VIEWPOINTS TO DEVELOP QUALITY POLICIES IN ENGINEERING PROGRAMS IN EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA

Abstract

Quality assurance in Higher Education is by no means only a European concern. All over the world there is an increasing interest in quality and standards, reflecting both the rapid growth of higher education and its cost to the public and the private purse. Accordingly, if Europe is to achieve its aspiration to be the most dynamic and knowledge-based economy in the world, then European Higher Education will need to demonstrate: it takes the quality of its programmes and awards seriously and is willing to put into place the means of assuring and demonstrating that quality. The initiatives and demands, which are springing up both inside and outside Europe in the face of this internationalization of higher education, demand a response. The commitment of all those involved in the production of these proposals augurs well for the fulfillment of a truly European dimension to quality assurance with which to reinforce the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area’s (EHEA) offer.

The EHEA with its 40 states is characterized by its diversity of political systems, higher education systems, socio-cultural and educational traditions, languages, aspirations and expectations. This makes a single monolithic approach to quality, standards and quality assurance in Higher Education inappropriate. In the light of this diversity and variety, generally acknowledged as being one of the glories of Europe, technical universities set their face to develop their internal quality assurance systems according not only to the European standards and the guidelines, focusing more on what should be done than how they should be achieved, but also to different factors and sources.

This paper identifies and explains all the sources that should be taken into account to provide the quality policies adequate to the technical teachings, including engineering accreditation programs, funding programs or improvement plans. It is showed with a practical case developed in the Quality Manual start up of a Spanish Engineering school.

Current role of the Quality in the Higher Education

Universities are becoming due to the new changes in the society. Universities as part of this new society play an important role for generating new learning and for producing and transferring new knowledge and technologies to contribute solutions to the human, economic, political and cultural problems in the world. Universities have responded to this external pressure with diverse models: entrepreneurial, stakeholder, corporate, or managerial and academic capitalism universities representing the market, competitive, virtual, service, business and other models in order to redefine their position face to the industry, market and the society in general. As consequence there have appeared new cross-boarding higher education providers that are expanding worldwide educational services.
The twenty-first century has begun with an explosion in the number of Higher Education students. Data from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimate that enrolment has increased approximately from 72 million in 1999 to 133 million in 2004. Sanyal and Martin explain this situation due mainly to two reasons: the increase in social demand for Higher Education and in the economic need for more highly educated human resources.

- The increase in social demand is due to the democratization of the societies: increasing number senior citizens looks for culture for its own sake or getting better jobs. The student population has changed and there are more collectives than can be identified: from typical successful completers of secondary education, mature learners enrolled part-time in programs related to an occupation or for pleasure, students who have obtained qualification and are looking for specialized professional opportunities, who pursue education abroad, and those ones want to diversify their occupational activity.

- The increase in the economic need for skills requiring Higher Education. Globalization is based on in a new world information economy combining developments in information and communication technology (ICT) and organizational changes leading to a new international division of labor. The labor required is highly skilled and trained in technology.

How do students, employers, governments, employers in industry and other stakeholders are keeping their edge in quality terms? The main commitment of the universities with all these changes and new role is towards quality, not as general concept but as something that evolves over time. New quality assurance systems are emerging.

**Quality in the context of the European Higher Education**

The issue of quality assurance has risen very high on the Bologna agenda and is seen now as one of the key instruments to promote the attractiveness of European Higher Education. It was made clear that in defining common criteria and methodologies in the European Higher Education is necessary to take into account the diversity of the various systems and traditions that will go into the construction of a comparable framework. Harmonization should be the result of the conjunct of these traditions and should under no circumstances mean their reduction to a common pattern. For the implantation of an effective culture of quality, it is essential that governments, Higher Education Institutions (HEI), quality agencies, teachers and students all participate, in view of the expectation that this process will benefit not only all agents involved but also society at large. The Berlin Communiqué - while recognizing the role of HEIs in promoting quality invites the Quality Assurance (QA) and Higher Education communities to develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance.

