Submit a good practice

General Description:

Title: Quality assurance system for IST's course units (QUC)
Keywords: teaching and learning, quality, accountable involvement
Starting date: 1993, major modification in 2007
Dimensions and categories:
(Click on the dimension and category/ies your practice is related to)

	Financial feasibility	Social and environmental responsibility	People	Recognition & Reputation	Quality Management	Infrastructure & Equipment	International orientation	Regional engagement
Education			x	x	x			
Research								
Knowledge Technology transfer								

Contact details:

Name and surname: Raquel Aires de Barros Role: Professor and president of Pedagogical Council University: Instituto Superior Técnico Email: mailto:rabarros@ist.utl.pt	Name and surname: Carla Patrocinio Role: Person-in-charge of the Statistics and Prospective Unit University: Instituto Superior Técnico Email: carla.patrocinio@ist.utl.pt
Webpage of the practice (if any): http://quc.ist.utl.pt/en/	

Characteristics of the strategic management practice:

Executive summary (maximum 250 words)

In 1993, the Instituto Superior Técnico (IST) started to carry out teaching performance evaluation exercises, always seeking to improve the results of this activity. The practices and procedures carried out in this regard have resulted in a number of institutionalized procedures that reflect critical principles of a quality culture, in particular at academic level.
The oldest quality management tool is the evaluation mechanism for measuring how subjects of the BSc programmes taught at IST work, which was modified and is now known as Course Unit Quality Assurance System of IST (QUC).
The new QUC system provides for a half-yearly evaluation of each Course Unit (UC) of the programmes taught at IST, aiming: to monitor each UC *vis-à-vis* the objectives envisaged in the curricula; to promote the continuous improvement of the Teaching and Learning process (TL) and; to evaluate and involve the different stakeholders in the process in a clear and responsible manner. These changes were not intended to create a static model, which should not be restricted merely to data collection and production, but to implement a continuous quality improvement process with a cyclical review of the results and with the ultimate

purpose of fully measuring the objectives, both of the teaching and learning process, and of the readjustment, in real-time, of the internal processes.

Focus of the practice (maximum 300 words)

(*Describe the initial situation, the context and objectives. Along with the justification of its needs, the level of integration within the context and the value added*)

The previously mentioned mechanism, active since 1993, consisted in applying on a half-yearly basis of a student survey, in each subject, and check how subjects were taught. The printed surveys were usually distributed on the 11th week of classes and they were collected and "read" by an optical scanning machine. The process was time-consuming (over 30000 surveys made available to the students). A relatively large number of errors occurred and there was a low response rate (30%-40%). Later, the answers were processed and letters with the results printed and sent to all those involved in the process: teachers, lecturers-in-charge, programme coordinators and Department Heads.

Some years after the launch of this survey, a teaching report was also put in place, which was later implemented in computerized form. Then the system evolved (2005/06) as the questionnaires were converted to the digital form, in an attempt to minimize the logistics and the volume of errors. Nevertheless, this transition was reflected in a significant fall in the response rate by students (less than 20%), which made it harder to use the results for the quality improvement processes.

In 2007, some factors were identified as not being fully operational and that required some reform in order to guarantee their efficiency, namely: the involvement of all stakeholders in a clear and effective manner, the guarantee of timely results and, above all, the retrospective applicability, considering the results, or the intended purposes cannot be achieved. The reflection on the reformulation process coincided with two fundamental moments in the Portuguese Higher Education (PHE) – the adequacy to the Bologna process and the revised legislative process on the PHE evaluation – essential aspects in the quality management processes.

Implementation of the practice (maximum 300 words)

(*Describe the implementation of the practice: actions, timing, resources applied. Degree of adjustment of the practice deployment with the objectives, areas and the planned approach*)

The Pedagogical Council (PC) is responsible for the QUC, with the participation of all the actors concerned in the TL process, namely: Students, Teachers, Students' representatives and people in charge of academic management (Programme Coordinators, Lecturers in charge of course units, Department Heads and Governing Bodies); all of them with their role identified and participating in specific periods.

