An analysis of topics addressed by recommendations in the reports of the Institutional Evaluation Programme

By Elena Cirlan and Anna Gover

September 2019

Contents

Abstract

This study aims to identify and explore the topics most frequently addressed by recommendations in the reports of the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) of the European University Association (EUA). The analysis is based on recommendations of a sample of 25 recent IEP reports. The study reveals that IEP recommendations most frequently address the topics under the areas of governance and decision-making, followed by teaching and learning, and research. The findings suggest some convergence in the areas in which the evaluated institutions face challenges or are advised to make changes. The most prominent of these are strategy development, supporting teaching and learning in line with policies of the Bologna Process, and stakeholder collaboration.

1 Introduction

The aim of this study is to identify and explore the topics most frequently addressed by recommendations in the reports of the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) of the European University Association (EUA). This has been done through an analysis of the recommendations presented in a sample of 25 recent IEP reports. A qualitative analysis examined the topics referred to in each recommendation, while a quantitative analysis looked at the number of recommendations coming under each topic.

IEP is a quality assurance agency listed on the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). Its mission is to support higher education institutions and systems in developing their strategic leadership and capacity to manage change through a process of voluntary institutional evaluations. The evaluations are context-sensitive, taking the institution's mission and goals as its starting point rather than any externally imposed criteria. IEP also takes an improvement-oriented approach, i.e. evaluations identify good practice and provide recommendations for improvement. They do not lead to any final judgement, accreditation or ranking (IEP, 2019c). The evaluation teams conducting the evaluations are composed of higher education leaders, professionals and students, coming from across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (IEP, 2019a).

IEP was established in 1994 and by July 2019 had conducted 430 evaluations in 50 different countries. Of the evaluations, 415 were conducted in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The same methodology is used regardless of the location of the institution. Each IEP evaluation consists of a self-evaluation by the institution and two site visits by the evaluation team, and results in a written report providing a narrative of the findings and recommendations to the institution to support it in achieving its goals. Institutions follow up on the findings internally and are asked to report on how they have addressed the recommendations by submitting a progress report one year after the completion of the evaluation.

In their reports, evaluation teams are expected to present their findings under six headings, corresponding to the main areas of institutional activity covered by the evaluations: governance and decision-making, quality culture, teaching and learning, research, service to society and internationalisation. The reports follow a common template, which includes suggestions of some of the topics to be covered under each heading.

The reports provide a wealth of evidence as to the state-of-play at evaluated institutions and by examining the recommendations made by the teams, this study aims to shed light on the main challenges that institutions face in their development.

Some previous studies have examined the reports and recommendations resulting from IEP evaluations, primarily in an attempt to identify the impact of the programme (cf. Dias et al., 2014 pp. 34-35). In particular, a 2014 study examined the reports and recommendations of 30 reports to "find out the areas of [higher education institutions] that are mostly addressed in the report, assuming they are the ones where the Programme intends to produce an impact" (Dias et al., 2014 p. 35). Others (cf. Taveres et al., 2010; Dias et al., 2014) analysed a collection of reports from a specific country as part of a broader exercise in which IEP evaluates some or all of the institutions in the country and then produces an overarching report that identifies the common trends and challenges across the higher education system and makes further recommendations to the national authorities. Most recently, such exercises were conducted in North Macedonia and Montenegro (Sursock, 2018; Jørgensen, 2018).

2 Methodology

2.1 Sample

For the purposes of this study, recommendations were analysed from 25 IEP reports dating from 2014 to 2018. This timeframe was chosen in order to have a sample of the most recent IEP reports. All the reports are a result of an initial evaluation;[1] in 19 cases this was the first IEP initial evaluation that the institution undertook and in 6 cases it was the second. Two of the reports came from evaluations with a special focus (one on internationalisation and one on management of research and use of research results). In order to obtain a geographically balanced and diverse sample the follow-up and coordinated evaluations from that timeframe were excluded.

The evaluations took place in 13 different countries of which 77% are from the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) *(see Annex 1).*

Of the evaluations, 68% were of public institutions, and the size of the universities varies from one-faculty to 23-faculty institutions. The institutions included in the sample have a rather young profile; 64% had been founded in the last 50 years.

