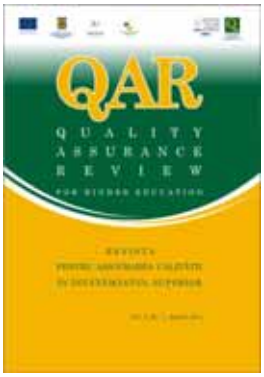

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Quality Management Integrated in the Academic Activity

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Quality Management Integrated in the Academic Activity

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Abstract: *Quality management focuses on those strategies, structures, techniques and operations through which the institution demonstrates that it evaluates its assurance and improvement performance for quality in education. It is also a proof that it has information systems able to disclose the research and learning results. The significance of this field of activity consists both in its focusing on the way in which the institution administrates the quality assurance for all its activities, and the publication of the data and information endowed with a certain quality level. Within this context, 1 Decembrie 1918 University of Alba Iulia has implemented a process-based approach for quality management system projecting, implementation and the improvement of the quality management system efficiency with a view to improving students' satisfaction and quality increase to all the academic activities. In the first step, we have elaborated the system and working procedures and in the second step we have implemented these procedures in the academic activities. On the other hand, we have assembled a team of 12 internal auditors who regularly audits the following activities: education, research and administration. Audit findings are included in the annual analysis of quality management system, accompanied by reports and action plans. This approach allows us to know and to continuously improve the overall activity of the university.*

Key words: *best practice, new practices, quality management, education quality, academic activity*

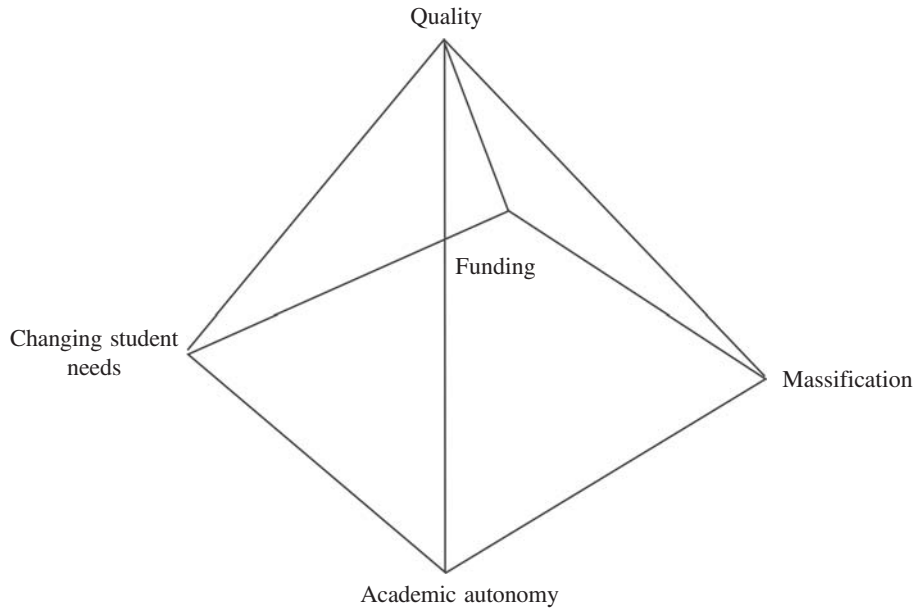
1. General aspect

Traditionally, quality in higher education was seen in terms of the "exceptional". By its very nature, elitist higher education recruited exceptional teachers, researchers and students and provided them with exceptional libraries, laboratories and opportunities to learn from one another. "Excellence" was the clarion call of all universities. The emphasis was on high quality inputs. The result was "excellent" outcomes - pioneering research, scholarly theses and exceptional graduates, who were attractive to employers simply by dint of being graduates [1].

"Quality" has also become used as shorthand for the bureaucratic procedures applied to monitor various notions of quality. It is thus not the quality itself that is regarded as undesirable, but the paraphernalia of quality monitoring that is seen as so intrusive. Quality is not so much about what or why, but about assurance and assessyment. It is about who decides what an appropriate educational experience is, for what purposes and at what cost [1–3].

"Quality" is about academic autonomy, about expanding and improving higher education systems.

Figure 1. *Quality in Higher Education,* Source*: Harvey, 2007*



Cynicism about "quality" in higher education is thus superficially linked to a view that it involves an agenda being controlled from outside academia. The changing perceptions of "quality", from something intrinsically "good" to something to be treated with suspicion, reflects the complex inter-relationship in higher education between massification, funding, academic autonomy, and changing student needs (Fig.1).

