most important changes in the past 10 years has been enhanced internal quality assurance processes (Sursock and Smidt 2010: 84). Furthermore, the results above and empiric evidence brought forward, for example, during the European Quality Assurance Forum,[3] demonstrate that great progress has been made in developing internal QA systems. It is safe to say that there exists a shared understanding of good practices and that acknowledgement of the institutional responsibility for QA is growing. Needless to say, however, that how this is implemented in practice varies from one context to another.

Thus, HEIs have invested a great deal of time and resources to develop their systems, either because they have been forced to do so by the national requirements or out of their own willingness. Whilst it is evident that a great driver of this development

[2] EUA's 'Trends' reports, which have accompanied the Bologna Process from its launch in 1999, aim to contribute to the understanding of developments in Europe's changing higher education landscape with particular attention to the institutional level. Further information is available on: http://www.eua.be/eua-work-and-policy-area/building-the-european-higher-education-area/trends-in-european-higher-education.aspx.

[3] An annual event organised by the E4 Group (ENQA ESU, EUA and EURASHE) and endorsed by the Ministerial Communiqués. Since 2006, the event has offered an opportunity for many institutions to present their experiences in developing QA and, also, to learn from each other through debates. Further information is available on: http://www.eua.be/eua-work-and-policy-area/quality-assurance/qa-forum.aspx.

has been the growing number of requirements by the external QA, Trends 2010 also found a link between internationalisation and importance given to the development of internal quality processes (Sursock and Smidt 2010: 84), which suggests that the growing competition and collaboration, which both require trust-building between universities, are important drivers for QA.

However, in the midst of all the effort that is put into developing QA processes, there are those who are asking whether we are 'pulling the wrong cart', as Huisman and Westerheijden formulated it when they questioned whether the ESGs have contributed to improving the quality of education (Huisman and Westerheijden 2010: 63–65). When developing the processes, have the actors lost sight of what is essential and maybe forgotten the ultimate goal of QA? What has been the impact of these processes on the quality levels?

These questions are worth pondering upon. One should not lose sight of the fact that quality assurance is a tool, not a goal in itself. QA processes should, ultimately, aim at ensuring a certain level of quality and, even more importantly, enhancing quality levels while they contribute to building trust among the stakeholders.

However, measuring the impact of QA processes at a general – European – level is extremely difficult, if not impossible. At institutional or programme level it may still be possible to demonstrate some causal relationship between a specific QA activity and the quality, although even one that can be questioned.[4] In this regard, EQC findings showed that there still remains work to be done in developing efficient feedback loops (Loukkola and Zhang 2010: 38) suggesting that when those are in place, quality assurance will have an impact on quality. Equally, EQC made the point that certain conditions help to ensure impact such as responsibilities being devolved and accountability lines clear and when internal QA systems allow certain degree of adaptation at departmental or faculty level thus promoting ownership (Sursock 2011: 55).

When examining the impact at HE system or EHEA level, the question becomes even more challenging. Not least due to the rather tumultuous decade experienced by the European higher education, as Trends 2010 noted, in the last decade, in all European countries, the institutions have been involved in several simultaneous reforms, some related to the Bologna Process, some to the reshaping of the national HE systems (Sursock and Smidt 2010: 15–19; Sursock 2011: 17–19). This further complicates any impact analysis of QA at system level.

Nevertheless, it is relatively safe to argue that the QA processes, both internal and external, coupled with the other Bologna Process action lines – such as the introduction of the three-cycle system and qualification frameworks, increased emphasis on the employability of graduates and internationalisation – have driven HEIs to examine and streamline their internal processes and support systems, to pay attention to staff competencies and the student experience, etc. If this is all done in a way that it fosters the quality culture, it is reasonable to expect that it has a positive impact on quality levels.

[4]See, for example, Bennett (2001) on difficulties of assessing quality in higher education and Newton (2002) on 'situational factors' influencing the success of QA.

17.5 External Quality Assurance as a Driver

As discussed above, external QA frameworks can be efficient drivers for the development of internal QA. In the best case scenario, 'the external drivers have led to quality cultures when the institutions have managed to seize upon changes in the external environment and to embrace quality assurance processes that are fit for purpose and engage the university community' (Sursock 2011: 20).

