

Higher Education Quality

Pedro Saraiva, IAQ Associated Academician, Portugal

Maria Joao Rosa, Portugal

Abstract

Higher Education (HE) has always been seen as playing a key role in the development of societies in general. Therefore, both the coverage, scope and quality of Higher Education Institutions (HEI) have always been present across times in the world. Thus, the subject of Quality Management in Higher Education is far from being new, but now we have a number of different tools and approaches to address it. Although several ways can be adopted to define or measure quality under the specific context of HE, and in many occasions it is mentioned that HEI should learn from management experiences coming from private companies, the reverse is also the case. A basic but yet important way of evaluating the quality of any organization has to do with its capacity to compete and survive across time in a sustained way. And we know that the large majority of private companies do not live for more than 10 years, and very few survive for more than one century. In this regard, HEI have shown management practices and quality results well above the average, with levels of resilience from which companies should try to learn about. Indeed, as pointed out by Kerr, out of about eighty-five institutions in the western world that were already established by 1520 and still exist in recognizable forms, with similar functions and unbroken histories, seventy are universities, most of them being public entities. This shows, once again, that eventhough not naming it as such, HEI have been able to implement quite strong quality management approaches, enabling them to survive and adapt to a changing world across many centuries.

The topic not being new, we will visit briefly how Quality Management in HE, under a more well structured approach, given the knowledge and methodologies that are available today, should be kept as a major priority, through the usage of available best practices, concepts, tools and results. Building on our national and international view, with a possible biased European perspective, given the authors background, we will visit the topic taking into account the knowledge available at present times, trying to cover main concepts, specificities of HEI, possible quality management approaches that can and should be adopted for HE, resources that may be needed to do so, before reaching some final conclusions, that may be helpful both for Higher Education public policies, HEI but also for other types of organizations as well, that can learn how to define and manage quality from the ways this is being done and studied in HE.