

Quality management in universities: towards an integrated approach?

Maria J. Manatos¹, Maria J. Rosa², Cláudia S. Sarrico³

1 — Department of Social, Political and Territorial Sciences & CIPES, University of Aveiro

2 — Department of Economics, Management, Industrial Engineering and Tourism & CIPES, University of Aveiro

3 — ISEG Lisbon School of Economics and Management, University of Lisboa, Lisboa & CIPES

The purpose of our research is to look for empirical evidence of the trend towards the integration of quality management (QM) in universities. We understand integration as the development of QM as part of organisations' global management systems, covering different processes and missions, organisational levels and QM principles.

Empirically, the paper is based on a country case study which embeds three paradigmatic university case studies. Data are obtained from institutional documents, as well as from individual and panel interviews with different internal stakeholders.

Globally, universities show signs of integrating QM in their overall management and governance framework. The use of information originating in the QM systems for decision making and the existence of top management representatives in the QM structures are positive factors towards true integration. Still, the very existence of separate bodies dedicated to QM, albeit with people

from top management, is an indication of the lack of total integration.

Universities are developing their QM systems with a focus on teaching and learning, but they are increasingly trying to integrate their other missions, namely research and third mission.

With regard to the different organisational levels and units of the universities, while the definition of the QM policies follows a top-down logic, being mostly assured by top management and governance bodies of the institutions, the procedures for the assessment and monitoring of the different processes follow a bottom-up strategy. Nevertheless, if on the one hand, there seems to be an articulation between the different organisational dimensions in the sense that the roles for the different levels are well defined; on the other hand, there is a gap in the communication between different hierarchical levels.

As regards QM principles, universities cover most of them, but seem to fail to: meet their 'customers' needs and expectations; effectively engage their internal stakeholders; equally integrate their different processes; and fully involve the external stakeholders.

It is simultaneously interesting and surprising to observe how, after so many years of QM in universities and so much research on the topic, universities and their management bodies have not yet been able to embed communication and active stakeholders' participation as key elements of an effective integrated QM system, which contributes to the improvement of the quality of universities and their activities.