However, recent studies have also voiced concerns about the potentially detrimental effects of external QA. For example, Trends 2010 noted that 'the introduction of new national external evaluation procedures has caused some institutions to pay much less attention to their own internal accountability procedures, thus leading to a compliance culture. This seems to be particularly true when the external agency is perceived as being formalistic and bureaucratic' (Sursock and Smidt 2010: 63). Westerheijden et al. identified a rise of compliance culture and underlined that an 'engagement of stakeholders within higher education institutions is needed to create the genuine quality cultures' (Westerheijden et al. 2010: 31).

According to a 2010 Eurydice report, three quarters of countries in the EHEA have adopted a QA system based on supervision and ensuring minimum standards, while only 14 had adopted mainly an improvement-led approach, with the primary responsibility lying at institutional level (Eurydice 2010: 27). A survey conducted among the European QA agencies which are members of ENQA found that, while many agencies carry out a combination of different external QA activities, programme level procedures were more common than institutional level (two-thirds carry out programme level activities, about 40% institutional ones) (ENQA 2008: 24).

A recent EC working document accompanying the revised Modernisation Agenda further found that 'both internal and external quality systems in Europe have tended to focus on accreditation of programmes against minimum standards, rather than pushing for excellence, and exploring new and innovative ways to ensure the quality and relevance of programmes' (EC 2011b: 38).

This may lead the reader to feel that there is not much room for quality enhancement in QA. If so, how could these external frameworks better support HEIs? Taking the assumption that external QA will always be necessary so as to provide stimulus to and legitimise the results of the internal QA, the key is in finding the right balance between these actions. EUA, as a representative of European universities, has identified a number of key success factors that lead to the increase of institutional responsibility for quality, such as:

- the greater the institutional autonomy, the more robust the internal quality processes introduced in universities, and vice versa (EUA 2010: 2).
- external QA frameworks with a fitness for purpose approach respecting the diversity and the institutional mission statement as a starting point and focussing on an improvement orientation that stresses the self-evaluation phase (EUA 2010: 3).

17.6 What's Next for the Internal Quality Assurance?

Bearing in mind the extensive work done in developing internal QA processes while the impact it has had on quality levels still remains, to some extent, a mystery, it is reasonable to ask what the future will entail in this respect. The question is all the more relevant considering that there is an on-going debate regarding the need to revise the ESGs.[5] Nevertheless, irrespective of the ESG debate, there are a number of key challenges for internal QA that HEIs will need to address one way or another. In the following section three of them are discussed shortly.

17.6.1 Learning Outcomes and Links with Curricula Development

As more time passes and experience on QA processes accumulates, legitimate questions are being asked about the linkage between QA and the educational quality or student experience (for e.g. Harvey 2009; Huisman and Westerheijden 2010). This is, certainly, a hot topic within the universities as well. How to ensure the link between QA processes and what is really happening in the classrooms so that QA would not be just another burdensome bureaucratic exercise?

The question is timely but challenging, and there are no right answers. Some indications can, however, be proposed and some have seen the development of learning outcomes as the one of the answers.

Thus, for some time already, QA practitioners have discussed what the development of learning outcomes might mean for the future of QA. The 2009 Stocktaking report found that 'some countries are on their way to including the learning outcomes and student assessment issues into external quality reviews of the programmes' (Rauhvargers et al. 2009: 55). Considering the influence external frameworks have on internal processes, it is clear that more HEIs are required to address these issues through their QA systems.

Haakstad recently wrote about the shift towards the learning outcomes approach in QA and what kind of changes this would require. He found that quality assurance should 'renew its emphasis on didactic concerns'. It would, i.e., 'include a scrutiny of how precisely and comprehensively students' achievement of intended learning outcomes is assessed. […]To assess the level, coherence and progression of a programme in terms of the interrelationships between the qualifications framework,

[5]ENQA, ESU, EUA and EURASHE are currently working on a project, MAP-ESG, which gathers information on how the ESGs have been implemented and applied in the 47 Bologna signatory countries, at national level, in higher education institutions and in quality assurance agencies with the aim of preparing a recommendation to the Ministers of higher education whether a revision is needed. Further information is available on: http://mapesg.wordpress.com/.

the specific learning aims, the descriptions of teaching/learning processes, the curriculum and the assessment methods will be a major task' (Haakstad 2011: 35–36).

This would strengthen the link between QA and curriculum development and also facilitate the strengthening of the feedback-loops currently seen as a weakness of many QA systems (Loukkola and Zhang 2010: 27). Right now, the link between curriculum development and QA varies greatly, the link being more tangible in more mature QA systems than in others. Nevertheless, programme or curriculum committees quite naturally should be an important part of any institutional QA system (Sursock 2011: 30).

