# Quality Assurance in Higher Education. Sept 9th 2021

**SPEAKERS**

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### Riccardo Mussari

Good morning everybody, we are here to listen the words, the suggestions and experience of our very authoritative guest speakers. I would thank everybody, starting from our speaker and Paulo for the great job he is doing and I wish to invite everyone to participate and to be active, because to achieve the objectives of our project participation is important. Listening is fundamental, but also contributing is important too. Thank you very much again for being here.


### Paulo Resende da Silva

I just want to give you few words. I want to thank our invited speaker to accept to participate with us in this webinar in this Inspire project. The topic today is about quality assurance and general aspects of quality management and quality assurance in higher education institutions, with a presentation given by Professor Funda, who has a large experience on this topic. Thanks again and I give the word to Professor Nazim.


### Nazim Celal Irem

Thank you very much for the opportunity to introduce Professor Serifoglu. She is the former founding rector of one of the most successful universities established in Turkey in recent years. But what is relevant in her experience for this meeting and for the purpose of the project is that she is one of the team leaders of the higher education quality assurance institution in Turkey, which has been authorized to accredit national institutions. She has a great field experience and in-depth knowledge of the standards. The thing that fascinates me in her experience is that she's the team leader because of her experience coming from the field. I have some information about the quality assurance systems because of my job, but I'm not a practitioner in the field. I would like to introduce her and then we will have the questions and answer session. Thank you very much.


### Funda Şerifoğlu

Hello everybody, all the colleagues and professors and managers of different countries all over the world. Let me start with the definition of quality. Quality is a very generic concept. We use it in all the sectors of our lives, even private lives and in our family lives. But what is quality in the higher education area? Defining quality is not easy. Why? Because quality is a dynamic concept, it's not static, it's not a one-time job to define quality. And quality also depends on the context. What do I mean by context? I mean, the institution itself, its mission and vision, the strategic goals, the country, the environment, the international environment, so everything related to context changes the definition of quality. Quality is a multi-dimensional concept.

Let's look at higher education from a literature paper of Schindler et al. from 2015. They say that there are four stakeholder groups that we have to consider when we try to define quality. What are those stakeholder groups? The first group is the fund providers, that are the people who pay so that we can give the higher education, such as taxpayers, the State and the community. The second group are the users of the products and services of the higher education, such as the students, industry, the NGOs and the State. The third group are the users of the outputs (meaning by "outputs" the graduates basically), such as employers, the industry, the firms and the community who are using students as employees. The fourth group is made by people in the universities themselves, like the academicians and administrative personnel. These four stakeholder groups are really important when we try to define quality.

Quality also varies depending on the perspective. From the perspective of purpose, quality is conformance to mission and standards. From the perspective of accountability, quality is optimal use of resources, and delivery of accurate educational products and services. From a transformative point of view, quality is positive change in student learning experience, and professional and personal development. And from a rankings and reputation point of view, quality is achievement of distinction, of exclusivity, through the fulfillment of high standards.

So, there are many things affecting the definition of quality. If you want me to summarize it, I can use the ISO, that groups all these definitions in two main groups. According to the first one, quality is fitness for purpose. According to the second one, quality is satisfying consumer expectations. Your university can decide on the definition of quality looking at the stakeholder groups that you want to prioritize, and at the perspective that you may use, and then you can come up with your own quality definition. Each institution can use this or that definition, it will depend on the context of the university.

But what is quality assurance? Quality assurance is a very important notion in our times, in which the world is so fast changing and higher education is also changing. The ISO defines quality assurance as a part of quality management, focused on providing confidence that quality requirements will be fulfilled. What do I understand from this definition? Quality Assurance is about defect prevention: we want to minimize errors, we want to have zero errors in quality assurance, according to ISO.

But let me go to a better definition for higher education. I define quality assurance in higher education as follows: "it's the totality of planning and implementation principles and their documentation". Documentation is very important in quality assurance. So we have the planning, the implementation, and then we have the documentation; these are all the principles for the functions of the university, such as education, R&D, societal contributions and administrative processes, which are developed in compliance with the mission and goals of the institution with the national needs and international standards. So it is not a closed system. It's an open system, because we live in a world where everybody interacts with every other.