A total number of 580 recommendations were analysed. The number of recommendations in each report ranged from 11 to 44. The style of recommendations varies: in some instances the recommendations addressing interrelated issues are clustered together into one single recommendation while others are formulated as one-issue recommendations.

2.2 Data analysis

The recommendations were analysed using the content analysis research method. According to Downe-Wambolt (1992, p.314): "Content analysis is a research method that provides a systematic and objective means to make valid inferences from verbal, visual, or written data in order to describe and quantify specific phenomena."

Considering that the aim of this study is to find out which topics are most frequently addressed by the IEP recommendations, both quantitative and qualitative content analysis methods were applied. The former was used to determine the frequency of the topics (Berelson, 1952; Krippendorff, 2004; Neuendorf, 2002) and the latter to interpret the results.

Based on the content of recommendations, 39 topics were identified and allocated under the six areas of institutional activity covered by the evaluations *(see Annex 2)*. Each recommendation was categorised under the relevant topics, regardless of the section of the report in which it appeared. As such, a recommendation could be categorised under multiple topics.

In order to increase the validity of the data analysis two researchers performed the investigation separately and reached a consensus by discussing the results.

2.3 Context-sensitivity of recommendations

In addition to looking specifically at the topics addressed by the recommendations and the possible reasons for this, the research brings up an important observation about the recommendations

---

[1] IEP conducts several types of evaluations: initial evaluation, initial evaluation with special focus on internationalisation, initial evaluation with special focus on management of research and use of research results, follow-up evaluation (an evaluation that focuses on the changes implemented after the initial evaluation) and coordinated evaluations (in which some or all of the institutions in a country are evaluated at the joint request of institutions and public authorities).

themselves, namely that they are very context sensitive. Similar recommendations found in two separate reports may have quite different meanings, depending on the context of the institution and the evidence on which the recommendation is based. For example, a recommendation to increase the offering of courses taught in English may be proposed in order to make the university more attractive and accessible to international students, or it may be made with the aim of developing the language skills of domestic students. As such, reading the recommendations on their own does not give a full picture of the situation at the institution; instead they must be taken in the context of the full report.

This context sensitivity also applies to the number of recommendations in each report. As mentioned above, in the sample covered by this study the number of recommendations in each report ranged from 11 to 44. On average there were 23 recommendations per report. It is tempting to infer that more recommendations mean that an institution has more aspects that it needs to improve. However, two points refute this conclusion. Firstly, a single recommendation may address a number of different issues. This may be because the issues are all interconnected; however, it may also be linked to the writing style of the team coordinator. Secondly, a single simple recommendation, e.g. calling for the development of a strategy, or an overhaul of the institution's administrative structures, may imply the need for a fundamental change in the institution's operations, which can be put briefly and simply on paper, but requires a significant amount of work to implement.

A final note about the recommendations is that each recommendation may be linked to a number of different areas of institutional activity. This demonstrates the synergies between different activities and that a change in one area may require corresponding changes in another area, or have impacts beyond the initial intention.

2.4   Limitations

Some limitations to the data analysis should be acknowledged. The cross-cutting nature of many recommendations means some are counted multiple times, across different topics. In this case the researchers sought to identify only the primary topics covered by the recommendation, and did not count the recommendation in areas where secondary impact might be expected.

Alternatively, a report might make several separate recommendations related to the same topic, in which case each of these recommendations is counted individually.

These limitations come on the one hand from the complex nature of higher education institutions, where institutional activities cannot be viewed in isolation, but on the other hand also from the approach adopted by each evaluation team for writing and presenting the recommendations. While all the reports follow a common template, and are checked by the IEP secretariat to ensure they meet the standards of content and language expected by the Programme, the teams operate independently in formulating the recommendations.

3 Findings

3.1 Overview

Over half of all the recommendations (58.8%) in the analysed reports are related to governance and decision-making. The next most covered area is teaching and learning (22.1% of all recommendations), followed by quality culture (20.3% of recommendations). Of the recommendations, 17.8% are related to research. Internationalisation and service to society are the least covered areas, with 14.5% and 8.5% of the recommendations respectively. This chapter explores in more detail the topics most frequently addressed under each of the six areas.

