

University Quality Assessment in Spain: A (double) Bid of an Engineering School at Polytechnic University of Valencia

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Abstract: Quality control at universities is a non-compulsory subject in Spain in order to get accreditation capability. However, with the aim of studying and improving university standards the Spanish Government settled rules by means of which, and in a completely optional basis, universities could be checked by external evaluators.

Escuela Universitaria de Ingeniería Técnica Industrial de Valencia, whose origin dates back to 1855 which make it the second oldest School of Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, went through this process in 1996/97. It is worth while noting that this decision was taken by itself and involved everybody: administrative staff, cleaning services, concierges, director, faculty, students, deputy directors and Xerox services.

During 1998/99 and by its own applying EUITI has gone through this evaluating process for second time.

The most relevant features of these evaluation processes and what parameters should be taken into account in order to measure university quality standards will be discussed by the authors.

Keywords: Quality assessment, Spanish Universities, EUITIV.

1. Introduction

According to the Spanish regulation U.N.E. 66001, quality is defined as “the set of properties and characteristics of a product or service awarding it the capability of satisfying certain expressed or implied needs”.

Starting from the premise that the student is the customer, our service, which is Teaching, should meet the students needs in technological training and human formation, i.e.:

Properties and characteristics	technological training and human formation
Service	teaching
Needs	requirements of our customers: the students

From this point of view and summarising it in a few words we might say that quality in teaching is to perform the adequate steps each time so that our customer, the student, finds in our service, teaching, a satisfaction to fill his needs in technological training and human formation, [1].

The aim of this note to give a general view of how Spanish Government, through the Department of Education, addresses this important issue and how a particular Engineering School, the Escuela Universitaria de Ingeniería a Técnica Industrial de Valencia (EUITIV) at Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, has voluntarily gone twice through an evaluation process during 1996-1999.

The board taking care and maximum responsible of general university matters is the Consejo de Universidades (General University Board), which is formed by all University Rectors (about 70), the Education Secretaries of the 17 Spanish Autonomies and a group of Experts (usually less than 10) appointed by the Congress.

In order to promote quality concern, the Consejo de Universidades yearly calls for Universities/Schools voluntarily wishing to be evaluated [2]. It also determines the aspects to be evaluated such as Administrative Management, Teaching Quality, etc.

Evaluation is carried out by two different committees: the Internal Evaluation Committee, which is elected by the government bodies of the University/School to go through evaluation, and the External Evaluation Committee, whose four members are named by the Consejo de Universidades.

2. First assessment at EUITIV

Teaching quality has been twice evaluated at EUITIV, firstly in the academic year 1996/97 and secondly in the academic year 1998/99.

The EUITIV went through evaluation of its teaching quality for the first time in the academic year 1996/97. An excellent reality was then detected, which still exists and even improves. This was reflected in the External Evaluation Report, whose most outstanding results follow:

- The studies offered by this School received the largest number of applications among students wishing to study at Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, [3].
- Strong leadership of the Dean School and his team of collaborators.
- Innovation Programmes.

Moreover, this First Evaluation showed us some points that needed to be improved. Among them, we may mention:

- The general aim and purposes of the studies were not written down.
- Syllabuses of some subjects not always available in the xerox service.
- Delay of some Departments in informing the assigned staff to the different groups.
- Exam dates remained unknown at the time of registering.
- Tutorials not generally used by the students.

In April 1996, both the Universidad Politécnica de Valencia (UPV) and the Consejo de Universidades organised the first information meetings.

On 23rd April 1996, within the Junta Permanente de Centro, the Escuela Universitaria de Ingeniería Técnica Industrial de Valencia voluntarily requested its inclusion in the group of UPV-Schools chosen for carrying out the Quality Project presented by this University in the framework of the Plan Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad de Universidades.

The first stage consisted of a publicity campaign providing general information on the Project and on the decision made by the Junta Permanente to begin the evaluation process.