Let me go over the basic principles that will probably clear what I mean by quality assurance. A quality assurance system should be in compliance with the mission, with the vision, with the strategic goals and objectives of the university. You must have your strategic plan to have a sound quality assurance system, it should be in compliance with the declared quality policy principles of the university. One important thing here is that most universities have a quality policy, it's on the website, but nobody knows it. Everybody in the university should know that there is a quality policy document, at least one time have read it, and they should have understood what it means for the university. The personnel, the academicians, the professors, the students and administrative people should be encouraged to see the quality process as part of their own responsibility. In the universities, usually, there is a unit called "quality assurance unit" or "quality department" that is responsible for everything: they report, they write the documents, they sent the writings, they do the mailings, etc., but all the other people are not aware of what's going on. This is not a good quality assurance system, because quality is the job of everybody in the university, from the person in the doorway, at the very beginning of the campus, to the person in the cleaning room, to the professor in the classroom, to the students in the classroom. Processes should be managed in concordance with the institutional values and goals. In our current university systems, we are still using the department perspective for management; departments are closed, and even if units interact with other departments, they still close the doors to other stakeholders, they don't want to have much interaction, they don't want people to interfere with their business. For example, a student taking an elective course, it will at least go through one, two, three or more units and departments, so that the student can choose an elective course, make sure that he or she is registered in that course and everything is fine. All these steps he or she has to take is part of the process. It goes across many departments, many faculties, general secretary, a department for the student affairs, etc. So, we have to define the processes, and we have to manage them to have a good quality assurance system.

Let's go to performance indicators. Most universities have strategic plans and quality principles, but then they do not supervise the progress in the implementation of the performance indicators. Continuous improvement is very important for quality assurance, because quality assurance is not a one-time process. Everybody should be involved and it will be a continuous improvement process. Last but not least, the success of a quality assurance system is closely related to the institutional continuity to leadership and to organizational culture. What do I mean by continuity? What happens when the rector changes, when the management changes, and you do not have his plan anymore? This is not good in terms of quality and quality assurance and continuous improvement in terms of reaching the strategic goals of the university. Of course strategic plan can be changed and revised, because world is changing so fast. Our countries are changing, international environment is changing, so we can revise the strategic plans. But when the rector changes, the strategic plan does not need to be necessarily revised or changed, continuity is very important.

Professor Nazim told you that I am a part of the Turkish higher education quality Council. What does the Turkish higher education quality Council do? Well, this is a quite young council, actually; it is a public entity, but it's autonomous. It has its own budget and personnel. In 2016, it has been established; in the last five years, it has been a wonderful progress in Turkey; all of our universities are externally evaluated by teams of the Turkish higher education quality Council, and they are every year writing their own internal evaluation report. Last year, we have started institutional accreditation also in Turkey. This is our second year. So basically, there are three duties of the quality Council. First, quality council assigns teams, like the ones I lead, to externally evaluate universities for quality assurance. Second, they authorize accreditation agencies in our country; these accreditation agencies go and accredit programs in the national universities. Third, quality council tries to make international collaborations in our country in higher education area. Actually, the quality Council, although very young, is already a member of several different international networks, including ENQA, APQN, etc. It has also some bilateral agreements and associations. I have said three important tools: program accreditation, external evaluation of the universities, and institutional accreditation. These three tools are the basic tools to build a quality culture in the universities. External evaluation and institutional accreditation are very much affected by program accreditation. What do I mean? Program accreditation supports the other two tools very much. When we go to a university, if the university programs are accredited by agencies, then you can see that people, academicians, students, they are very well aware of what quality is about. They know what performance indicator is, they know what an evaluation report is. So they will be aware of notions of quality assurance. Program accreditation is a very important tool. When you have program accreditation in your university, you have a basic quality culture in your university. Internal evaluation is a different tool. You look at the university as a whole over the performance indicators of the quality Council; you look at how the university is performing related to the strategic goals in the strategic plan; you look at how the resources are located, whether they are productively used or not, whether stakeholders are involved in decision making processes, whether processes are documented well, whether everything is defined well, whether people know about them. So internal evaluation is a very powerful tool for the university to look at itself in terms of the performance indicators of the quality Council, and these performance indicators incorporate educational, R&D, societal contributions, management principles and quality assurance principles. It's about 58 performance indicators through which they evaluate institutions. Once the university has an internal evaluation report, quality council sends a team to externally evaluate that university. The team looks at the university and evaluate it over the same 58 performance indicators. As a university, you'll see a mirror, where you look at yourself from the eyes of a third person. And then you see what your weaknesses are, what your strengths are, what the opportunities for improvements are.