Beyond this, three cross-cutting topics were also identified that are present across several areas, namely the focus on strategy, the prevalence of Bologna Process policies, and reference to stakeholder collaboration. These are discussed further in chapter 4.

These key findings correspond with a previous study that identified the four most covered areas by IEP recommendations as being strategic management, governance and management, quality culture, and teaching and learning (Dias et al., 2014b, pp.36-37).

Furthermore, while the number of recommendations does not necessarily translate into impact, it is interesting to note that the top area identified by this study (governance and decision-making) corresponds with the top area of impact of IEP evaluations on evaluated institutions, according to a recent study by Dakovic and Gover (2019, p.9).

3.2 Governance and decision-making

There are three likely reasons for the high proportion of recommendations related to governance and decision-making. The first is IEP's specific focus on the strategic leadership and the development of the institution as a whole (IEP, 2019a). This leads to a natural emphasis on the institution's central governance and management structures, as these steer the direction of its development.

The second is the use of rectors and vice-rectors in the evaluation teams, which can also be seen to lead towards a focus on the top-level management of the institution.

The third reason is that the area of governance and decision-making covers such a wide range of issues that are decided upon at the institutional level, including, but not limited to: mission and vision, strategy, organisational structures, leadership, finances, HR and communication. While some of the recommendations also touch upon how these topics are handled at faculty level, this is often with regards to the links and communication with the institutional level.

Within the area of governance and decision-making, the most frequently addressed topic is academic staff, closely followed by the one that might be expected to be most covered: strategy and implementation.

Many of the recommendations about academic staff relate to professional development and training. They cover training not only for the development of pedagogical skills, but also for research methods, supervision skills, writing project proposals/funding applications, language skills (specifically English), or on a more general level, providing opportunities for sharing of practice and peer learning.

The need for a better balance between teaching and research for academic staff comes up repeatedly. On the one hand, institutions are recommended to reduce or redistribute teaching hours so that academic staff have sufficient time for research. On the other hand, institutions are also recommended to strike a more even balance between research and teaching skills in recruitment and

promotion criteria, which currently usually give more weight to research achievements. This follows the general trend currently seen in European higher education, in which policy recommendations seek to redress the balance between the teaching and research missions of universities (cf. EUA, 2018; EFFECT/EUA 2017).

Strategy and implementation is the next most frequently discussed topic under governance and decision-making. This can be seen as a natural consequence of the IEP philosophy and methodology. Strategy also appears as one of the most frequently addressed topics in the other areas as well. It is therefore discussed in more detail in chapter 4 of this study.

As the IEP methodology takes the institutional mission and goals as the starting point for the evaluation, it is no surprise that many of the recommendations suggest a review of the institution's mission or redefining the strategic priorities. In some cases this is advised as a reactive action, to bring the mission and goals in line with the realities of the institution's recent development. In other cases this is proposed in order to give impetus to a rethinking of the institution's strategic direction or to better define its distinctive features. This demonstrates that the evaluation teams look not just at how to reach the mission and goals, but also whether they are appropriate given the operating context of the institution.

There are a number of recommendations that relate to financial matters of the institution. However, this is not as prevalent as might be expected given that finances are key to the sustainability of the institutions as well as to providing resources for implementing change. This may however be explained by the fact that in many higher education systems, institutions receive public funding allocations from the government, and changing this is not in the control of the institution. Therefore, funding matters are tackled in the narrative part of the report but not in the recommendations, as IEP teams make recommendations only to the institution itself, and not to national authorities or other bodies that set the framework for their operation. Where recommendations do cover funding, this relates instead to advice to diversify income streams, for example by exploring possibilities for project and research grants or income from commercial activities. More frequently, however, the financial recommendations cover budget allocation within the institution, for example, between faculties, or ring-fencing funding for specific activities, as this is largely within the control of the institution.

Finally, another topic that has the same number of recommendations as the financial matters is communication and marketing. This may be due to communication and marketing having an impact on many aspects of university development. For example, the availability of information in English affects mobility and international visibility, and the marketing of the university's unique selling points and ties with society affects its attractiveness for potential students and partners.

