



WORKSHOP REPORT: DEVELOPING A QUALITY ASSURANCE STRATEGY – A COLLABORATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract. The report of this workshop introduces a collaborative model of developing quality assurance strategies in institutions of higher learning, as part of the Erasmus+ CBHE QUARTZ project. Understanding that successful quality assurance involves more than just formal adherence to external standards, the workshop invited QA experts, institutional heads, and the academic staff of the Uzbek higher education institutions, along with the European partner universities to collaboratively create a practical and replicable model of QA strategies formulation. The report records some of the main principles that came up during the workshop such as the strategic adoption of pre-designed drafts as structured starting points, the significance of initiating processes with central coordination and later moving to collaborative creation, the need to engage various institutional units and finally the importance of aligning the strategies of QA to the institutional mission. The QA strategy document has three-part structure, which consists of principles, which govern the quality policy (academic excellence and continuous improvement, student-centred focus, transparency and accountability, and quality culture), mission-aligned goals (teaching and student community, research, and third mission and society), and assessment and review approaches (degree programmes, PhD programmes, and third mission). Workshop facilitation, pre-workshop preparation, post-workshop refinement and implementations are some of the practical recommendations that universities should consider to implement. The report recommends that a proper development of QA strategies should involve a combination of structured but flexible strategies, participatory activities leading to institutional ownership, all-encompassing coverage of every area of the mission, contextualization of international standards, and long-term dedication to build a true quality culture. The framework will be used by QA officers, university leaders, and policy formulators interested in transforming the quality assurance of higher education in Uzbekistan and other similar environments.

Keywords: Quality assurance, higher education, QA strategy, institutional development, quality culture, QUARTZ project, Uzbekistan, ESG

1. Introduction

The successful deployment of quality assurance (QA) systems in the context of higher education has been an ongoing issue in most developing contexts of higher education such as Uzbekistan (Odilov, 2025). Although national regulatory frameworks, including the creation of the National Agency of Quality Assurance in Education and the establishment of state accreditation requirements in 2025, are necessary external standards the transformation of these standards into sustainable institutional practices will have to go beyond compliance (Jurayev & Kurbonov, 2024). It requires the creation of coherent, institutionally owned and context-specific QA strategies that are integrated into everyday academic and administrative operations (Kahsay, 2012).

With this in mind, a joint workshop titled “Developing a Quality Assurance Strategy: A Collaborative Framework to Universities” was organised as part of the Erasmus+ CBHE QUARTZ project. The workshop included QA experts, institutional heads, and faculty members of various higher education institutions in Uzbekistan, as



well as the partner universities in Europe, in an effort to co-create a viable and scalable QA strategy development model. One of the key aspects of the workshop was that a pre-written QA strategy document, developed by Laquilla University, would be used as a systematic point of departure of discussion, critique, and adaptation to context.

The results of the workshop are summarised in this report. It records the major tenets that were developed as critical in the writing of a QA strategy such as the use of pre-written drafts, the role played by the institutional mission and the importance of participatory processes with various units of the university. Another aspect of the report is a collaboratively designed design of the QA strategy document, which includes guiding principles, mission-oriented objectives, and evaluation techniques. Lastly, there are some practical recommendations on how the university can gain or redesign its QA strategies, based on the outcomes of the workshop.

The focal point of the current report is to present a systematic, repeatable and evidence-based model of the QA strategy development, one that would strike a balance between international standards (especially the ESG) and local institutional realities. It is aimed at QA officers, university leadership, and policy developers involved in the current process of changing the quality assurance of higher education in Uzbekistan and similar situations.

2. Basic guidelines to write a QA Strategy

2.1. Start with a Pre-designed Draft

Within the framework of the QUARTZ project, which was a part of the Erasmus+ initiative, the universities that took part in it decided that one of the key barriers to the development of effective quality assurance (QA) strategies is the absence of a structured starting point. Most of the times, the institutions were using fragmented practices or trying to create strategies independently and this brought about discrepancies between them and little practical use (Krouglov, 2017). In order to resolve this situation, the proposed project suggested utilizing a developed template of the QA strategy as a basic tool that could help the process of development.

The draft was prepared with the help of the European partners of the project, considering the correspondence to the internationally accepted frameworks, including the Standards and Guidelines on Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). Such a framework would guarantee that the strategy would be based on generally accepted principles but still allow adapting to the unique aspects of the Uzbek partner institutions.