It is only possible to establish common criteria and methodologies if mutual trust among Institutions and agencies are achieved on a basis of greater transparency in accreditation processes. To that end it is essential to promote a peer review process among agencies. But this proposal had a risk. The Institutional Evaluation Programme has given Europe a solid experience in transnational evaluation, evaluating close to 120 universities in 35 different countries. This ten-year experience, combined with the outcomes of the Quality Culture project, points to the
fact that it is impossible to reach agreement on quality standards when dealing with a diversity of institutions across a whole continent. By the other side evaluation approaches that are based on standards, quantitative methods, sets of criteria or checklists will not improve quality meaningfully and may not even control it significantly because they will not capture the complexity of the educational enterprise.

Autonomy is a precondition for a capacity to respond to change. Thus, university autonomy requires that each institution decides on its standards in the context of its mission and goals 5, assuming quality as the primary responsibility. A change of paradigm has taken place determined by the idea, that QA is or should be an essential part of the responsibility of a university. So the Graz Declaration claims that "the universities are responsible for developing internal quality culture" and the Berlin Communiqué says that "the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with the institution itself and this provides the basis for the real accountability of the academic system within the national quality network." Licensing and certification is now at least looked at as a shared responsibility of the state and the scientific community. So in Europe corresponding to the role of the state and the role HEI have to play in the Bologna Process there is a double legitimation for QA: it is with the responsibility of HEI and of the governments. As discussed at the Graz Convention (May 2003), among the policy goals for an appropriate European QA dimension are:

- Achieve greater compatibility while managing diversity of QA procedures. There is a great diversity of national procedures in Europe that needs to be accepted as this diversity reflects specific national circumstances that each national QA framework tries to address. Upholding a widely shared set of principles in the QA area would ensure compatibility while minimizing intrusiveness in national frameworks.
- Achieve trust: It is evident from discussions with various key actors, that some believe that trust across Europe can be achieved only if all QA agencies follow similar procedures and guidelines. In other words, trust is based on professionalism, grounded in a set of standards.
- Preserve and extend institutional autonomy while meeting the demands for accountability: It is essential that the development of a European QA dimension accompanies and extends institutional autonomy in order to ensure that QA is not merely window-dressing and a compliance exercise. The Berlin Communiqué acknowledges the central role that institutions must play in this respect.

Quality assurance systems need to be flexible and embrace this diversity in order to ensure that higher education serves effectively society 6.

Stakeholders in the definition of quality policy in Engineering European Higher Education

The statement of quality policy in HEI documents the authority for the implementation of a quality management system in the form signed by the dean or director in charge of the institution implementing the quality management system. It must express the intentions of the institution concerning the quality of the academic offer and the rest of services and products it supplies. It is a way to guarantee the coherence of the processes, products and services covered by the quality management system.
According to ISO 7 with respect to the capabilities enclosed in the quality policy for which the organization is seeking certification, top management should ensure that:

- It is appropriate to the purpose of the organization.
- It includes a commitment to comply with requirements and improvement the effectiveness of the quality management system.
- It is understood and communicated within the organization.
- It is reviewed for continuing suitability.
- It provides a framework for establishing and reviewing quality objectives.

Quality Management System, authorized and conformance by the existence of the Quality policy, defines the policies, procedures, methods and standards for the management of the HEI. The policies for developing, implementing and maintaining the quality management system, first element of this Quality System, must be designed to ensure that stakeholders’ requirements are met. Which are the stakeholders that provide sources for the desired quality deployment of the institution?

Congruence between policy and results is evaluated through audits that periodically check the conformance. That is the reason why the stakeholders’ needs to be clearly identified and their different needs should be met. Any disparity in the definition of policies can be identified and corrected with a frequent feedback from all the stakeholders. In the case of European Engineering HEI we have selected the following stakeholders, in our experience, as providers of policies: Strategic plans of the institution, Guidelines from National Quality Agencies, and Funding programs for the institutions.