Massification and the changing needs of students in themselves reflect the pressure of international competition and the internationalization of labour markets. "Quality" becomes the focus of attack or derision from those within academia reluctant to face up to changing student needs and preferring an introverted cloisterist approach (as opposed to a responsive collegialism). "Quality", conversely, becomes the legitimating ever more insidious managerialism. It "conceals" the under-funding of mass/fled systems and it brings with it overbearing and bureaucratic accountability. We should be focusing on "quality" at the pinnacle of the pyramid, but also on the elements on the base of it [1].

A dominant characteristic of European educational policy in the last decade is the systematic evaluation of higher education institutions undertaken as a consequence of indirect pressure from – or by the direct initiative – of governing authorities. The evaluation methods which are used often combine self-evaluation with external evaluations and various forms of external reporting. In what is known as quality audits, the evaluation focus is on the higher education institution as a whole, where the objectives are often coupled with the desire to support universities and colleges in their attempts to redefine their mission, their activities and organization, and to stimulate and renew their way of dealing with the expectations of both society and students [2–3].

2. Tools for maintaining and improving quality of education. A case study – Internal audit

In order to maintain and improve quality in our university we used different ways to complete specific ARACIS methods [5-7]. One of these instruments is ISO 9001:2008 standard. This standard requires an annual internal audit by a team of specialist auditors.

2.1 Theoretical premises

1 Decembrie 1918 University undertook an institutional re-evaluation in October 2009, following which, it was awarded the 'high level of trust' degree. This important step has increased the accountability and responsibility of the institution towards the academic activity and not only. The management team of the University has been involved in a series of projects that aimed at maintaining and increasing the quality of teaching, of research and of the administrative activity in the institution.

An important step for our institution has been the ISO 2001:2008 certification, which has determined us to analyze the entire quality management system closely, to pay more attention to the degree of satisfaction of our clients – students, but also an important aspect, the quality of human and material resources.

To maintain a continuous contact with the structures of the University, a team of 12 internal auditors was set up, which, beginning with the academic year 2009-2010 has started auditing the university structures.

The 12 auditors are members of the University Board for Quality Management and they became internal auditors in June 2008. They attended continuing training courses organized by TUV Rheinland Romania, internationally recognized and accredited courses. A multinational company with extensive experience in auditing European institutions (50) conducted the first internal audit. The 12 auditors observed the audit and gained experience. This academic year, the Quality Management Department of the University developed an annual audit plan, approved by the Academic Senate in January and implemented during the following months [7-10].

2.2 Aims and objectives of the internal audit

The 12 auditors were divided into 4 teams of 3 people. They were appointed by the Rector of the University (decision no. 779/5719 of 25.05.2010, issued by the Rector of the 1 Decembrie 1918 University of Alba Iulia, professor ACHIM Moise Ioan)

Type of audit: – The team of internal auditors has carried out a system audit regarding the observance of principles, methodological and procedural rules as regards the ARACIS Methodology and *the Quality Management System ISO 9001:2008.*

The aim of the audit mission was to monitor the ARACIS quality indicators in the field of education, research and administration, at the University level.

Objectives:

a) *The design of the academic curricula*;
b) *the teaching activity*
c) *the University-client relationship* (students);

Length of the audit mission: 01 – 11.06.2010.

Audited period: academic year 2009-2010.

Audited structure: Faculty of Law and Social Science

Methodology/working instruments/legal grounds*:*

A sample check of the teaching and non-teaching activity was carried out in the audited structure, regarding the observance of laws and regulations, of efficiency requirements, of adding value by formulating recommendations and of correcting problems, if found.