The quality assurance system was structured into a number of important sections that were included in the draft document. First, it has defined how the quality assurance process should be managed, including roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes. This involved the establishment of roles of quality assurance units, academic councils, and governing bodies and how they will interact.

Second, the document detailed internal evaluation processes. These are course reviews, program reviews, self-evaluation processes and academic feedback processes.



At this point, it was also necessary not to make the procedures complex, but to make sure that they are possible and do not contradict the current practice in higher education institutions in Uzbekistan.

Third, the draft foresaw the mechanisms of monitoring and analysis, such as the development of procedures for data collection, analysis, and use to make decisions. These mechanisms include key performance indicators (KPIs), periodic reporting, and feedback systems, which will enable continuous improvement as opposed to an end-of-period evaluation.

Lastly, there was the draft entailing stakeholder engagement. Current quality assurance systems involve active involvement of students, academic and administrative staff and where necessary, involvement of external stakeholders like employers. The draft indicated the location and contributions of these groups towards quality assurance processes.

It should be pointed out that this first document was not to be a final plan. Instead, its primary worth was in the fact that it was a working document. It can be used as a general point of departure that can guide different stakeholders to have substantive and organized discussions. In the absence of such a starting point, consultations tend to be disjointed and fruitless (Batini, et.al, 2012).

Practically speaking, the draft assists with standardizing the terminology, expectations and eliminates the uncertainty during the initial development phases. It also increases the pace of the process itself since it enables the stakeholders to react on particular proposals, as opposed to abstract concepts.

The QUARTZ project, in our opinion, shows clearly that the application of the pre-developed framework is not a technical measure but a strategic instrument. It helps to steer universities out of isolated and formalistic approaches toward a more coordinated, collaborative and effective process of formulating quality assurance strategies.

2.2. Launching the Process

The institutional level initiates the development of a quality assurance (QA) strategy through the central QA unit or a working group specially formed. This primary phase is essential, since it defines the course, extent, and degree of aspiration of the whole process (Pramono, et.al, 2018).

This central team will usually work on the preliminary outline of the QA plan, which may be based on the current institutional practices and adapt them to the international standards, including the ones advanced as part of Erasmus+ initiatives. At this level, the idea is not to come up with an ideal document, but to have a systematic outline that captures the present situation of the HEI and gives potential developmental paths.

Concurrently, the working group determines the scope and goals of the strategy. These include answering important questions, that include:

- What areas of quality will the strategy deal with (teaching, learning, research, services);



- How detailed must it be;
- The outcome of achievement the institution wants to have on both short and medium term.

It is also important to determine key stakeholders in the whole university.

These typically include:

- academic departments and faculty,
- administrative departments,
- students and student representatives,
- external stakeholders.

By determining these groups early, the process will be inclusive in the first place and minimize the chances of resistance at subsequent stages (Suleiman, 2023).

The participation of the leadership of the university (the president and the vice presidents) is crucial at this early stage. Their involvement is more than mere sanction. The role of the leadership plays a number of important functions:

- it gives credibility to the process, showing that quality assurance is a strategic focus and not a technical process;
- it makes sure that the creation of a quality assurance strategy is coordinated with the overall objectives of the university;
- it helps in the distribution of the required resources, such as time, human resources, and organizational assistance.

Nevertheless, practice, such as the experience acquired during the QUARTZ project, makes it clear that the completely centralized approach is not enough. Even though the early stage of the project development can be handled by a small team, the crucial transition that has to be made is the shift from centralized development to a collaborative one.

This change is a paradigm shift. The draft document should be more inclusive to wider participation of the representatives of the institution, and different departments and stakeholders should be involved in it, questioning some of the assumptions, and tailoring the strategy to their unique conditions. Devoid of such change, the QA strategy may remain a paper document, with minimal practical implications. When put into practice, the strategy is transformed into a usual institutional frame that has a base in the real practice and is supported by the people who do the implementation. This is one of the most critical moments in the entire process in our opinion. It will decide whether the quality assurance strategy will be used as an administrative measure or as an instrument of living institutional development.

2.3 Engagement of Different Units

A good quality assurance (QA) plan should take into consideration the complexity and diversity of the university as an institution. Universities are not uniform institutions; they comprise different academic fields, administrative models, and stakeholder groups, all of which possess a sense of quality, priorities, and goals. Thus,



a QA plan created in a vacuum, by one department, is likely to be out of touch with what is really happening at the institution (Kayyali, 2023).

