Uludağ University
Report on
Quality Culture: Implementing Bologna Reforms

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1. What is Uludağ University’s concept of a quality reform with respect to the Bologna process?

1.A. What is Uludağ University's Bologna “philosophy”?

1.A.a. How does Uludağ University understand the Bologna declaration and the Prague communique?

Uludağ University (UU) believes Bologna declaration and Prague communique may serve as a catalyst to increase the quality of education and research within itself by attaching great importance to the creation of a compatible and efficient, yet diversified and adaptable European Higher Education Area. UU also considers the Bologna process as a golden opportunity to support the continuing improvement of the curricula in terms of learning outcomes and degree structure as this is the key to increase the mobility and employability of students.

Achieving the goal of European Higher Education Area will eventually not only dissolve the discrepancies in higher education systems but also the misconceptions brought by cultural differences towards a unified Europe.

1.A.b. Does UU see specific links between these items?

According to UU, quality evaluation procedure and accreditation are crucial in developing a degree structure based on ECTS and diploma supplement by which both outgoing and incoming mobility of students and teachers will be facilitated. A framework of joint degrees can then be established towards European Higher Education Area in which universities play central role in advocating life-long learning, and employability in Europe.

1.A.c. What are UU’s priorities in implementing Bologna?

With its already existing two-tier system compatible with the aims of Bologna declaration, UU’s priorities have been the establishment of ECTS compatible credit systems and the adaptation of common framework of readable and comparable degrees (e.g. diploma supplement), without necessarily aiming at standardization. Next step in this regard is to work towards the adaptation of undergraduate and post graduate degrees up to the needs of labour market. In line with these priorities, UU strongly believes in the vital role of elimination of possible obstacles to facilitate mobility of students, academic and administrative staff.

UU puts the greatest emphasis on the establishment of a “European Quality Assurance System”. This difficult but extremely crucial step would

- clear the opacity of institutions’ educational quality within the country as well as across the borders and fulfil the “quality information gap”,
- protect students from institutions giving invalid diplomas (prevent rogue providers) and stakeholders from facing with unsuitable candidates,
• provide an opportunity for the universities to strengthen their image by demonstrating their quality.

1.B. What is Uludağ University’s understanding of

1.B.a. Quality management?

According to UU, the key feature of quality management is to acknowledge that a university is a self-critical academic community striving to enhance the quality of its entire teaching and learning environment as well as the quality and capability of the graduates. The quality management system should thereof aim to assess and improve the content of the lectures, the project works as well as the entire education environment that is seen as the basic engine for constant renewal and improvement. Quality management systems should also aim the development of professional and pedagogical level of academic staff.

UU acknowledges the importance of staff involvement at all levels in the institutional quality management and policy determination. Therefore, academic staff survey is a must in order to obtain their views and comments on quality improvement as well as to involve them in the realization of the quality development process as an initial step towards the creation of “alive” quality management systems.

With all these in mind, for almost two years, UU has been trying hard to create the most effective quality management and improvement system which would ensure that the profile and quality of programs, academic staff and the standard of its graduates are in line with the academic demands of higher education as well as expectations and needs of the trade and industry.

1.B.b. Quality culture?

UU understands quality culture as a multi-dimensional concept that depends upon and relates to the contextual setting towards achieving excellence in education in line with the mission and vision of the individual programs as well as the university. UU believes that establishment and management of a quality process that constantly monitors, evaluates and renews itself is the very core of creating and maintaining a quality culture. To this end, UU puts every effort to establish feedback loops that reflect the opinions of all stakeholders.

UU believes that the involvement of all stakeholders in quality enhancement procedures, an open and honest communication among these stakeholders, and ensuring everyone’s access to all information on all quality improvement operations are the integral elements of creating quality culture in the “heart” of the institution.
2. How can Bologna tools be used for achieving quality programmes in the sense defined under 1?

2.A. Degree structures (Bachelor/Master)

Two-tier system is a necessity to clarify the broad and specialist characters of the education at undergraduate and post-graduate levels, respectively. A successful application of two-tier system can not only facilitate the compatibility and therefore transferability of undergraduate credits, but also provides various alternatives to continue with specific graduate studies that may consist of study abroad periods. In other words, two-tier system can promote the creation of internationally compatible and competitive high-quality programs.

Establishment of post-graduate education as the second-cycle of the two-tier system as a major part of the Bologna process will not only satisfy interests of students but also provide more focused education that can meet the expectations of market and eventually lead to the improvement of quality in education.

2.B. Combining academic quality with relevance to lasting employability

Satisfying the needs of labor market with matching qualifications of graduates is the first step for providing lasting employability. The continuous improvement processes for the curricula involving all the stakeholders and the utilization of the contemporary research conducted at the departments for improving the content of the course material are the following steps for universities.