3.3   Teaching and learning

Over half (60.9%) of the recommendations related to teaching and learning are linked to curriculum development and delivery. The recommendations make many references to topics covered and promoted by the Bologna Process, with a particular focus on the shift towards student-centred approaches to learning and teaching, including use of learning outcomes. Bologna policies also come up in other areas, most specifically quality culture, and therefore prevalence of Bologna policies in the IEP recommendations is discussed further in chapter 4.

Beyond student-centred learning, a number of other issues come up repeatedly in the recommendations related to curriculum development and delivery, namely: stakeholder involvement in curriculum design, offering programmes or courses in foreign languages, digitalisation and e-learning, and ensuring programmes support the employability of students.

Other topics covered under teaching and learning include strategy, infrastructure, student assessment, drop-out rate, sharing of practice (between teaching staff) and the balance between teaching and research.

Due to the fact that IEP does not evaluate individual programmes, there are no recommendations related to the programme content, except for those that refer to the need to embed the development of transversal skills into the curriculum or to foster interdisciplinarity.

3.4 Research

Almost half of all the recommendations about research relate to strategy and implementation (46.6%). This covers primarily advice to structure (or re-structure) how research is organised at the institution and to develop or revise an overarching institutional research strategy. In particular, many recommendations called for the need to identify existing areas of excellence or potential and to prioritise investment in these. By calling for an institution to revisit its strategy, several recommendations are implicitly also about ensuring the fitness-of-purpose of the research goals (i.e. that they are realistic in view of the institutional context).

Issues around collaboration appear in just over a quarter of the research recommendations (26.2%). On the one hand these relate to internal collaboration, primarily in order to support inter-disciplinarity, and cooperation and resource sharing between faculties and units (often linked to creating critical mass and making the best use of resources). On the other hand, they relate to external collaboration both with other universities and with businesses, in order to establish research partnerships and create opportunities for capacity building. The topic of collaboration with external stakeholders is covered in more detail in chapter 4.

3.5 Service to society

Service to society is the area with the fewest recommendations. Despite being the "third mission" of European higher education institutions, it is clear that this area receives less attention than teaching and learning and research. However, the limited number of recommendations here may also link to the fact that this area requires a significant understanding of the local context, which is more difficult for the IEP evaluation teams, which do not have any members from the country in which the evaluated institution is situated (Dakovic and Loukkola, 2016, p.7). A similar observation was made in a recent study looking at the impact of IEP on evaluated institutions, which noted that service to society was the area in which the least impact was reported by the evaluated institutions (Dakovic and Gover, 2018, p.6).

Under this area, the majority of recommendations relate to developing a coherent strategy (61.2%). In many cases this referred to consolidating or further extending existing activities and prioritising so as to achieve higher impact in chosen areas.

The recommendations under this section reflect the very broad understanding of what constitutes service to society. As such there are few identifiable trends in the specific topics of the recommendations, which refer to activities ranging from knowledge transfer and consultancy services, charitable actions, engagement with the local community, and lifelong learning. Furthermore, the recommendations generally advise further developing or expanding existing activities, rather than proposing new ones. These observations may be linked again to the strong dependency on the operating context of the institution.

However, two distinct types of recommendation can be identified: those that focus on the service that the university can offer to society, and those that focus on harnessing the benefits that offering these services can bring back to the university.

3.6 Quality culture

Recommendations related to strategy also appeared frequently under the heading related to quality culture; however, even more common (around 43.2% of the recommendations under this heading) were those regarding the concrete tools and processes used to implement the strategy. As such, these recommendations are more practical than those in other areas. They covered issues such as varying the methods for collecting feedback, using key performance indicators, improving data systems, developing quality handbooks, and defining and embedding quality standards (including the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG)). Some recommendations called for more monitoring, while others warned against "evaluation fatigue" and advised for the need to be more selective in quality assurance approaches.

The recommendations related to strategy were often linked to bringing existing ad-hoc practices under one coherent quality assurance system and expanding that system to cover more areas of institutional activity, not just teaching and learning. Several also mentioned needing to support the development of quality culture (including moving from checking and control to quality enhancement) and some practical advice on how to do this were given, including reducing bureaucracy, fostering ownership through better involvement of stakeholders in quality assurance processes, and improving communication, including by providing information about actions taken as a result of feedback received ("closing the feedback loop"). Indeed, the second most addressed topic under the heading of quality culture was that of follow-up: not only taking actions, but also communicating about them.