In order to be relevant and applicable, the following groups should be actively involved into the development process:

- academic units directly engaged in teaching, curriculum development and student learning outcomes;
- administrative units that facilitate learning activities by providing services including student admissions, student support and data management;
- students, the feedback of which is valuable information regarding the quality of teaching and learning;
- professional bodies, such as employers, and other external stakeholders, particularly in practice-based areas.

These groups should not be included in a symbolic way but organized, substantive. Such cooperation can be developed in universities with the help of various practical tools:

- forming interdepartmental working groups comprising the representatives of different faculties and departments;
- conducting focus group meetings to discuss particular quality-related matters and expectations;
- organizing thematic seminars about critical areas of quality assurance, including instructional methods, evaluation procedures, and online education.

With such mechanisms, educational institutions are in a position to consider different perspectives and make sure that the quality assurance strategy is a reflection of the realities in the different departments of the university.

The fact is that a collaborative approach is not only desirable, but is also a key to the success of a quality assurance strategy. First, it promotes institutional ownership. The stakeholders feel more inclined to accept and support the implementation of the strategy when they are taken into the process of strategy development. This greatly minimizes resistance which is usually a challenge in reforming the quality assurance system. Second, there is contextual relevance due to collaboration. The quality assurance mechanisms that are developed based on the input of the people who implement them are more realistic, achievable, and in harmony with the current practices. This prevents the usual issue of strategies that are brilliant on paper, but do not translate into practice. Third, it creates a quality culture. A culture of quality also centers on group values, accountability and ongoing improvement, unlike quality control, which centers on ensuring that the requirements are met. Such a culture is based on collaboration.

Practical experience of the international sphere, especially in the context of the Erasmus+ QUARTZ project, indicates that educational institutions that consider participatory methods in the formation of QA systems have much higher rates of implementation effectiveness and long-term sustainability. Top-down approaches, on



the contrary, frequently result in mere formality in compliance with requirements with no real impact.

Development of a QA strategy is not a single event that should happen but rather an evolutionary process. The plan must be created in a series of consultation, gathering feedback, and improvement cycles.

An average evolution process involves the following steps:

- getting a preliminary draft prepared, typically by the central QA department or a working group;
- holding consultations on a departmental level, whereby the draft is tabled and debated;
- systematic gathering and analyzing feedback in order to find out both general tendencies as well as particular problems;
- creating and sharing updated editions, which capture the opinion of stakeholders;
- institutional leadership to make sure that it aligns with the strategic priorities.

In this way, the strategy can be slowly developed, which can be an initial idea and then a reasonably based institutional document.

More significantly, it will convert the quality assurance strategy into a formal requirement to a collective obligation of the institution. The stakeholders are not just given the final document but are actively involved in the development of the document. Consequently, a strategy no longer is just a policy document, but a shared plan of action backed up by people who are to do it.

This process of iterative and collaborative process is what we feel is one of the most critical indicators of quality assurance system maturity. It represents a change in the attitude of administrative compliance to the real intentions of the institution to enhance the quality.

2.4. Correspondence to Institutional Mission

It is one of the most frequent weaknesses in the development of a QA strategy to use some standardized documents which do not consider any specific conditions. In most occasions, universities take the pre-written templates or replicate the strategies of other institutions of learning without modifying them appropriately to their own situations.

Though these methods can be done on paper, and satisfy the demands of the outside world, they do not always lead to tangible outcomes. The greatest danger is that the QA strategy will remain a symbolic or bureaucratic document, one that is not linked with everyday academic and administrative practice.

This in practice has a number of adverse effects:

- QA happens in a formal way, and does not affect the decision process;
- Academic staff view QA as an administrative tool, not a support tool;
- The institution's priorities are not effectively reflected in quality assurance processes.



The quality assurance strategies are usually more focused on the requirements fulfilment, instead of improvement, which is the opposite of the philosophy of the modern European quality assurance systems. Consequently, they seldom help in building a sustainability culture of quality.

A good QA strategy should be entrenched within the mission, vision and strategic profile of the university. Each university or college has its own context, influenced by its academic specialisation, student body, the region and development agenda. Thus, a QA system cannot be a universal one but it must consider certain conditions and be mission-oriented.