As a team leader in the quality Council of Turkey, I have been working in the last five years. I have evaluated foundation universities, I have evaluated state universities, I have gone to Anatolian universities where the resources are scarce, and the universities are younger. I went to metropolitan areas like Istanbul and Izmir, where the universities are much older and stronger, so, a wide range of experience. And from that experience, I can tell that this evaluation process, both internal but more external, provides a wonderful learning and improvement environment for the university, especially for the rector, and vice rectors, and for the Board of Trustees. Probably this is a more important result. Of course, they want to have a wonderful report so that they put it on the website, they can be proud of it, and say to the stakeholders: "our report is wonderful; we are a wonderful university". But I think that the evaluation process is more important than that report, because in the evaluation, the team members, like myself, there are about seven to nine people. We look at each and every process in the university. We look even at core syllabuses. We give feedback to the university, we ask questions, we want extra documents, we look at the report minutes of the meetings, we look at the reports, we read every related quality document of the university, we go over the internal evaluation report of the university. So, we scan through the university, and they give feedback to the university management and to the

stakeholders. And this is very important. They learn about themselves from the third eye, and they see areas of improvement where they can put more resources so that they have a bigger improvement. I find this very valuable.

One of the questions that comes into mind is: if the quality Council performs this evaluation and accreditation procedures, and if the universities are supervised, evaluated over these 58 performance indicators, then is the autonomy of the university threatened? Is this something that tells the university what to do? What about the university autonomy? In my opinion this quality assurance process, external evaluation and accreditation processes, on the contrary, supports University autonomy. What do I mean by that? It supports autonomy because nobody, including the quality council, tells the university what to do; the university itself decides what to do. How? It looks at the National regulations, it looks at the international environment, it looks at the stakeholders, it looks at its own strengths and resources, etc. Moreover, they have a vision, they have a mission, they have a strategic plan, and everything is decided by the university. So, the university knows what to do. It knows its vision. Quality Council just make sure that there is a strategic leadership, there is agility, there is sustainability in the process. In other words, these four questions on the flight are being answered in our report for the university. What is the university trying to do? What is its mission? What are the strategic goals? How is the institution trying to do that? What are the objectives? What are the action plans? How are the resources allocated in those plans? How does the institution know that this is working? This leads it to its strategic goals? How does it know? Are there any performance indicators? Is there any supervision of the performance indicators? Do the Commission's work properly? Are stakeholders in the decision-making process or not? Are the students involved? Are all the stakeholders aware of what's going on in the university? Are they part of the continuous improvement process? We ask those questions to the managers, Rector, Vice rectors, Deans, directors, students, academicians and personnel; we have one to one focus meetings with several different stakeholders' groups of the university. And lastly, the last question, how does the institution change in order to improve? How is the change management done? How is the sustainability guaranteed in the current changing conditions of this crazy world? In other words, quality assurance supports autonomy and integrity. As a university in your website, you would say: "I'm going to do this education programs and I'm going to do it well, I'm going to produce graduates which are used by the factories and firms and government effectively and efficiently in the work environment". You all promise this to the community, to your stakeholders. Quality assurance makes sure that you stick to your promises. And this is very valuable for a university for its dignity and for its for its reputation.

**Paulo Resende da Silva**

We have two questions from the audience, both of them very interesting. The first one is from Rafa Abaldawi who asked: how you can get the private and industrial sectors involvement in writing the QA system of the education institutes?