3.7 Internationalisation

With regards to recommendations on internationalisation, three topics were most frequently mentioned: strategy, mobility and foreign language provision. Many reports noted that institutions have a range of internationalisation activities, but that these are not necessarily linked to an overarching strategy. Recommendations therefore focused on encouraging institutions to think more strategically about their internationalisation activities, including defining priorities, setting goals and arrangements for monitoring progress, defining criteria for international partnerships (for example for joint programmes and research collaboration) and clarifying responsibilities. Furthermore, a number of recommendations referred to the need to consider in more detail how internationalisation strategy and activities link to other areas of institutional activity and can be embedded or mainstreamed, rather than viewed as a standalone activity. In this way, internationalisation was also viewed as a tool to improve quality.

While some recommendations sought to highlight less resource-intensive approaches, such as internationalisation-at-home, many recommendations related to increasing mobility. These covered the full range of facilitating both incoming and outgoing mobility, for both staff and students. In some cases this went hand in hand with improving recognition procedures in order to facilitate mobility.

Recommendations related to foreign language provision mostly covered language courses (for staff and students), classes/courses taught in other languages (primarily English), and availability of information in other languages. In many cases, these recommendations linked also to mobility. Offering courses taught in English is in part about attracting international students (as well as offering domestic students opportunity to study in English), and offering English language tuition supports both staff and students in being internationally mobile.

4 Cross cutting topics

As previously mentioned, many of the topics come up across several areas of institutional activity and recommendations are linked to several areas at the same time. The analysis for this study identified three cross-cutting themes that appear most frequently in the recommendations: the focus on strategy, the prevalence of Bologna Process policies, and reference to stakeholder collaboration.

4.1   Focus on strategy

One of the most frequently addressed issues under all areas of institutional activity is strategy (and approaches for its implementation). Across all areas, three types of recommendations can be identified. First, those that advise bringing existing plans and activities under the umbrella of a coherent strategy, whether for the institution as a whole, or in a specific area of activity. Second, those that advise what a strategy and accompanying implementation plan should look like, for example having clear and realistic objectives, SMART targets, key performance indicators, clear allocation of responsibilities and timelines. Third, those that deal with how the strategy should be developed, namely with engagement from senior leaders, broad engagement with both internal and external stakeholders and good communication between central and faculty levels.

Beyond this, recommendations referring to strategy also have a specific character depending on the areas they address. For example, the ones referring to governance and decision-making touch upon the importance of rationalising and strengthening the services provided across the university in order to reach a deeper level of cohesion and to offer additional support where required, at institutional and faculty level. Recommendations related to teaching and learning, on the other hand, emphasise the need to appoint responsibility at the senior leadership level for steering the strategy and creating or strengthening structures to support the pedagogic development of academic staff and sharing of existing good practices.

The heavy focus on strategy and how to operationalise it is a natural consequence of the IEP mission, which is to support the strategic development of the institution as a whole. This is reflected in the methodology, which takes the institution's own mission and goals as a starting point for the evaluation and considers in the first instance their fitness of purpose, and then the fitness for purpose of the policies and practices in place to reach those goals.

However, the prevalence of recommendations at the strategic level may also be linked directly to the motivation of institutions that are evaluated by IEP. Responses to the survey sent to institutions directly after their evaluation is completed show that "to develop further our strategy" is one of the top three selected reasons for registering for an evaluation (Dakovic and Gover, 2018, p.3). Furthermore, almost two-thirds of the institutions covered in the sample for this study were established fewer than 50 years ago, so they may be seeking support with their strategic development to help them move beyond the phase of initially establishing the institution.

4.2   Prevalence of European higher education policies

As a European quality assurance agency, IEP promotes Bologna Process commitments and operates in line with the ESG. In this regard, several Bologna Process objectives such as student-centred learning and teaching, recognition of qualifications, quality assurance in line with the ESG, employability and internationalisation (cf. EHEA, 2015; EHEA, 2018) appear as transversal topics across the analysed recommendations. Many of the recommendations aimed to ensure that institutions meet European best practices. The European perspective is at the core of the IEP methodology and the use of teams of mixed nationalities allows them to bring approaches and ideas from a diversity of European higher

education sectors, rather than focusing on the institution's development towards nationally-set priorities. Indeed, previous research (Dakovic and Gover, 2018 p.3) also noted that this was particularly valued as a feature of the Programme shown by the fact that "to get a European evaluation" was in the top three most cited reasons for registering for IEP.