The creation of a matrix according to which the priorities of the institution are connected to particular quality assurance mechanisms can be considered one of the helpful practical tools:

Institutional Priority	QA Mechanism
Improving teaching quality	Course evaluations, peer review
Internationalization	Joint program monitoring, mobility feedback
Employability	Graduate tracking, employer feedback

This kind of comparison assists in making sure that quality assurance is not an abstract concept, but instead, the quality assurance is directly connected with the objectives of the institution. Moreover, it assists in enhancing communications by showing clearly how QA activities aid in the strategic development of the institution.

An effective QA strategy should not be a parallel or independent system. Quite on the contrary, it should be completely embedded in the overall management and governance processes in the university.

This must have a number of vital components:

Inclusion in strategic planning: QA goals and processes need to be coordinated with the developmental plans of the institution, and they need to be reviewed regularly to be examined as components of the strategic cycles.

Connection to performance measures: QA processes should be connected with performance measures, which would allow institutions to monitor the progress and define areas where improvement is necessary.

Use in decision-making based on evidence: data generated by quality assurance activities - such as student feedback, assessment results, and performance indicators - must be actively used in decision-making at all levels of the institution.

QA in this model is a decision-support system as opposed to a reporting mechanism. It offers adequate information that can assist the management and



academic departments to make sound judgments regarding the curriculum development, resource allocation and institutional priorities.

One of the most important aspects of the effectiveness of a QA strategy is alignment with the mission of the institution. In the absence of such alignment, even well-crafted QA systems are likely to turn into mere formal procedures. With this kind of alignment, QA can be a potent instrument of institutional change and permanent progress.

3. Structuring the QA Strategy Document

Part 1: Principles in the Quality Policy

The quality policy of any higher education institution should be based on a set of well-defined principles which should have an expression of core values of the institution, its strategic direction and stakeholder commitment (Mourad, 2017). These principles are not aspirational statements per se but operational pillars that determine decision-making, resource distribution, and daily activities. Four key principles were found to be the guiding principles to an effective and sustainable quality assurance strategy based on the collaborative discussions during the workshop.

To begin with, the quality policy should exhibit a true desire to achieve academic excellence and continuous improvement. The ultimate aim of higher education is academic excellence, but this concept cannot be interpreted as any static accomplishment or a goal. Instead, excellence should be viewed as a continuous quest towards greater standards, more profound learning outcomes, as well as more effective teaching practices. A quality policy based on this principle denies complacency and opposes the idea of accreditation or external review as a destination. Rather, it institutionalises the idea of continuous improvement in the institutional DNA by incorporating systematic data gathering, periodical review cycles, peer institution comparisons, and professional development systems that focus on pedagogical development. Continuous improvement does not mean constant turmoil but a disciplined form of gradual improvement, which includes evidence-based changes that are carefully introduced and assessed in terms of their effect.

Second, the quality policy should put the student community as a major stakeholder of any quality assurance processes. The students are not passive receivers of the educational services but active and engaged participants whose experiences, feedback, and outcomes of learning are valuable evidence that can be used to assess and enhance the quality of education. This principle entails that institutions should go beyond tokenistic consultation to the actual involvement of students in the curriculum design, programme evaluation, teaching quality assessment, and governance structures that are related to quality assurance. Surveys of student satisfaction, representation in quality committees, and student grievance systems are not peripheral elements but fundamental elements of a student-centred quality policy. Acknowledging student



input as an actual factor in institutional decision-making makes students feel like they are stakeholders in the quality improvement efforts, and not outside observers, which creates a sense of collective ownership of academic standards, as well as learning conditions.

Third, the quality policy should highlight transparency, accountability and stakeholder engagement as values that are interlinked. Transparency can be defined as openness of communicating quality assurance policies, procedures, and results to all those concerned, such as students, academic personnel, administrative staff, employers, and the rest of the individuals. Accountability implies that institutions own the quality of their delivery, and are ready to show their performance in comparison to the set goals and outside standards. Stakeholder engagement is not limited only to the students but also to faculty members who will be active participants and not passive subjects of quality processes but also to the external partners like professional bodies, industry representatives, and alumni. A good quality policy will make information relating to quality available, decision-making processes well documented, and have a feedback loop to show how the input of the stakeholders has been employed to bring about change. In the absence of transparency and accountability, quality assurance is likely to be seen as an internal bureaucratic game with not much relevance to the people that it is designed to serve.

