

# Guidelines of Quality Development at the University of St.Gallen

## I. Preamble

1. A university's quality is to a large extent based on its members' motivation to strive for excellence in their respective fields. Accordingly, quality development aims to foster and support this aspiration in a university's core areas, i.e. teaching, research, services and executive education, management and administration.
2. Universities are "professional expert communities" with a high degree of autonomy enjoyed by academia. Loyalty and dedication are primarily accorded to faculty members' respective fields, but then also to the university and its objectives. Generally, such autonomous experts cannot be "streamlined" towards a university's objectives in such a culture. Peer feedback and recognition within a scientific community or school are often more effective than material incentives and organisational rules. The result of this is that an individual's intrinsic motivation, on the one hand, and an "informal organisation" of networks, on the other hand, are of great importance for quality development. Impulses instead of instructions, persuasion instead of directives are then be essential approaches for a university's quality development.
3. Ultimately, quality development will only result in significant changes if it is perceived and implemented as an integral part of the functions and responsibilities of a university's individual members and organs. This, in turn, means that quality development must be organised in a decentralised way.

## II. Objectives

4. Quality development serves to reinforce and develop a quality standard of teaching, research, services and executive education, management and administration that is high when measured against international yardsticks. It is closely related to the University's strategic development and contributes towards the implementation of the University's vision and objectives.
5. Quality is an open term that requires semantic specification. Fundamental guidance in this respect is provided by the Vision 2020 adopted by the Senate. The guiding principles that are stated there must be specified for the core areas of quality development and identified in the form of quality objectives.

6. At the level of individual teaching faculty, researchers and staff, quality development supports the formation and reinforcement of reflections on functions and professional self-conception. At the same time, it provides executives at the level of degree course programmes, research projects, schools, institutes, administration and the President's Board with relevant information to support these various leadership functions.

### III. Principles

#### *Teaching*

7. It must be assumed that attitudes towards teaching are heterogeneous to a greater or lesser extent among both faculty and students. Thus "established" academics have developed their research and teaching profiles in the course of many years, and these profiles are usually characterised by a high degree of stability. Conversely, younger academics are still at an academic socialisation stage and therefore frequently have a great need for substantial feedback and support for the further development of their teaching profiles.
8. Comprehensively oriented quality development in teaching requires impulses at several levels: courses, programmes, schools and the University as a whole. Accordingly, quality development begins both with the way in which those who are responsible for teaching act and with the general organisational framework for high-quality academic studies.
9. At the level of courses and programmes, feedback is generated that is relevant to the action to be pursued by the faculty involved; this feedback is dovetailed with follow-up activities.
10. At the levels of the Schools and the University, the quality of teaching is also affected by the general structural and cultural framework for academic studies. For instance, modules that are too small, an inflation of examinations or culture of studies that is one-sidedly focused on utility, which gives prominence to an optimisation of ECTS credit acquisition, may have a great impact on students' learning behaviour. At the same time, this area is difficult to grasp owing to its complexity and some factors that can only be indirectly ascertained, and is therefore less accessible for the necessary quality interventions.

#### *Research*

11. Research follows a dynamism that is largely controlled bottom-up. It is determined by researchers' individual interests and can only be controlled to a limited extent through a configuration of internal general conditions and incentives. Instead, it is subject to forms of professional self-monitoring (particularly in the form of peer reviews of research papers in journals); in addition, the impact of research on practice can be recorded.

12. The bottom-up dynamism is supported and synergetically reinforced by two instruments: through the establishment of profile areas, existing research resources are focused on selected fields of economic and social relevance, and through forms of research funding, incentives are provided to align University research consistently with the relevant quality criteria.

#### *Services and Executive Education*

13. Services and executive education activities take place in an environment characterised by competition and in which alignment with market requirements plays a constitutive role for success. In these areas, it is the decision-makers in the institutes and the Executive School who are responsible for quality development. They define procedures and measures that are in accordance with the overarching quality standards of the University.