**Funda Şerifoğlu**

You want to understand how a non-higher education stakeholder can see the reports of the universities? If this is the question, for Turkey, you can just go to the website of the higher education quality Council and you can see the reports. But I don't think the reports for individual universities are in English. They are translating reports for the individual universities right now. But you can see the general annual report for Turkish higher education in terms of quality assurance in English. In other universities, or in other countries, you can always go to the website of the university and you can find the internal and external evaluation reports. In Turkey each university has the internal and external evaluation report on their website.

**Paulo Resende da Silva**

Can I go through the mean of the question? The point is that some subjects from the private sector participate in the evaluation of the higher education institutions, of their program, and so on. So the question is: how can we evolve? How can we involve the external stakeholders from the private sector in our relations process?

**Funda Şerifoğlu**

Good question. For now, the private sector members are not involved in the teams, but we have international members. You can apply to the higher education quality council to become an international member of the team. We started last year, but this year we will have more international members in our teams and most of the process will be in English, and also the reports in English. So, if you are interested into the Turkish system, please apply over the website of the quality Higher Education Council.

**Paulo Resende da Silva**

We have a question from Doctor Hayder Dibs: how is it possible to get international accreditation program for our universities, so for the Iraqi universities?

**Funda Şerifoğlu**

That question is probably to the Iraqi managers because for now, the Turkish higher education quality council does not give the service to international universities, it's a national institution. They do not do this for other international universities. Maybe your university can apply to European University Association, that has an International Evaluation Program (IEP), where what they do quite similar to what I do with my evaluation teams: they go to the university -now they do it over zoom, most probably- they read the documents, and they give a report on the quality assurance system and under management of the university.

**Paulo Resende da Silva**

We have a very demanding question from Miaad K. Alkudhairy: recently, there have been many standards of quality in international universities, and this diversity has been characterized by its progress and acceleration, so how can we choose what is appropriate for our universities?

**Funda Şerifoğlu**

International accreditation agencies are very well known. For example, if you are in the field of engineering, then ABET is one of the very well-known agencies, or you can search for other agencies as well. I have given some networks, umbrella institutions of those agencies like ENQA for Europe, the European National Quality Association. If you go to the website of ENQA you can find the accreditation agencies tied up with this umbrella Association ENQA and then you can see their standards, their performance indicators, etc. But the performance indicators are more or less the same. They look at the four questions I summarized. They look at how your institution is allocating resources to the action plan so that you can reach the strategic goals of your institution.

This last slide is very important, this is a summary slide. Let me summarize what I try to say here with this slide. A university should integrate the strategic plan and the quality policies. They should have performance indicators regarding to strategic goals, and to quality principles policies. What sort of quality policies can there be? Well, it depends on the university; the University Senate decides actually on the quality policy items; for example, the University may decide that they prioritize technology in education, they want to issue quality with updated technology in the educational programs; or the Senate might decide that the quality principle for the R&D processes can be used to solve problems of their own country or the region. It's up to the institution, the University decides on the quality principles, and they put it on the website. So, if you go to a Turkish University and you go to the website, you will see the quality policy document and the strategic plan. And then in a good university with a good quality assurance system, these two are integrated over the performance indicators. When you have the strategic plan integrated with the quality policy with performance indicators, all you have to do is to systematically monitor your performance, your implementation of the strategic plan, and this will lead you definitely to success. And this monitoring should be done with the academic personnel, administrative personnel, the students, the graduates, with other stakeholders, internal stakeholders, you have to monitor your performance. And then you have to evaluate the results with the stakeholders, especially the external ones. If you want to see how we perform in the R&D, you have to invite the factories, you have to ask them: "Do you use the technology I produce in my laboratories? Do you use them in your processes? How can I help you