Fourth, the quality policy should portray a strong commitment to promote a quality culture at all levels within the institution. A culture of quality, in contrast to quality control, is based on shared values, collective responsibility, and intrinsic motivation to improve, instead of on compliance with external requirements. This rule acknowledges that no external mechanism or regulation system can replace the authentic devotion of academic and administrative employees towards high standards. To establish such a culture, leadership that sets and demonstrates quality-oriented behaviour on a regular basis, reward systems that reward quality improvement efforts, and professional development opportunities to help instill quality-related competencies throughout the institution are needed. It also needs a change of mindset, viewing quality assurance as an outside force to an opportunity to grow professionally and develop the institution. An established quality culture is one where there is an open discussion of the challenges, readiness to learn about mistakes, and the joint celebration of the achievements made. Once this principle is completely fulfilled, quality is not a distinct operation carried out by a special department but a component aspect of all academic and administrative operations, encompassing curriculum development as well as student support services, faculty staffing as well as graduate follow-up.

Part 2: Objectives of the Quality Policy by Mission Area

A higher education institution needs to express its quality policy in clear, measurable objectives that are varied throughout the core areas of the mission of the institution. Based on the discussions at the workshop and with examples of other institutions, such as the practice of Central Asian University, three areas of mission



were identified as necessitating specific, but interrelated quality goals: teaching and the student community, research and third mission with societal engagement.

A. Teaching and the Community of Students

The first area of mission involves the teaching and student community, where the quality goals should be geared towards improving the basic educational experience. One of the key aims is to improve the curriculum and its relevance by ensuring that the academic programmes are periodically reviewed and modernised to align with the up-to-date disciplinary knowledge, labour market requirements and the changing societal demands. This will involve systematic curriculum mapping in relation to learning outcomes, incorporation of digital and innovative pedagogies, and alignment with national qualifications frameworks. The second aim is to enhance student support and learning provision such as academic advising, tutoring, career counselling, as well as access to the library and digital infrastructure. The quality assurance in this aspect requires institutions to observe the sufficiency and availability of support services by surveying students, analyzing usage statistics and correcting deficiencies where they are found. A third goal is to enhance student satisfaction and participation, as the student is the key stakeholder with the experiences of which the quality of education is directly related. This includes not just quantifying the level of satisfaction by conducting periodic surveys but also providing real opportunities to students to act in governance, the curriculum committee, and quality audit procedures. The fourth goal is to enhance assessment and feedback processes, replacing summative, reproduction-based tests with diversified, competency-based assessment approaches that entail formative feedback, ongoing assessment, and clear grading standards. Teaching and student community quality goals are used to guarantee that the institution provides a student-centred learning environment that equips graduates with the right learning that would prepare them to continue their learning and to work.

B. Research

The second area of mission has been identified to include research and innovation in which the quality goals should be directed to the quantity and the quality content of the scholarly activity. One of the key goals is to foster research integrity and ethical practices, which can be achieved through the systemic application of plagiarism detection tools, proper policies regarding authorship and data management, and frequent faculty and student training on responsible research practices. In the absence of these integrity mechanisms, the results of research become credibility challenged and the institution is at risk of tarnishing its reputation. The second goal is to enhance the quality and impact of research not only in the quantity of publications but also in terms of their positioning in indexed journals like Scopus and Web of Science, citation rates, and impact on knowledge. The commercialisation of research in terms of patents, intellectual property, and technology transfer, and translation of findings into practical applications is also included in this goal. A third goal is to assist early-career researchers and faculty development, as sustainable research capacity relies on mentoring, research funding opportunities, access to international scientific databases and organised professional development programmes. This goal involves promoting



engagement in national and international research programmes, academic mobility programmes, and industry and research organization projects. Its fourth aim is to promote interdisciplinary and collaborative research, no longer confined to the silos of a particular discipline, but instead integrating methods that deal with complex issues in society. The quality goals of a research should thus involve observing strategies like the quantity of research grants, collaboration arrangements and joint publications with colleagues from other disciplines or sectors. Constant control over these indicators is the guarantee of constant quality of the research and compliance with the national accreditation standards.

