Does the EUA institutional evaluation programme contribute to quality improvement?

Tavares, D., Rosa, M.J. and Amaral, A.

However, do evaluators know what happens to their judgements and recommendations? Does anything happen?

(Scheele, Maassen and Westerheijden 1998: 10)

Abstract

Purpose – This paper reflects on the relevance of the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) of the European University Association (EUA) to universities’ quality improvement. All IEP follow-up reports were analysed, to find out if the programme was contributing to the development of a quality improvement culture. The follow-up process has as its main rationale the idea that a second review can assist a university evaluating progress made since the original evaluation. The reports analysed show that changes have always happened to a certain extent after the first evaluation.

Design/methodology/approach – The structure and contents of 22 follow-up reports were analysed to assess the IEP programme. All reports were subject to content analysis using adequate software (NVivo 8 with a 242 nodes tree), the main goal being to evaluate progress made since the original evaluation.

Findings – The reports analysed and the work by other authors (Hofmann, 2005; Williams, 1999; Nilsson et al., 2002), show that IEP can constitute a useful approach towards the universities’ quality improvement. IEP evaluations generally give a precise account of problems faced by each university, identifying its strong and weak points, opportunities and threats, and presenting clear recommendations and suggestions for improvement. If properly discussed inside the university, these evaluations can form the basis for an improvement plan.

Research limitations/implications – In general, follow-up teams recognise the difficulty to distinguish changes caused directly by EUA teams’ recommendations from others caused by external pressures.