**Strategic Plans:**

Leadership systems are the systems within an organization that provides direction and support. The leadership system directs an institution through Mission, Vision, Guiding Principles, Strategic Goals and Organizational Structure. We explain with more detail the elements more relevant to the elaboration of quality policy: Mission and Vision.

- Mission: Mission statements enable HEI to distinguish themselves from one another, but also provide direction for assessment. Missions identify also about what to measure and what quality organizational issue assure. Assessors, in this way, will have the opportunity of measure the quality of the quality policy, among others elements, by determining the degree to which these policies support the unit’s mission and the effectiveness of the mission statement in serving its purpose.
- Vision: Vision provides a clear and shared of performance excellence helping institutions to reach higher levels of performance. Commonly, vision is expressed as a model of what the unit seeks to become. As missions, visions are important to quality assurance and assessment. Through visions can assess performance results against the description included in them, and assessors can measure performance of the quality policy and all the leadership system by determining the degree to which its elements understand, share and are motivated and inspired by the HEI’s vision.
An immediate result of the incorporation of a culture of quality in Higher Education Systems has been that HEI have embarked on a process of internal discussion, and also of analysis of their actions, as these relate to the objectives and the mission established for each institution. Many European universities combine these elements of leadership system and Strategic Planning from a perspective of continuous improvement. From this viewpoint it is needed a defined process for strategic planning while improving the process over time. It is not enough to conduct some type of strategic planning but a strategic planning process needs to be clearly defined.

This process differs significantly of those elaborated in the corporate setting in terms of who needs to be involved and in the relative emphasis on financial issues, although the main steps that will move the institution toward achieving the vision. The reflection for the strategic planning process use to be generated from a self-assessment process or a more detailed evaluation using the corresponding national or European standards for quality in education. A tool that is widely used to stimulate reflection in preparation for the strategic plan is SWOT, listing strengths, weaknesses, threats and then on opportunities. It provides useful information building a common perspective about the current state of the institution to consider the future. Finally, once the politics and strategies goals have been defined, the organization moves in the desired direction thanks to the actions plans defined.

Role of European networks of quality agencies:

Outcomes resulting from the introduction of plans for improvement and for control and monitoring mechanisms and information and dissemination of the results, with particular emphasis on the achievements that each institution identifies in the quality of the service, help to create a culture of quality. However, the culture of quality in universities has also produced results of a more practical kind, such as improved transparency of training processes, which has greatly facilitated student mobility between institutions, and improved definition of the skills and qualifications of their graduates with a consequent improvement in their prospects on the labor market.

HEI themselves have sought external benchmarks to sanction and justify their conclusions. In most comparable countries, HEI seek their external benchmark in the educational authorities that possess the capacity and the competence to enshrine it in a regulatory decision that will assure explicit recognition, in many cases with budgetary implications. Those responsible for higher education policy in Europe have pressed determinedly for the establishment of entities and organizations that will facilitate the institution by universities of assessment initiatives for their improvement. In a further step forward, the establishment of networks of assessing entities was sponsored by the European Commission in exercise of its competences in respect of promoting the European dimension and incorporating added value to Member States' initiatives. The supreme such entity is the ENQA (ENQA’s General Assembly confirmed on 4 November 2004 the change of the former European Network into the European Association) which was recognized by the conference of ministers at Berlin in September 2003 as the preferred interlocutor in matters of quality assurance in the European Convergence process.