C. Third Mission and Society

The third area of the mission deals with the relationship and contribution to society by the institution beyond the normal teaching and research purposes. One of the key aims is to enhance community involvement and social responsibility, where the university responds to local and developmental issues in the country with meaningful activities. As Central Asian University (through their project Ayol by CAU) demonstrates, this goal means creating and executing programmes that address certain needs of the society, e.g. economic empowerment of women, and evaluating their performance in terms of the number of participants, number of businesses established, number of people employed, and number of people whose income was improved. The second goal is to increase knowledge transfer and collaboration with industry, government institutions and civil society organisations. This implies the need to develop formal collaboration agreements, mechanisms for the transfer of technology, innovation actions, and in encouraging the development of entrepreneurship by means of startup competitions, incubation programmes, and applied research which is responsive of needs in the real sector. The quality indicators are the active partnership agreements, the number of collaborative research projects, and the commercialisation results obtained. The third goal is to quantify and report on societal impact, acknowledging that third mission efforts have to be recorded, appraised, and reported to stakeholders. This is to create case-studies, to monitor joint projects and social engagement activities, surveys of partner satisfaction, and regular reporting of social innovation projects. In the absence of systematic measurement, the value of third mission activities is likely to stay on an anecdotal level and unrecognized in institutional quality schemes. The fourth goal is to incorporate sustainability and social commitment in all institutional processes and ensure that considerations of environmental responsibility, ethical awareness, and social justice designs are incorporated in the curriculum design, research priorities, and operational practices. This involves the encouragement of cultural and educational growth by way of festivals, international cultural days, creative activities, and arts programmes, and so on, which will help to present the university as an open cultural and intellectual space. In general, quality goals in the third mission area would establish a sustainable combination of education, research, innovation, and societal development that would



lead to the social stability of the region, economic growth, and the legitimacy of the university as a public-good organization.

Part 3: Evaluations and Overview Techniques

An effective quality assurance plan must involve a systematic evaluation approach in all the areas of the mission. Based on the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle as an organising framework, three areas require different, but combined evaluation methods: degree programmes, PhD programmes, and third mission with social commitment.

Quality of Degree Programmes and Syllabus Description

Degree programme quality assessment is structured on cyclical programme review, which involves a mixture of in-house self-assessment and external assessment. The first step in this approach is to formalise the planning by engaging in incessant discussions with the stakeholders, both the public and the private bodies, professional organisations and the graduates. Teaching and service organisation is defined by the Degree Programme Board and the teaching quality is controlled by the QA Committee, chaired by the Programme Coordinator and comprised of teaching staff and student representatives, who propose corrective measures. The Advisory Board, which is made up of outside professionals, forges links to the world of work. The second critical approach is setting out clear learning outcomes and ensuring the syllabus alignment. Degree programmes should specify precise, quantifiable learning outcomes that are not only reflective of both disciplinary norms and labour market demands, but have a set of systematically aligned syllabi that ensures coherence between teaching and learning methods, learning activities and assessment. The self-assessment process, which is carried out on an annual basis, confirms this alignment and establishes the strengths and weaknesses that would facilitate planning on how to improve it. The third approach is systematic application of student feedback, graduate employment statistics, and employer surveys as key evaluation instruments. Student surveys on opinion help to capture firsthand experiences of teaching quality and assessment fairness. Graduate employment statistics monitor career and career development. The employer surveys are external views regarding graduate competencies and programme relevance. These sources are combined to inform annual self-assessment, as well as periodic external reviews.

Quality of PhD Programmes

The quality of the PhD programme should be evaluated with the help of the methods which will meet the peculiarities of the doctoral education. The former is a systematic observation of quality of supervision and degree of student achievement. The Coordinator is assisted by the Doctoral Programme Committee, which is in charge of quality assurance, internationalisation, and training. Quality of supervision is checked by the use of organized processes such as periodic progress reviews, records of supervisor-student meetings and student feedback. The progress of the doctorate is monitored against clearly outlined milestones between the completion of the coursework and the thesis. The second one evaluates time-to-completion and attrition as the key performance indicators. Long completion periods usually reflect issues of



supervision, resources or student support, and attrition rates are a high cost of investment. These indicators are tracked on an annual basis, disaggregated on the basis of discipline and cohort with corrective actions being taken where any patterns of concern arise. Strategic advice on the alignment of programmes with contextual needs is given by the Advisory Board, which consists of academic and scientific representatives. The third one measures the academic and professional performance of doctoral graduates. Academic performance encompasses academic publications, conference papers, and patents, but the quality and quantity are focused on. Career outcomes monitor the professional paths of alumni and graduate success in academia, industry, government, and non-profit organizations with surveys and tracking of graduates. These findings are reported by the Quality Committee to the university bodies per year in a circular flow of information that helps to raise awareness of processes and results.