17.6.2 Contributing to the Modernisation of HEIs

The second challenge to be addressed is how to ensure the effectiveness of QA processes by strengthening the link with institutional governance and strategic management. This would support HEIs in their efforts to improve the quality of provision through modernisation and to facilitate the contribution of higher education in terms of societal needs.

The link between QA and university strategic management is also crucial to the HEIs for internal reasons, considering that EUA's Quality Culture project highlighted the importance of linking QA to institutional strategy in fostering quality culture (EUA 2006) and assuming that a genuine improvement in quality levels can only be reached through developing the quality cultures. Still, the EQC survey showed that this remains one of the main areas of development (Loukkola and Zhang 2010: 38).

In light of the discussion about the external QA as a driver for internal developments, one is inclined to ask whether the weakness of this link has to do with the external QA frameworks focusing on ensuring the minimum standards – rather than developmental perspectives – and on programme level activities – rather than institutional capacity for defining and managing the quality.

17.6.3 Promoting Innovation[6] in the Knowledge Societies

As previously described, there is a great expectation towards QA to promote the innovation through innovative practices and creativity within HEIs, which is, then, expected to shine on other sectors of society. Nevertheless, there have been concerns about the QA processes becoming too bureaucratic, favouring a compliance culture and avoidance of risk taking. It is clear that those involved in developing

[6]Innovation is being used in this context as in the Lisbon Strategy consisting of the successful production, assimilation and exploitation of novelty in the economic and social spheres.

internal QA processes need to bear this in mind in their work. Therefore, some suggestions were made by a EUA project,[7] that recommended, i.e.:

- Commitment to the developmental approach to QA;
- Involving the whole HE community and relevant stakeholders in QA;
- Ensuring engagement and capacities of those involved;
- Developing the partnership between institutions and agencies; and
- Sustaining QA processes allowing risk taking and failure, which are essential for creating new knowledge (EUA 2009: 7).

17.7 Conclusion

The capacity of HEIs to manage the QA processes and to find an appropriate balance between different developmental paths and to seek synergy benefits will determine the future of internal QA. In this context, the role of the external QA is not to be underestimated. As discussed in Sect. 17.5, the external requirements and guidelines influence the choices made by the HEIs in terms of developing their internal processes. Therefore, it is interesting to note that, in an increasing number of European countries (the Netherlands, Germany, Flanders, Denmark, to mention a few), there is growing interest to move towards different versions of external QA that focus on the capacity of HEIs as a whole to ensure, oversee and enhance the quality of their processes.

Nevertheless, regardless of the concrete approach adopted, the key to success is understanding the nature of HEIs as complex organisation with various missions and different solutions in terms of processes or structures to improve quality. And these will and should, most certainly, continue to differ from one institution to another. Experience has shown that, in order to promote quality culture, QA should be owned by the university community and each institution should take account of its internal and external context so as to determine what kind of structures and processes best suit its needs. Based on the results of the studies referred to in this paper, this is, indeed, what the European HEIs have done.

This paper aimed at providing a snapshot on the trends in internal quality assurance within the European HEIs, while demonstrating the complexity of the topic at hand. As demonstrated above, considerable progress has been made in terms of setting up and further developing processes, but the impact they have actually had on the quality itself remains to be determined. Moreover, it is evident that just having the processes in place does not yet lead to a quality culture, but may support its development. And only the cultural change is generally considered to lead to a change process.

[7] EUA and its partners ACQUIN, the Higher Education Academy and the National University of Ireland, Maynooth carried out a project Quality Assurance for the Higher Education Change Agenda (QAHECA) 2007–2009.

Thus, the work to develop internal QA that fosters quality culture continues and 'there is a need to increase the focus on internal quality assurance within the EHEA' (Rauhvargers et al. 2009: 51). As a recent OECD report on lessons learnt on teaching quality noted:

> The sum of individual initiatives taken by teachers is not sufficient for an overall improvement of quality teaching in an institution. Only the institution (at central level and at departmental level) can detect benchmarks, promote good practices and scale them up across departments, and think up effective support matching teachers' expectations with those of students' (Hénard 2010: 43).

However, as explained in this paper, one of the key drivers for internal QA is the external framework and, therefore, these two aspects should be considered as complementary – two sides of the same coin, so to say – when continuing to develop the European quality assurance framework.

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