The ENQA has played a crucial role in the implantation of institutional assessment as part of the activity of HEI, and as part of the national strategies of European States. There can be no doubt
that the effects of networking of assessment bodies have increased exponentially in terms of more and better knowledge of examples of good practice, exchange of information and experiences, and fluid communication among international experts. In the Berlin Communiqué of 19 September 2003 the Ministers of the Bologna Process signatory states invited ENQA through its members, to develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance and to explore ways of ensuring an adequate peer review system for quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies or bodies. The standards and guidelines were designed to be applicable to all HEI and quality assurance agencies in Europe, irrespective of their structure, function and size, and the national system in which they are located. It had not been considered appropriate to include detailed procedures in the recommendations, since institutional and agency procedures are an important part of their autonomy. It will be for the institutions and agencies themselves, cooperating within their individual contexts, to decide the procedural consequences of adopting the standards contained in this report¹⁰. (Table 1)

Table 1. European standards and guidelines for internal QA within HEI

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>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</td>
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<td>1.2</td>
<td>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</td>
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<td>1.3</td>
<td>Assessment of students: Students should be assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures which are applied consistently</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Quality assurance of teaching staff: Institutions should have ways of satisfying themselves that staff involved with the teaching of students are qualified and competent to do so</td>
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<td>1.5</td>
<td>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</td>
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<td>1.6</td>
<td>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</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>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</td>
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Further, they reflect the statement of Ministers in the Berlin Communiqué that 'consistent with the principle of institutional autonomy, the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself and this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework'. In these standards and guidelines, therefore, an appropriate balance has been sought between the creation and development of internal quality cultures, and the role which external quality assurance procedures may play¹¹. The purpose of these standards and guidelines is to provide a source of assistance and guidance to HEIs in developing their own culture of quality assurance, and to contribute to a common frame of reference in the EHEA. It is not the intention that these standards and guidelines should
dictate practice, be interpreted as prescriptive, or in any way require some rigid measure of compliance. The standards or principles under discussion are quite general and are designed to encompass the situation applying in all forty countries in the process.

Funds:

There exists, in several European countries, concerns about money and accountability in public services. These concerns have led to the rise of previous evaluative activities and a posteriori evaluation which seeks to discover how far goals have been met. The HEI in many countries in this context have moved towards expenditure-driven as opposed to demand-related budgeting. This shift has promoted performance related funding and encouraged Performance Indicators or Quality Indicators which permit finer targeting of resources. Despite the existence of this fact, systems of HEI vary in many ways including the degree of autonomy in institutions and individual academics. Furthermore within any country different policies might be pursued for different sectors of Higher Education.

The case of a School of the Technical University of Madrid

The definition of the quality policy in the Computer Engineering School of the Technical University of Madrid has required the analysis of the sources explained in the previous section. This analysis has allowed the deployment of results for every source. Figure 1 shows these results.
Strategic Plans:

Strategic Plans must distinguish those ones referred to the school and the university to which belongs. The Technical University of Madrid (UPM), (www.upm.es), which it has no Strategic Plan, approved in the year 2005 a Quality Program named “Programa Institucional de Calidad” (PIC, Institutional Quality Program)\textsuperscript{13}, with the following key objective: to measure the quality and to foster and to assist the initiatives of continuous improvement in the different schools, departments and units of the University. The PIC general objective can be developed in a set of more detailed subobjectives:

- To adapt the educational offering to the social and employers needs.
- To adapt the teaching methodologies to the Educational European Space (EES).
- To enhance the effectiveness and quality of the educational processes.
- To develop curricula and educational programs with international dimension.
- To provide a continuous learning offering.
- To foster the interaction among the system R+D+I, the technology transfer and the teaching.
- To strength the application of the ICT in the educational processes.
- To promote the image of the University at national and international level, and to disseminate the contribution of the University to the society.
- To define criteria for resources distribution based upon results.
- To encourage a culture of continuous improvement.