Quality of Third Mission and Social Commitment

Third mission and social commitment can be evaluated with the help of methods that take into consideration the contribution made by the university to the development of the society that are not related to teaching and research. The first one is the case study development to record community impact. In contrast to quantitative measures, case studies are elaborate accounts that shed light on how certain initiatives have created tangible impacts on communities or businesses. These case studies can be viewed as accountability, showing value to funders and regulators and can be viewed as learning, establishing what is working and can be transferred to other settings. The second approach entails the implementation of the partner satisfaction surveys as a direct tool of capturing stakeholder points of view. Structured feedback on the effectiveness of communication, responsiveness, quality of deliverables, and overall satisfaction are given by external partners, such as industry, government agencies, NGOs, and community groups. Findings are presented in the University Quality Committee and incorporated in the annual QA report. The third approach follows the collaboration projects, the activities of the public engagement, and the social innovation as the key signs of the third mission vitality. Some of the important monitoring elements are the quantity and quality of the partnership agreements with the external parties; the amount and intensity of the engagement activities related to the community, such as events, workshops, and the number of participants; technology transfer outcomes, such as spin-offs supported and patents registered; and community impact, such as feedback provided by local beneficiaries. A self-assessment process takes place annually and assesses performance and contribution to society, resulting in certain corrective measures and updates to the strategy, and it is explicitly aligned with the goals of sustainability, such as contributing to the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

4. Practical Suggestions and Advice for Universities

Following the joint workshop debates and experience of the participating institutions, some realistic recommendations on how universities can build or rebuild



their own quality assurance strategies were identified. These recommendations are arranged in chronological order through three stages; pre-workshop preparation, workshop facilitation, and post-workshop refinement, and then cross-cutting implementation considerations.

Pre-Workshop Preparation

A good QA strategy should be developed long before there is any official talk. The most crucial preparatory measure is to get a draft QA strategy document circulated among all the participants long before the workshop or consultation meeting. This pre-reading enables the stakeholders to become accustomed to the structure, terms, and intended content of the strategy, and therefore, they can be present with a mind to provide insightful comments instead of having to look at the document for the first time at the meeting. This preparatory step is essential, without which the precious meeting time is wasted in simple orientation and the discussion is superficial. Another recommendation towards this is to delegate certain parts of the draft document to other institutions or working groups before the meeting. As an example, one institution could be tasked with the responsibility of reviewing and making recommendations on the principles section, another on the objectives by mission area, and another on assessment methods. This method promotes ownership, sharing of work, and bringing various expertise to bear on every section. When members are aware that they will make significant input on a given part, they will be more inclined to delve into the content and come with tangible suggestions as opposed to vague impressions.

Workshop Facilitation

In the workshop itself, effective facilitation should be formal in order to keep the focus and assuring productive results. The three main sections of the QA strategy document: principles, objectives, and assessment methods, are to be used in organising the workshop discussions. This three-part model offers a rational progression between the core values and operational objectives to evaluation systems, avoiding the disjointedness and lack of focus in discussions. The parts are to be dealt with in a step-by-step manner with well-defined periods of time that will not be disrespectful to the complexity of a particular subject. The second facilitation suggestion is that time should be provided to both the plenary presentation and small-group breakouts. Plenary sessions are useful in introducing content, overall feedback and developing shared understanding among all participants. Nevertheless, it is necessary to use small-group breakout sessions to promote more active engagement, since, in this way, participants will be able to talk about particular issues in more depth, reveal opposite points of view, and come up with more complex recommendations. Breakout groups ought to be organised around particular questions or parts, and have assigned facilitators and reporters who can report back to the plenary to discuss important insights more widely. The plenary and small-group design makes sure the workshop will be both collective in its sensemaking and intensive in terms of collaboration.

Post-Workshop Refinement

The workshop is not the end of the work of developing a QA strategy. After the event, the organising team has to synthesize all the feedback, suggestions and



recommendations to a modified copy of QA strategy document. It is important in this process of consolidation to keenly identify the difference between a minor editorial recommendation and substantive structural or policy reform and where there has been consensus and where the divergent views cannot be resolved further. After preparing a revised draft, it is advisable to present it to all the participants of the workshop to have it finally validated before it is officially approved. The purpose of this validation step is twofold: not only does it ensure that the revised document is an accurate reflection of the discussions at the workshop, but it is also the last chance of the workshop participants to express any concerns they may have. It is after this validation that the strategy can be subjected to formal approval by the governance procedures within the institution. This process of drafting, consulting, revising and validating turns the QA strategy into a document that is dictated by a central office into a shared structure, influenced by the diverse stakeholders of the institution.