Many recommendations related to student-centred learning also overlapped with those about academic staff. As such they focused on the need for staff training and peer learning on matters connected with student-centred learning, such as teaching methods, use of learning outcomes and use of digital technologies.

With regards to recognition of qualifications, recommendations sought to highlight the need for smooth and correct recognition of ECTS from mobility periods, and, to a lesser extent, the recognition of prior learning and extra-curricular activities.

As a quality assurance agency operating in compliance with the ESG, IEP teams are also obliged to include the standards covered by Part 1 of the ESG[2] in their evaluation of an institution. Indeed, these topics are mentioned in the report template used by IEP teams, in order to give an indication of where they should be covered in each report. Multiple recommendations related to quality assurance refer to the need to embed the expectations of the ESG into the institution's own quality assurance system.

In order to foster graduate employability, which is high on the European agenda as well as on the national level, the teams frequently recommended building a close relationship with local businesses and other stakeholders. Recommendations advised that stakeholders should be involved not only in the strategic development of the institution but also in curriculum development, specifically in order to refine course content to meet employers' needs both in terms of discipline-specific knowledge and transversal skills, and to offer internships and practical training.

Finally, it is interesting to note that references to the Bologna Process key commitment of implementing the 3-cycle degree structure are rare, suggesting that this aspect of the Bologna reforms has already been implemented in the countries covered by the sample for this research.

4.3   Stakeholder collaboration

The analysis shows that collaboration between higher education institutions and different stakeholders is considered by the evaluation teams to be essential for institutional development. There are many areas where an institution is considered to benefit from, or is dependent upon, collaboration with external stakeholders, in particular strategy development, research, service to society and curriculum development. The recommendations advised various methods for gaining stakeholder input, ranging from formal partnerships for the implementation of activities (for example in research projects or for providing internships), to gathering their input and advice (for example, by having external stakeholders in the governance bodies or curriculum development teams).

IEP teams meet external stakeholders during their site visits, allowing for stakeholders' views to be reflected in the team's reports and recommendations. Many recommendations sought to highlight the importance of stakeholders' feedback related to graduates' preparedness for the labour market as well as regarding programmes' development and renewal.

---

[2] The standards of Part 1 of the ESG are: policy for quality assurance; design and approval of programmes; student-centred learning, teaching and assessment; student admission, progression, recognition and certification; teaching staff; learning resources and student support; information management; public information; on-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes; and cyclical external quality assurance.

Collaboration with external stakeholders is not viewed as a goal in itself, but as a tool to improve the quality of the education, research and service to society of the institution. This aspect is reflected in many of the recommendations that advocated for stronger links with stakeholders with the aim to diversify internship placements or offer guest lectures and thus enrich student learning experience, and to develop industry collaborations for research.

Finally, several recommendations also referred to the need to monitor and review existing partnerships, and to think strategically when seeking new ones. As such, "quality over quantity" was implied in many of the recommendations related to external collaboration.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that governance and decision-making is the area most covered by recommendations in the IEP reports covered in this study. This is followed by teaching and learning, and research. The findings suggest some convergence in the areas in which the evaluated institutions face challenges or are advised to make changes. The most prominent of these are strategy development, supporting teaching and learning in line with policies of the Bologna Process, and stakeholder collaboration.

This study also points to three key factors that influence the recommendations. Firstly, the mission and methodology of IEP and its focus on the development of the institution as a whole naturally lead teams to formulate recommendations that address the strategic level. Furthermore, the peer experts conducting the evaluations are themselves former or current institutional leaders, again bringing a natural focus to issues of leadership and strategy.

Secondly, the institution's own missions and goals steer the team towards focusing on particular areas of activities. Again, this is related to the IEP methodology, which takes the mission and goals as the starting point of the evaluation and examines whether they are appropriate for the institution, and if so, how they can develop their policies and practices in pursuit of them. Furthermore, institutions can steer the direction of the evaluation by asking the teams to examine issues that are of specific importance to them.