The Mission and Vision Statements of this School, approved last October (www.fi.upm.es), is source too for the quality policy. As concern to the accreditation issue the Vision says: “… the academic offer shall be conformed to the European guidelines accreditation and others internationally recognized in the engineering sector…” By this reason to establish a comprehensive quality policy and strategy, the criteria for quality certification and accreditation of different organizations in the USA and Europe have been taken into consideration, particularly ABET, Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology\textsuperscript{14}, and Baldrige\textsuperscript{15} in the USA, and EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management)\textsuperscript{16} in Europe. The preliminary conclusion is that, in general terms, the policy and strategy elements defined in the above mentioned criteria are quite similar to those covered by other sources: ENQA and ANECA guidelines, and the Institutional Quality Program, PIC, of the UPM. On the other hand, the certification criteria usually provide with more detailed quality requirements, since they focus in “how the organization do” kind of questions to evaluate the performance of the organizations. For this reason, the certification or award criteria are very useful as a guidance to identify the key processes in the organizations.

The fundamental question in the context of this paper could be, “Which accreditation or certification criteria could provide added value to the policy and strategy statements already considered?”
Baldrige and EFQM criteria pursue quite similar certification criteria objectives. On the other hand, the ENQA and ANECA guidelines have taken the EFQM model under consideration; with these points into account, there are only commented in this paper some topics related to the Baldrige criteria, with the scope of providing some view of the USA quality certification boards. The EFQM excellence model is formed by a set of facilitator agents (leadership, persons – students and workforce-, strategy and resources, processes, and alliances) plus a set of results, embodied in key, students, persons, stakeholders and society categories. A comprehensive analysis of these topics is beyond the scope of this paper.

Role of European networks of quality agencies:

In Spain, the Agency ANECA (Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de Calidad y Acreditación: Nacional Agency for Quality Evaluation and Accreditation), member of ENQA, has adapted the ENQA guidelines to the Spanish context and has published a document with a set of guidelines for the systems of internal quality guarantee within HEI. These guidelines could be envisaged with the perspective delineated in the figure 2.

Figure 2. ANECA Quality Model for Higher Education (AUDIT Program)

The guidelines defined by ANECA essentially cover the strategic objectives that intend to answer to the following fundamental questions:

- How the University defines its quality policy and objectives?
- How the University guarantees the quality of its educational programs?
- How the University focus its teaching to the students?
• How the University guarantees and improves the quality of its Faculty personnel?
• How the University manages and improves its facilities, material resources and services?
• How the University analyses and takes in account the results of its action plans?
• How the University publishes the curricula information?

A summary of the ANECA guidelines are herein described:

a) The University must consolidate a culture of quality, supported by a known formal policy and objectives of quality, publicly available.
b) The University must implement mechanisms that allow it to maintain and to improve its educational offering, developing methodologies for periodical approval, control and review of the educational programs.
c) The University must build procedures that allow it to validate that the actions put in place have the fundamental aim of fostering the students learning.
d) The University must implement mechanisms that assure the access, management and training of Faculty and Staff should be done with the necessary guarantees to fulfill their duties.
e) The University must implement mechanisms that allow it to design, manage and improve its services, facilities and material resources with the aim of a proper development of the students learning.
f) The University must put in place procedures that allow it to guarantee that the results (in the areas of learning, placement success, and satisfaction of the different stakeholders) are measured, analyzed and used in the decision processes and in the improvement of the teaching quality.
g) The University must implements the mechanisms that allow it to guarantee the periodical publication of updated information related to curricula and programs.

The stakeholders involved should be pointed out, along with the way used by the University to present its quality results to these stakeholders. The different elements, such as procedures and processes that form a system that allow rolling out the quality policy should be put in place, along with the procedures to define, approve, review and improve the quality policy and objectives.

Funds:

The PIC protocol establishes the need of a Program Agreement to be subscribed by the Chancellor and the directors of every School. The aim of this Program is to align the objectives of the Schools that form the University to a unique UPM policy and strategy, and to provide to the stakeholders with reliable information on the fulfilment of the agreed objectives. With the above scope, the University has defined a “Framework of Program Agreement” 18 that will assure a common focus of improvement objectives, goals and indicators, with the flexibility required to adapt every Program Agreement to the particular improvement needs of the different Schools. The results of the Program Agreements will allow to the Schools to get additional funding over the fix budget.