#### *Management and Administration*

14. The President's Board provides general conditions for teaching and research throughout the University, as well as for development potentials in the individual organisational units.
15. It supports teaching quality through the delivery of general material and cultural conditions. It supports research activities, ensures transparency, coherence and the development of strategic focal points. It makes decisions concerning the establishment of University-wide research foci and centres. It encourages efficient and need-orientated administrative processes.
16. The President's Board is responsible for the development and implementation of quality development. It has appointed a Delegate for Quality Development and set up a Quality Development Office that reports to him.

## **IV. Measures**

#### *Teaching*

17. At the level of *courses*, student surveys are conducted on a regular basis, the results of which are made available to faculty, students, academic directors, deans and the President's Board in an appropriate form. If any action is required, responsibility is primarily the faculty members'. Secondly, the supervision of the changes derived from the evaluation is incumbent on the respective academic director and the Deans, as well as the President's Board.
- Care is taken that the same students are not too frequently evaluated in the same semester by the selection of a certain segment (for example, a programme at Bachelor's Level), which would impair the validity of their feedback.
  - The items used in the questionnaires should be founded on theory, for one thing, and provide faculty members with suggestions – as concrete as possible

- for reflection and, if need be, a modification of their own teaching activities. Besides the use of a standardised questionnaire, faculty receive pointers towards the utilisation of further instruments for the generation of relevant feedback.
  - Faculty members receive the evaluation results with the suggestion to discuss them with the students in the course.
  - The evaluation results are compiled at the programme level and fed back to the academic directors. Both positive and critical aspects are pointed out; if necessary, optimisation potentials are pointed out. The academic directors are asked to comment on the feedback they have received and, if required, to provide indications about changes that have been initiated.
  - The results from programme-related feedback are integrated in the programme of the Center for Teaching and Learning at the Institute of Business Education and Educational Management (HDZ-IWP) in order to generate specific offers where necessary (for instance consulting for individual faculty members or courses).
18. At the level of *degree programmes*, instruments include feedback groups and graduate surveys.
- Periodically conducted peer reviews and accreditations provide information from external perspectives.
  - As the result of a pilot project, a conceptualisation for continual quality development in degree programmes is developed and made available to academic directors in the form of a handbook.
19. At the level of the *University as a whole*, general conditions for the configuration of teaching at the programme and course levels are fostered.
- Thus a great number of seminar, coaching and consultancy sessions are provided by the Center for Teaching and Learning at the Institute of Business Education and Educational Management (HDZ-IWP), with whose help faculty are able to develop their professionalisation process in teaching.
  - With reference to identified problem areas, targeted analyses are introduced with the aim of reflecting on changes and if need be initiating them. In the past, for example, the “Konzentration der Lehre (KOLE)” was launched in order to counter the low granularity in module structure. Current problem areas are the precise configuration of the Assessment Year, the design of valid examinations and the development of students’ attitudinal dimensions in the spirit of the University's Vision 2020.
20. The Student Union closely cooperates with the Quality Development Office and organises evaluations of its own. It sets up student evaluation teams for this purpose and awards an annual prize for excellent teaching.

### ***Research***

21. The Schools possess specific research cultures. They record research achievements according to criteria they have defined themselves in respect of academic and

practice-oriented research. They distribute research incentives in the form of temporary teaching load reductions.

22. The Research Committee awards University research funds and Swiss National Science Foundation scholarships on the strength of competitive selection procedures. It provides information about research programmes and advises applicants who express an interest in these.

### *Management and Administration*

23. The Administration is evaluated in regular graduate surveys and peer reviews. The scope and objectives of the peer reviews are determined by the Quality Development Office and the Director of Administration. The responsibility for the implementation of any measures for improvement lies with the administrative unit concerned. Implementation is monitored by the Director of Administration and the President's Board.
24. Accreditations and audits conducted at regular intervals, such as EQUIS, AACSB and OAQ, are used to document the levels of quality achieved in a transparent manner, to communicate them as an integral system and to develop them still further.