In June 1996, the Internal Evaluation Committee (IEC) was created. Professors, representatives of the administrative staff and students were its members. This committee met regularly to prepare the Internal Report and the Final Report [4] which followed.

On 14th January 1997, the process of Public Auditory of the draft of the Internal Report Study was begun. The document was delivered to all members of the School community.

On 24th January 1997, a Junta Permanente was held, discussing the amendments to the document and including them in it upon general agreement.

On 30th January 1997, a Junta de Centro took place, in which the final text of the Internal Report was approved. The document was then handed in to the Servicio de Estudios y Planificación of the UPV.

The members of the External Expert Committee visited EUITIV in May 1997 (20th, 21st and 22nd) in order to generate the External Evaluation Report. This document reached the Servicio de Estudios y Planificación de la UPV on 15th July 1997. After having been widely communicated within the UPV and once it had been carefully studied by the CIE, the different Departments and the administrative staff, a draft of the Final Report was written and spread to all members of the School.

This document showed the strong and weak points identified by the evaluation, explaining their levels of implication, responsibility and decision.

3. Second assessment at EUITIV

Three years have passed since EUITIV made up its way in Quality Evaluation of Teaching. After the First Evaluation and its favourable results, we came to the idea of carrying out a voluntary Second Evaluation.

This Second Teaching Quality Evaluation was based on two main points. First, the huge infrastructure change experienced by the School (we moved into a completely new building). The second aspect to be taken into account was the establishment of new syllabuses. Both changes removed some of the evils detected by the First Evaluation, but they may also bring about new ones, [5],[6].

This way, on 27th October 1998 a new Quality Committee was created to deal with the generation of the second Internal Report.

Since then the committee has started his duty following a pattern of regular meetings. Several smaller committees were created to collect and process data for later analysis. Meetings and tests among the different School groups provided further information.

On 21st April 1999 the first draft of the Internal Report written by the School's Quality Committee was presented. Regular meetings followed to improve the document until it was finally ready on 28th April 1999.

Once the draft of the Internal Report had been delivered to all members of the School Community, the Public Presentation of the Internal Report took place in the School's Conference Room.

After collecting and discussing amendments, on 27th July 1999 the definitive Internal Report was written. It remained available to the School Community as a printed document, and on the net as well.

The External Expert Committee visited EUITIV in October 1999 (20th, 21st, 22nd and 25th) in order to generate the External Evaluation Report.

On 29th November 1999, the External Evaluation Report reached EUITIV. The School's Quality Committee studied it and wrote the Final Report [7].

Among the strong points singled out we find:

- An excellent relationship between the University and the Industry.
- Wide and strong international relations.

- Teaching innovation commitment.

Between the deficiencies detected in the second assessment we find:

- Relation between the School and some Departments to be improved.
- Absence of administrative procedure in ink for Administrative Staff.
- Convenience of extending to four years the actual teaching of our Engineering studies due to the heavy content of the syllabuses.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Despite the short period past between the two evaluations, this intense experience in Teaching Quality had been quite challenging and we feel that we have reached a point at which we can estimate and study the advantages, obstacles and the truth provided by these Quality Evaluations that up to now have been carried out at EUITI.

One of the advantages of these assessments is to get a real knowledge of the university by providing a radiography in full detail of every aspect related with it. A lack of these evaluation processes is not providing adequate funds to go through some of the detected deficiencies.

According to the EUITIV atmosphere of innovation and continual improvement, we feel that we cannot stop at this point. Therefore, we shall carry on with the Teaching Quality Process and make up our way towards adapting the European Full Quality Model (EFQM) as an internal evaluation tool. Additionally, we shall work on the generation of a System to ensure Full Quality.

Up to now all activities have been carried out with the help of all School members (professors, administrative and service staff, students.). But now, in order to reinforce and encourage this new work model, the EUITI has created its own Quality Office. It will promote and give support to every aspect related to excellence and achievement of an increasing improvement. The School is consequently providing the Quality Office with the necessary material and human resources

5. References

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