The structure of the Framework of Program Agreement is based on three action lines:
• Line 1: Budgetary distribution of the operating and overhead expenses.
• Line 2: Assistance to the implementation of improvements plans.
• Line 3: Continuous improvement processes in the Schools.

The specific objectives of the action line 1 are formally defined with mathematically formulated indicators that will be mapped into the budget. In table 2 are represented some of the most significant objectives of the line 2, assistance to the implementation of improvements plans, since they will be used, along with the line 3 objectives, to compare the strategic objectives of the different sources taken into consideration in this paper.

Table 2. Line 2 Program Agreement Framework objectives by areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational programs planning</td>
<td>Increment the number of new students</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Educational profile taken into account the social and stakeholders needs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Curriculum and educational programs review</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Implement mechanisms to track and to steer the development of the plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching, learning and Evaluation processes</td>
<td>Improve and update the contents of the courses</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Update and improve of the teaching-learning methods</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support to and communication with the students</td>
<td>Facilitate the integration of new students</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Design and implement tutorial plans</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Funding assistance</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Students placement and scholarships</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resources and infrastructure</td>
<td>Planning, evaluation and review of the library resources</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Update the classrooms and labs to the current and future needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Update and improve the ICT resources to the current and future needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>External relations</td>
<td>Foster the external presence</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strength the relationships with alumni</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Post graduate courses</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Programs for knowledge and technology transfer</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Structure and Organization</td>
<td>Faculty and Staff needs focus</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improve the Human Resources policies and management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Faculty and Staff training and support</td>
<td>Promote and support the professional development</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encourage the participation in educational, research and innovation activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acknowledgement of the excellence in educational and research activities</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Finally, the process to identify the quality policy in the school requires a matching of the terminology used in each source, in order to assure the coherence, integrity and coverage of the policies selected. In the table are established the matching corresponding to the practical case exposed in this work (table 3).

Table 3. Matching between areas from sources considered

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Our Improvement Areas</strong></th>
<th><strong>Program Agreement Areas</strong></th>
<th><strong>Theoretical Areas in the School</strong></th>
<th><strong>ANECA</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>External relations programs</td>
<td>External relations programs</td>
<td>External Relations programs</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>School structure And organization Information Management</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Quality policy and objectives Decisions based on results analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Educational programs</td>
<td>Educational programs</td>
<td>Educational programs</td>
<td>Educational programs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching, learning and evaluation processes</td>
<td>Teaching, Learning and evaluation processes</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Teaching focused to the students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus to students</td>
<td>Support and communication with the students</td>
<td>Programs to recruit, to admit and to retain the students.</td>
<td>Teaching focused to the students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>Program Agreement (Objectives in Line 1 and Line 3)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources Faculty and Staff</td>
<td>Faculty and Staff training and support</td>
<td>Programs to recruit, to contract and to train Faculty and Staff</td>
<td>Faculty and Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding resources</td>
<td>Program agreement indicators</td>
<td>Assets investments and operations expenses</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material resources, infrastructure and services</td>
<td>Resources and infrastructure</td>
<td>Facilities master plan ICT plans Library</td>
<td>Resources and infrastructure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality and Strategic planning</td>
<td>PIC objective</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Quality policy and objectives</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Conclusions

The issue of quality assurance has risen as one of the key instruments to promote the attractiveness of European higher education Area. The Berlin Communiqué recognized the role of HEIs in promoting quality to develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance. HEI’s autonomy is, by this reason, a precondition for a capacity to respond to the change. Thus, university autonomy requires that each institution decides on its standards and in the definition of the quality policies in the context of several sources. This paper has presented the sources that should be taken into account (strategic elements, national quality agency and funds program of the HEI), from the viewpoint of the authors, and according to their experience in the practical case briefly described.

Bibliography