

Models for Quality Evaluation

Malcolm Frazer

Abstract: *In addition to outlining the features of the Institutional Evaluation Programme of the European University Association, a new six stage model for internal and external quality evaluation will be proposed.*

Key words: *Institutional Evaluation Programme, European University Association, six stage model, internal and external quality evaluation.*

The Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) of the European University Association was launched in 1993 and has so far benefited 150 universities in 36 countries [6]. It is a voluntary and supportive programme aimed at helping universities to improve their capacities for strategic planning and internal quality monitoring. The process is based on the traditional model of external evaluation, *viz.*: the university prepares a self-evaluation report, this then forms the basis for two site visits, over a total period of five days, by an international expert team consisting of three rectors or former rectors. Finally, the team prepares a report for the university. The whole programme is coordinated by a Steering Committee appointed by the EUA Board and is managed by the EUA Secretariat in Brussels.

The positive features of the IEP are that it is non-governmental, non-threatening and international. Its purpose is only one of improvement; and it is not concerned with accountability or accreditation.

The remainder of this paper is based on experiences of the author from about 150 evaluations with 10 agencies in three continents over a period of about thirty years. The opinions expressed are his alone and do not represent in any way the views or policies of EUA.

The “four stage” model for quality evaluation {1. an agency, 2. self-evaluation, 3. peer review and site visit, and 4. report} was based on a study of higher education evaluation in just five countries. It was presented by van Vught [7] in 1993. Subsequently, in the scramble to establish quality assurance systems in many other countries, this model has been widely adopted {*e.g.* by 2003, in Europe, 24 countries including 34 agencies were using this model [2]}.

I have been a strong advocate of the “four stage” model; but, from experience particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, I have reached the conclusion that it can be extended and improved. The Deeming principle relating quality to continual improvement is paramount; and consequently this alternative model, in contrast to the four stage one, applies equally to *internal* and external evaluation. My view is encapsulated by the following quotation [4]:

“The ‘quality movement’ in Europe started from the wrong end, with the rush to establish external quality procedures rather than building them internally.”

The alternative model has similarities to that developed by the author and others for a manual on self-evaluation [1], and is not inconsistent with the standards and guidelines for quality assurance published by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and adopted by the Bologna Process [3].

The six stages are in the first column of the table. Some assertions and comments, which will be developed during the presentation, are on the right. For external evaluations, a quality agency is likely to be involved at all stages, but this is not an absolute necessity.

By definition, an evaluation involves evaluators and the evaluated.

Table: A six stage model for quality evaluation

Stage	Comments
I. Initiate	Evaluators and evaluated must agree on the purposes (note a) and scope. They must also agree in advance on the procedures for the process (stages II - VI). Evaluators must be properly trained and briefed in advance.
II. Assemble evidence	Evidence can come from many different sources: public domain; existing information from the evaluated institution; a self-evaluation report (note b) ; interviews with - or written reports from: students, alumni, local community, graduate employers, etc; and <i>structured</i> interviews with academic and administrative staff on-site (note c) , and off-site.
III. Make judgements	The evaluators should agree in advance the criteria to be used for making judgements. Only when all the evidence has been assembled should judgements be made. They should not be made piecemeal. Attempts to label judgements with numerical values should be avoided.
IV. Prepare report	The published advice [1, 3, 5] should be followed.
V. Reflect on the process	The rhetoric of “evaluating the evaluators” is now commonplace, but needs to be more widely implemented. It is not only an agency which needs to evaluate itself, but after every event the evaluators and the evaluated should formally reflect, and report, on the process and its outcomes.
VI. Action and follow-up	The evaluated will take actions on the recommendations in the report, and the evaluators need subsequently to monitor these actions.

Note a – Clarity of purpose by both evaluators and evaluated is the key issue for a successful evaluation. Purposes may be either improvement or accountability (accreditation, informing stakeholders, benchmarking, grading, mutual recognition, etc.). The purposes of improvement and accountability are generally incompatible. An evaluation attempting both purposes is likely to do neither very well. The processes selected for stages II - VI will depend on the purpose.

Although the improvement purpose is favoured, that is not to imply that accountability evaluations are not necessary, and demanded by society, particularly in this age of massification and globalisation of higher education.

Note b – Self-evaluation reports prepared by the evaluated are invaluable if the purpose is improvement, but are of less value for external reviews and accountability. For the latter, they often might be better described as “self-defence” or “self-delusion” reports. External evaluators should not rely on self-evaluation reports as the major source of

evidence. Even for the improvement purpose, it is clear that for many countries, more guidance and training for self-evaluation is needed. In some cultures, the concept of making an objective self-evaluation report, let alone allowing others to see it, is difficult to accept.

Note c – Site visits provide a convenient mechanism for interviewing staff, students and stakeholders, but they are often poorly planned and executed. Furthermore, a single site visit by the whole team of evaluators at one time has some drawbacks; and, if costs permit, more flexible arrangements (e.g. team members visiting at different times for different purposes, some interviews taking place off-site, spreading interviews over time so that evaluators and evaluated have time for reflection) may provide better ways of assembling evidence. Training and briefing evaluators for the site visit (including interviewing techniques) is essential.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Professor Malcolm Frazer, PhD, Director of Infotech Consultancy, OX13 5QQ, UK, E-mail: mjf@infotechox.co.uk