The main auditing techniques and instruments used:

a) checking to detect errors or problems;
b) physical observation in view of forming a personal opinion regarding the issuance and setting up of documents;
c) check lists to set up the requirements that each audited field must meet;
d) compliance risk report for each identified problem

Laws and regulations underlying the audit activity:

a) The internal auditing plan for the academic year 2009-2010, approved by the University management;
b) The internal auditing programme for the academic year 2009-2010, approved by the University management;
c) Law no. 87 of 10.04.2006 endorsing the Government Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005;
d) Government Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005 regarding the insurance of quality in education with subsequent changes;
e) Order of the Minister of Education and Research no. 3.928/ 21.04.2005 regarding quality assurance in higher education;
f) Annex to the Order of the Minister no. 3.928/ 21.04.2005;
g) Guidelines for the quality evaluation of academic programmes and higher education institutions issued by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS);
h) Standard ISO 9001:2008 (SR EN ISO 9001:2008) regarding the Quality Management Systems. Requirements;
i) Manual of Quality and Procedures issued by the Department for Quality Management within the 1 Decembrie 1918 University of Alba Iulia;
j) Internal regulations of 1 Decembrie 1918 University of Alba Iulia.

2.3 Results

Next we present some results of the audit at the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences. The on-site check (Department of Law, Department of Didactic Pedagogy and Psychology and the Department of Sociology and Social Work) aimed at a number of 8 curricula (of which 7 Bachelor degree programmes and 1 Master degree programme), *60 syllabi* and *45 teaching materials* (electronic or printed course-work).

In order to carry out the specific stages of the internal auditing mission, the team of internal auditors followed the mission objectives, presented before, in order to evaluate the functionality of the *Quality Management System* implemented by the *Faculty of Law and Social Science* based on the norms and regulations mentioned at point 2.2.

Materials set up during the auditing mission:

a) Non-compliance report (NCR);
b) Check list per objectives (CL);
c) Working documents;
d) Audit report,
e) Minutes of the opening, closure meetings.

Following the sample checks and analyses, the team of internal auditors has evaluated (partially) the objectives audited at the Faculty of Law and Social Science according to the check list below. *The evaluations shown in the following table refer only to the audited activities and objectives that need adjustments and not to a global evaluation.*

Table 1. *Overview of the objectives audited by the Faculty of Law and Social Sciences, in the academic year 2009-2010*

Cr. No.	OBJECTIVES	EVALUATION		
		Functional	To be improved	Critical
The Department of Didactic Pedagogy and Psychology				
1.	• Designing the curriculum		X	
2.	• Didactic activity (course description and percentage of teaching material needs covered)			
	- course description		X	
	- percentage of teaching material needs covered	X		
The Department of Law				
1.	• Designing the curriculum		X	
2.	• Didactic activity (course description and percentage of teaching material needs covered)			
	- course description		X	
	- percentage of teaching material needs covered	X		
The Department of Sociology and Social Work				
1.	• Designing the curriculum	X		
2.	• Didactic activity (course description and percentage of teaching material needs covered)			
	- course description	X		
	- percentage of teaching material needs covered	X		
The Faculty of Law and Social Sciences				
1.	• Relationship with the client (students)	X		

3. Conclusion

The internal audit report was set up on the basis of the Auditing programme, of the observations collected during information processing and fieldwork. All the findings were grounded on audit samples obtained as a result of tests mentioned in the working documents (control lists, work sheets) drawn up by internal auditors and assumed by the management factors of the entity.

The evaluation was based on the discussions that took place regarding the recommendations of the internal auditors during the mission closure meeting, evaluated by the participants to be realistic and feasible.

In addition, we believe that the results of evaluating the internal auditors regarding the observance of principles, methodological and procedural rules as regards the *Quality Management System ISO 9001:2008*, and ARACIS regulations fall within regular parameters.

We consider that by implementing the recommendations of the internal auditing team, the aimed objectives will improve significantly.

The audited structure must set up an *Action programme in view of implementing recommendations* and report the implementation stage back to the Quality Management Department no later than September 15, 2010.

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[3]. Turner, D., Benchmarking in universities: league tables revisited, in: Oxford Review of Education Vol. 31, No. 3, September 2005, pp. 353-371

[4].*** Law no. 87 of 10.04.2006 endorsing the Government Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005;

[5].*** Government Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005 regarding the insurance of quality in education with subsequent changes;

[6]*** Order of the Minister of Education and Research no. 3.928/ 21.04.2005 regarding quality assurance in higher education;

[7]*** Annex to the Order of the Minister no. 3.928/ 21.04.2005;

[8]*** Guidelines for the quality evaluation of academic programmes and higher education institutions issued by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS);

[9]*** Standard ISO 9001:2008 (SR EN ISO 9001:2008) regarding the Quality Management Systems. Requirements;

[10]*** Manual of Quality and Procedures issued by the Department for Quality Management within the 1 Decembrie 1918 University of Alba Iulia