The main sources of information are the curricula of each course unit, a student survey, a Student Report, a Lecturer-in-Charge report, a Teaching Report, and also a Programme Coordinator Report. All this information is collected based on the IST computer system , FÉNIX, and all forms are available for the different actors concerned from the respective portals.

The QUC provides for the evaluation of the TL process of the course units in 4 dimensions: Work Load, Organization, Evaluation, and Teaching Body. As for the latter, each teacher is evaluated by the students as regards the 'Benefit from in-person learning', 'Pedagogical capacity' and 'Interaction with the students'. Most of the dimensions are ranked according to their operational result - "Inadequate", "To be Improved" or "Regular". As for the two first classifications, there are more detailed information collection mechanisms on the causes of those results. Whether a majority of students reveal a complaint, the students' representative will make a comment in which he/she itemizes the problem and the lecturer-in-charge of that

course unit gives a solution that will be subsequently analyzed by the Programme Coordinators, Departments and PC.

Achieved results (maximum 300 words)

(*Describe the achieved results in relation to the planned objectives, also with the changes introduced during the practice implementation. Additionally it values the contribution of qualitative and quantitative data that demonstrate the fulfillment of the objectives*)

The system now relies in the principle of subsidiarity and instruments to quickly and locally address the problems are provided. Only when this mechanism fails will the institution's main bodies act.

In most serious cases (several dimensions classified as "Inadequate" or "To be improved") an auditing process is envisaged for the detailed analysis of the situations, from which a summary of the causes found for the problem results, together with a number of conclusions and recommendations for the future. Should the problems reappear, the PC, in coordination with the Departments and Programme Coordinators, will take stronger measures that may include changes at the level of the responsibility or the teaching body allocated to a specific course unit.

Positive emphasis should be given to excellent results, by publishing a list of excellent teachers in each semester, namely by awarding the IST Prize for Teaching Excellence and also by compiling and publishing good teaching practices identified. The global results of each teacher are also used in the tri-annual evaluation of IST's teachers, according to the respective regulations.

Assessment and review (maximum 200 words)

(*Describe the evaluation process and review and proposals made for improvement identified and introduced into the practice. And the degree of learning from the results obtained and not obtained*)

The QUC successfully answered to the motivations that led to its creation/reformulation. Currently, it is an essential tool for the continuous improvement of quality, with high participation rates and, above all, with the so much needed retrospective applicability in view of the results obtained. There is still a long way to go towards disseminating the effective results of this system wider and raising awareness of the community involved in the process in order to maximize the response rate and the respective participation in it. In this respect, there is currently a campaign going on (a video that explains the different steps of the process and a hand-out with information on the system).

Its application is currently focused on the course units working normally (lectures /problem classes/lab classes) of 1st and 2nd cycle programmes. In 2013, it is expected that this will be extended to other curse units (dissertations, projects, seminars), and to 3rd cycle programmes, which have their own specific features.

Innovative character and transferability (maximum 200 words)

(*Describe the aspects of internal innovation (at the institution) and innovation as respect to the context (at the university system) of the practice. As well as the elements and aspects that can be applied to a different context and possible recommendations that should be taken into account in a benchmarking opportunity*)

The methodology and procedures adopted and reviewed throughout the duration of this process allowed for objectively clarifying and defining the quality assurance procedures of teaching and learning at IST. Today, the academic community is familiar with the process, which, in addition to the retrospective mechanisms in the context of teaching and learning, has also an impact on the evaluation of teachers by transferring the results obtained at the QUC.

The results obtained can be easily transferred to other national or international higher education institutions, which intend to objectively and clearly outline and promote the assurance of quality in teaching and learning with the active involvement of academia.

The existence of different institutions with their own similar quality assurance procedures and methodologies would allow for discussing the results obtained between the various working groups to further the knowledge in these areas and promote the publication of good teaching practices among the different institutions that offer um certain number of similar programmes.

Upload supporting documents (max 5MB) – currently being translated.

Authorization to publish this practice in EUSUM website?

- Yes