Implementation Considerations

In addition to the document development process, some cross-cutting considerations are also necessary so that implementation is successful. First, there should be a definite action plan that will be implemented together with the QA strategy by universities. This action plan must define clearly who is to carry out what action, realistic timeframes in which it could be completed, and the resources (personnel, budget, technology) that would be assigned. In the absence of such an action plan, the finest strategy can end up being a pipe dream and not an operative strategy. Second, the institutions ought to have a monitoring and review committee that will monitor the implementation of the strategy and coordinate the periodic updates. This committee, preferably consisting of representatives of academic and administrative departments, student organizations, etc., should hold regular meetings to monitor the progress on the action plan, determine the obstacles in implementation, and propose changes where necessary. The committee also facilitates the periodic review of the strategy itself to ensure that it is kept up-to-date with changes in institutional priorities as well as outside demands. Third, and most importantly, the QA strategy should be embedded into institutional governance structures and processes of decision-making.

This implies that the issue of quality assurance is not an addition or a special reporting measure to be taken but rather a part of the manner in which the university makes strategic decisions, distributes resources, reviews performance, and reports to external stakeholders. Once integration has been reached, the QA strategy is no longer a document to be filed, but rather a living framework guiding institutional behaviour at all levels.

5. Conclusion

This workshop report has offered a collaborative model of quality assurance strategy formulation in higher education establishments based on the experience of the Erasmus+ CBHE QUARTZ project and the overall experience of the involved Uzbek and European universities. The framework is based on a number of conclusions.



To start with, a successful QA strategy means a well-organized but flexible strategy to balance between using pre-designed templates and the need to adapt to the specific context. The workshop experience showed that it is beneficial to begin with a well-developed draft document to have a common point of reference that organizes discussions and speeds up the development process. Nonetheless, any such draft should be allowed to be heavily revised on the basis of the institutional mission, the requirements of national regulation as well as the varied opinions of the stakeholders. The risk is as much in blindly and indifferently copying external templates as it is in trying to create a strategy with no reference to any existing good practice.

Second, the development process itself is as important as the final document. A QA plan designed remotely by a quality assurance head office and passed on to be passively accepted is not likely to elicit the sense of ownership needed to implement it successfully. By contrast, a participatory process involving academic departments, administrative units, students, and external stakeholders, by the use of structured consultation, working groups, and collaborative workshops, will yield a strategy that is not only better informed but also more generally supported. The investment in meaningful consultation pays off by less resistance in the implementation process and increased readiness on the part of staff and students to participate in the quality assurance processes.

Third, the text of a good QA strategy should cover three areas of mission that are interrelated: teaching and the student community, research and innovation, and the third mission with societal engagement. Although the emphasis on the quality of teaching has been a priority in most QA systems in the past, modern higher education demands an equivalent emphasis on the quality of research as well as the role of the university towards social and economic progress. It was repeatedly stressed by the workshop participants that the community engagement, transfer of knowledge and social innovation are the third mission activities that have to be evaluated using the methodological rigour used in assessing degree programmes and doctoral training.

Fourth, the conformity to international standards, especially the European Standards and Guidelines on Quality Assurance, offer a wonderful point of reference, though alignment should be interpreted as adapting, as opposed to adoption. The ESG framework provides principles and guidelines that have been effective in various systems of higher education in Europe. Nonetheless, they need to be construed against the national regulatory background of Uzbekistan, the missions of particular institutions and the national development priorities. The replication of European models in a mechanical manner, not with any contextualisation, will most probably result in formal compliance, but not substantive improvement.

Lastly, the effectiveness of any QA plan will always rely on the establishment of quality culture in the institution. Regulatory systems, accreditation standards, and supervision are all that they need. Authentic quality culture is achieved when the quality is internalised as a common value by the academic and administrative personnel, when students are seen as partners instead of passive receivers and when continuous improvement is a habit of working rather than enforced on them. The



QUARTZ project, with its focus on participatory culture of strategy development, capacity building and international knowledge sharing, offers a systematic channel to such a quality culture. The structure outlined in the current report is an effective resource to the university that takes that path, although the path needs the long-term leadership effort, the patience of the institution, and the desire to understand the lessons of successes and failures along the way.

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