2.C. Credits, especially ECTS

Students increasingly expect to receive a broad higher education with multiple choices that would give them flexibility in the labour market, since they will have a choice of employment opportunities. Transferability of credits based on ECTS and readability of degrees by diploma supplements are essential Bologna tools for the mobility of students and graduates. These expectations and the increased mobility of students and graduates will eventually bring irresistible pressure onto the institutions to enhance their teaching and research quality.

2.D. Diploma supplement

Companies operating globally wish to better understand the qualifications of international applicants. This is giving impetus to the objective of the Bologna declaration for European higher education to adopt a framework system of easily understandable and comparable degrees, and within that to make full use of recognition tools such as the diploma supplement.
2.E. Mobility of students and teachers; esp. recognition procedures (study abroad periods/foreign degrees)

Mobility is a tool to improve students’, academic and administrative staff’s professional, linguistic and inter-cultural skills and facilitate information exchange and cooperation.

The capability and quality of programmes has to be continuously evaluated with an internal monitoring system. Students, academic and administrative staff are the major stakeholders that provide feedback to this monitoring. Mobility of these stakeholders can provide an opportunity for them to become aware of different applications of teaching, research and quality management. This may result in more critical thinking and evaluation of their home institutions’ program applications and quality management processes.

Besides the advantages mentioned above, mobility of students and staff will create a positive understanding for multi-cultural structure of Europe, which eventually creates a peaceful unification of diversified cultures.

2.F. Development of joint degrees

In order to achieve quality programs at masters’ level, compatibility of programs and cooperation between academic staff from different universities must be established. Developing joint degrees with the attendance of experienced research universities will encourage the mobility at masters’ level and dissemination of “good practice” within the European Higher Education Area.

In fact, application of common research projects embedded in masters level could well serve as a starting point to overcome language barriers which appears as a real challenge in the mobility of bachelor students.

2.G. Quality evaluation procedures, accreditation

UU strongly recommends the creation of a European platform with the ability and power to directly accredit or at least validate an institution on demand. Such an internationalisation of quality assurance procedure is seen as a necessary and logical action to meet the needs of international transparency, mobility and comparability which are all the essential elements of Bologna reforms and the quality enhancement of European higher education.

2.H. European dimension

Full implementation of Bologna reforms and creation of an accrediting European organization would ensure the self-regulation of higher education and the quality assurance systems in Europe, instead of a system driven by the EU commission or EU member governments. Consequently, non-EU member countries in Europe would be contributing to the achievement of quality programmes and the implementation of quality assurance within a wider context of European dimension.
2.İ. Life-long learning

Considering the future Europe built upon a knowledge-based society and economy, life-long learning strategies are becoming necessary to face the challenges of competitiveness and the use of new technologies and to achieve social harmony, and therefore, the quality of life.

2.J. Social Dimension

Although the implementation of some Bologna tools such as ECTS credits and bilateral agreements are crucial frameworks for student and staff mobility, there may be a substantial risk that they may not reach to their ultimate aims unless they are supported by the financial and social services provided by the institutions. Therefore, the institutions which are aware of quality improvement consequences of student and staff mobility should seek every means to create necessary financial resources and social guidance to eliminate this possible risk.

2.K. Student Governance

Students are the major stakeholders within a university. Therefore, establishment of an adequate organizational structure that can acquire students’ opinions and inputs is crucial in the formation of overall quality framework even if the students may not formally be represented in governing bodies such as senate, academic councils, etc.

There may be other processes to implement student contribution in the quality improvement process such as concise questionnaires to each student class which are applied by UU. Using student representatives to identify issues of greatest concerns to students, holding class meetings to discuss student concerns or request each class to submit reports delineating problems could be considered as possible alternatives to involve students in the quality improvement.

2.L. Role of universities in national/European debate

Debate between universities from EU and non-EU European countries on the implementation of Bologna reforms will result in realistic and applicable processes to achieve quality programmes.

3. How does Uludağ University structure the process of implementing Bologna reforms as defined by its aims and priorities?

3.A. Quality Management

Leadership Commitment and Staff Involvement

At the central level of the university, the greatest strength of UU is its senior leadership (Rectoral team) determined in developing the quality culture and management mechanisms. UU acknowledges the importance of staff involvement at all levels in the institutional quality management and policy determination.
Therefore, as an initial step towards the establishment of quality management and developing “quality culture” within the university, senior leadership has first conducted an academic staff survey in order to identify their views and comments on quality improvement as well as to involve them in the realization of the quality development process.

Committee Structure

With a high level of support from academic staff for the implementation of the quality culture, UU has then established a Steering Committee (UU Accreditation Council, UAC) in April 2001, with one representative from each faculty, to design and facilitate the quality framework as well as create quality culture awareness throughout the institution. Responsibilities and procedures for quality assurance within the University are laid down in the “Uludağ University Accreditation Guide” produced by UAC. UAC is also responsible for coordinating the necessary procedures and standards for quality conscious activities throughout the institution, and monitoring the quality of the programmes by giving a general outline for the structure of the programmes, allowing for variations of practices across faculties.