more?" If they give feedback to you on your performance over the performance indicator, it's so valuable for you. So you have to put your stakeholders into the heart of your improvement processes. And then you have to replan your processes. This is the tool that you will use most of the time: PDCA cycle. What is a PDCA cycle? It's dating back to Francis Bacon, to systematic managerial principles in 1600s. It did speak to shivered for quality control. It did speak to deeming for statistical quality control, but it's something that you know very well. Mohammed Prophet said: if your two days are the same, that you are at a loss. What you have to do when you plan something in a process in an action plan. Then you check how you do on that plan. You monitor over your performance indicators. Then you study what went wrong, why, what can you improve, how, and you do this with your stakeholders, internal and external and then you improve your processes, and then you plan again, re-plan. And you do this cycle over and over again, these PDCA cycles are the very heart of continuous improvement. If you use PDCA cycles, if you plan, control, evaluate with stakeholders, and improve, plan, evaluate over performance indicators with stakeholders and improve. If you do this continuous improvement, then you surely will succeed. And this here shows you that if you do this continuous improvement process very well with your stakeholders over the performance indicators, then your standards will also improve, your quality principles will be better, your strategic plan will improve, everything in your university will improve with time, your quality standard will improve. So it's so easy. You have to have a system, you have to have your stakeholders in the system, you have to continuously improve by using PDCA in all your processes of the university.

**Paulo Resende da Silva**

We have a question from Dr. Ahmed Al-Manea: what is the most important factor to focus on to develop quality at education institutions, among other factors?

**Funda Şerifoğlu**

I do not understand why the institutions are so stressed when evaluation teams are coming to their institutions. If you are planning your goals, if you have a vision for your future for the university, then you know how to go to that vision, you have your strategic goals, you have your action plans, you planned your resources accordingly, if you had this plan, if you have the quality policy, all you have to do is systematically meet all the stakeholders, for example every three months, every six months in the Senate, in the faculties with the deans, in the big conference room. And how to do this is up to you, you plan it yourself. But be sure that you have stakeholders in the process. It's not a closed system, it's an open system. If you close yourself, your system will not improve, and it will not catch up with international competitors, you will not be in an international star. So, you have to be open to stakeholders, you have to be open to feedback. What you have to do is every six months, every month, every year, I don't know the period, systematically monitor your performance over the performance indicators; then you take invite your stakeholders, you evaluate the results and you discuss why some improvements cannot be done, because not all the improvements can be done. You have resources limited, you have money limited, people limited, everything is limited. So, you have to prioritize things. And you have to understand what went wrong and why. If you do those analysis, and you get the feedback, then you replan your actions and you cycle again, and this will take you to your goals actually.

**Paulo Resende da Silva**

We have another question from Rafa Albaldawi: has COVID-19, that we are still living, a big effect on quality assurance procedures?

**Funda Şerifoğlu**

In Turkey we put emphasis on distance learning. Now we have performance indicators for distance learning too. As the evaluation team, when we go to a university, we do the standard evaluation plus we evaluate the distance learning systems and processes. So, we put emphasis on this because you cannot improve something that you do not monitor, if you want to improve something, then you have to have some performance indicators for that process. In Turkey, we have defined performance indicators for this learning. And now the universities are trying to improve themselves in terms of those indicators. You can as well go to higher education Council website, and you can see the performance indicators. If you email me, I can send you the English version of the indicators as well.

**Paulo Resende da Silva**

We don't have other questions, but one thing that I wish to share is about your last slide; it's very interesting when we have the PDCA. One of the interesting things is connected to something that in beginning and during this conversation you addressed a lot, the strategic orientation of the universities and the reference to standards for quality. We need this to develop a quality assurance more precisely, and to have a stronger impact on university. To improve the quality of the universities firstly, you need to have a roadmap for the quality assurance. In this roadmap, we need to be very precise to know which is our strategic plan. We know that the strategic plan is very complicated and difficult to implement. What kind of roadmap the Iraqi Universities should set to develop a quality assurance plan, also in a national way?

**Funda Şerifoğlu**

I don't know if there is in Higher Education Council in Iraq. I understand that it is not. Probably this is the first step, even if maybe they need some time for structuring things and thinking about things, then the institutions themselves actually start with internal evaluation. Which performance standards can they use? Well, they can use the one from Turkey or from EUA or the institutional Evaluation Program guidelines, and they can find such guidelines in several different places. But I do not agree with you when you said strategic planning is complex, I don't think so. I don't think that if an institution does not know where to go and how to go that it will make any progress. So strategic planning can be very simple. We don't need a complex strategic plan, then we start the journey. Maybe a strategic plan with three goals only will be okay for the institution for the beginning. And maybe in three or four years the strategic plan will be better. But at one point you should start strategically planning, because if you don't do this, if you don't show this strategic leadership, you will not have a common vision and a common dream for all your stakeholders. A strategic plan is the common dream of all the people in the university. You say "I want to be such a University in five years, in 10 years, in 15 years"; if you don't have that passion in you, as a university, in your professors, your students, and your administrative force personnel, you will have bad day-to-day operations and then you will not use your resources optimally. So, I think a simple strategic plan can be useful, with some advisor help. And then an institutional evaluation guide can be put in place and program accreditation; for example, for engineering, you can go to ABIT international accreditation agency. Well, I have recognized that in Turkey, our national accreditation agencies, it is much difficult than ABIT. In Turkey, we are much more stricter. So do not get afraid about international agencies of all these umbrella associations. Go to the website, look for the agency, which is appropriate for your purposes.

**Ahmed Al-Manea**

Thank you very much for the chance to let me speak. In Iraq we have a Minister for higher education and scientific research who monitor the quality of our universities and our institutions. You just mentioned the diagram about the BDCA diagram. Think about a small Institute such as a classroom, and suppose I want to monitor the quality for my delivering subject. If I follow this diagram, it maybe goes up and down. Sometimes it's not like a straight line. Is that true?

**Funda Şerifoğlu**

You have taken the idea I have provided and already applied theory on your subject, great. I'm going with your example. As an instructor, you plan a course; what you do is to write down a syllabus, and you distribute the syllabus to the students and you put it also on the website of your department. This is the phase of the PDCA cycle, then you give the course. But the course has some expected outcomes: you plan the course so that you reach some expected outcomes. For example, I will teach the students linear optimization models; then you will monitor if you have reached those goals, if the students have learned about optimization models. How do you do that? You evaluate the students with exams, quizzes, exams, etc. And then you see the results. You plan the exams so that you can evaluate the outcomes. You can't write any questions for the exams, you have to write questions for the answers will tell you whether the students have this outcomes of the course or not. So there is this a very important statistical technique. Maybe your university is providing you with those techniques. So that they will teach you how to ask good questions to test the outcomes of the class. Then you have the exam papers, and you understand from the papers, how you did well in your course. This part is my duty. I could not give this notion to the students. How do I do better? And what do I do? I invite people,

stakeholders, students, and colleagues from the department. They help me to understand the dynamics behind this evaluation process. We all together try to understand how to make the course better. Next semester, you will write another syllabus for the same course. But a better one. And you will have better question. In your quizzes and exams. Are you understand the cycle now?

**Ahmed Al-Manea**

Yes, thank you very much, that answered my question.

**Paulo Resende da Silva**

Thank you. We are almost in the end. I give the final word for Professor Riccardo Mussari, our leader of the project, who wants to give some comments.

**Riccardo Mussari**

I wish to thank our speakers; the presentation was really intensive and reach of passion, not only of knowledge, experience, capacity, it is not only a matter of technique. What we all should learn from this webinar is that we have to have consciousness: we have to know what we want to achieve. That's why I would not like to answer to one of the questions I read the chat: "give me please, the performance indicators". Not at all. You have to tell me first what you want to achieve. Now we will talk about measurement and evaluation, if possible. I really want to thank you very much, because we learned a lot of things but above all for the message that you transfer to us. We have to love our institutions. We have to have consciousness of the mission we have to achieve. And we need also to have a systematic interpretation of our institution. Of course, in a webinar or in a discussion, in a conference, in a seminar, we can talk only about a small part of the whole, but we don't have the governance of the whole. To talk or to study or to deepen a single part is not so important, is not so useful to achieve our objectives. So, be systematic and show the same passion that our speakers showed us today. Thank you very much.