Simultaneously, faculty accreditation sub-committees have also been formed as Standing Programme Committees which are responsible for the reform of the programmes in coordination with the central Steering Committee of the University. Faculty accreditation sub-committees also fulfils the need of an internal communication channel to ensure two-way communication between UAC and all academic staff within the faculties and departments, and thus involving all the members in the development of a concept of quality within the institution.

There is also a Strategic Planning Committee of the University which was simultaneously established with UAC to discuss and develop a strategic vision. It is of advisory capacity and the rector directly appoints the members. It is mainly made up of faculty members who are critical of the current performance of the university and the rector, the vice-rectors, the advisors, the deans and the graduate school directors. It is hoped that the Committee will act as a devil’s advocate as well as a think tank in developing a vision for the university.

Apart from the above Committees, the most significant committee is the EUA Relations Board working under the University’s Quality Culture Project Coordinator who also acts as the Advisor for Accreditation.

Student Involvement

Quality of education at UU is also evaluated by students through questionnaires at the end of each semester. UU strongly believes that student feedback is a key, and increasingly important, aspect of the management of quality. Student feedback provides a large and vital part of the body of information used for the evaluation of the quality of teaching within the programmes. The University values student feedback, which is gathered through the use of questionnaires. It seeks preliminary responses from students at the end of each term. The qualitative data derived from
these questionnaires is circulated to all members of staff, and will be used in improving and planning teaching structures and content.

Student counselling is provided by academic staff for guiding students in their curricula-related activities. This also provides input into decision-making about teaching provision and content.

Other Defined Responsibilities

External Advisory Boards at programme levels are another means of monitoring the quality culture and the improvement of curricula.

UU also endeavours to keep in contact with its alumni as they are a useful source of support and feedback. It has recently started to establish a database of contact information of all its graduates.

There is no student representative in the university administration. Although student clubs and sports facilities create a distinguished and lively atmosphere for the students and certainly enhance social life in UU, there is no systematic way of involving students in the decision-making processes yet. UU seriously discusses student participation and representation.

An important part of UU’s understanding of quality culture is the monitoring and enhancement of individual faculty members. Quality monitoring and assessment is carried out at three different points in time. First, when he/she is recruited; secondly when he/she is promoted to an associate professorial position; and thirdly when he/she is up for promotion to be a full professor. There are different sets of criteria to be used at each step.

3.B. Quality Culture

UU has developed a long-term strategy based on the requirements of the Bologna Declaration, its mission statement and educational concept as a teaching-based university with necessary emphasis on the research, and on networking with international universities at the programme and institutional level. A key practice in developing a common framework for compatible qualifications as emphasized in the Bologna declaration is the regular preparation and renewal of course material based on self and external evaluation which in turn yields a systematic review approach in maintaining a quality culture.

On an annual basis, departments are required to conduct reviews of their teaching provision, during which they are expected to reflect critically on what they do, taking into account, in particular, student feedback and external examiners' comments. In these departmental reviews, involvement of all stakeholders including the external ones provides accountability for educational programmes. Recently established guidelines for the review of undergraduate programmes were intended to reduce the levels of variability, clarify responsibilities at each stage, and provide enhanced comparability, at least across the faculties.
UU is about to enter a process of change which will determine its capacity for survival as a top university in Turkey. With the leadership and vision of the Rector and his team, UU will keep its enthusiasm and capacity towards a quality culture in implementing Bologna reforms to help its own institutional self-evaluation.

To this end, UU acknowledges the Bologna process with its quality achievement tools to be essential in creating an intrinsic concept of quality in the community.
A Summary of the
Action Plan for Quality Culture Deployment

1. Ensuring the support of senior leadership
2. Determining stakeholders’ views and comments on quality management and culture through surveys
3. Establishing the necessary steering committees to design and facilitate the quality framework as well as subcommittees to ensure two-way communication throughout the institution
4. Revising institutional mission and vision
5. Establishing strategic planning committees in order to
   a. Perform institutional and departmental SWOT analysis by surveys
   b. Define main objectives
   c. Determine the priorities
6. Developing mechanisms to monitor and improve the quality of education
   a. By creating student, alumni and labour market feedback loops
   b. By benchmarking with competitive higher education institutions
   c. By regular preparation and renewal of course material
   d. By student involvement in curriculum design and governance
   e. By prompt implementation of some Bologna tools by simple procedures
      i. Introduction of ECTS compatible credit system
      ii. Providing diploma supplement
      iii. Two-tier system (if applicable)
7. Developing mechanisms to monitor and improve the quality of staff
   a. Strengthening sets of criteria for staff employment and promotion
   b. Introducing continuous staff development programmes (pedagogical, professional and IT-related)
8. Developing mechanisms and providing budget to monitor and improve physical facilities
9. Developing quality control mechanisms
   a. Internal evaluation and review
   b. External evaluation and review preferably by “a European Quality Assurance System”