Furthermore, the overall policy context in which IEP operates, namely the framework of the EHEA, means that the evaluation reports give prominence to issues also covered by European-level policies, for example, the focus on student-centred learning, recognition and quality assurance. This is the case even for evaluations of institutions outside the EHEA.

Finally, it is worth noting that there is significant scope for further research into the challenges faced by evaluated institutions, by looking more deeply at the narrative of reports, rather than only at the recommendations. This would give a clearer picture of the specific reasons behind the recommendations. Comparative studies analysing the recommendations in the context of geographic location, national policies and strategies, and age of the institution, could also be considered for future research.

6 References

Barbara Downe-Wamboldt RN, PhD, 1992, Content analysis: Method, applications, and issues, Health Care for Women International, 13:3, 313-321, DOI: 10.1080/07399339209516006

Berelson, B. L., 1952, Content analysis in communications research. New York: Free Press.

Dakovic, D. & Gover, A., 2019, Impact evaluation of external quality assurance by the Institutional Evaluation Programme, Quality in Higher Education, Retrieved on 26 August from https://doi.org/10.1080/13538322.2019.1635304

Dakovic, D. & Loukkola, T., 2016 The relevance of international experts in capturing the national higher education context in institutional evaluations, Retrieved on 6 August from https://iep-qaa.org/downloads/publications/IEP_study_relevance_international_peers.pdf

Dias, D., Cardoso, S., Rosa, M. J., & Amaral, A., 2014a, 'The EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme and the development of an internal quality culture', Journal of the European Higher Education Area, (1), pp. 1-16.

Dias, D., Cardoso, S., Rosa, M. J., & Amaral, A., 2014b, 'Thematic areas of IEP evaluations', Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP), A twenty-year contribution to institutional change. Retrieved on 22 July 2019 from http://www.eua.be/Libraries/publications-homepagelist/20_years_of_IEP

European Forum for Enhanced Collaboration in Teaching (EFFECT)/European University Association (EUA), 2017, Ten European Principles for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching, Retrieved on 22 July 2019 from
https://eua.eu/downloads/content/ten%20european%20principles%20for%20the%20enhancement%20of%20learning%20and%20teaching16102017.pdf

EUA, 2018, Learning and Teaching in Europe's Universities: An EUA position paper, Retrieved on 22 July 2019 from
https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/learning%20and%20teaching%20in%20europes%20universities%20-%20an%20eua%20position%20paper.pdf

European Higher Education Area (EHEA), 2015, Yerevan Communiqué. Retrieved on 22 July 2019 from
http://ehea.info/Upload/document/ministerial_declarations/YerevanCommuniqueFinal_613707.pdf

European Higher Education Area (EHEA), 2018, Paris Communiqué. Retrieved on 22 July 2019 from
http://www.ehea2018.paris/Data/ElFinder/s2/Communique/EHEAParis2018-Communique-final.pdf

Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP), 2019, About IEP. Retrieved on 22 July 2019 from
https://www.iep-qaa.org/about-iep.html

Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP), 2019, IEP homepage. Retrieved on 22 July 2019 from
https://www.iep-qaa.org/

Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP), 2019b, Why choose IEP. Retrieved on 22 July 2019 from
https://www.iep-qaa.org/why-choose-iep.html

Jørgensen, T., 2018, Evaluations of nine higher education institutions in Montenegro. Retrieved on 22 July 2019 from https://www.iep-qaa.org/downloads/publications/iep_me_system%20review%20report_2018_final_revised.pdf

Krippendorff, K., 2004, Content analysis: an introduction to its methodology. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications Inc.

Neuendorf, K., 2002, The content analysis guidebook. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications Inc.

Sursock, A., 2018, Evaluations of six higher education institutions in the Republic of Macedonia. Retrieved on 22 July 2019 from https://www.iep-qaa.org/downloads/publications/iep_mk_report_final.pdf

Tavares, D. A., Rosa, M. J., & Amaral, A., 2010, 'Does the EUA Institutional Evaluation Programme contribute to quality improvement?', Quality Assurance in Education, 18(3), pp. 178-190.

7 Annexes

7.1 Annex 1: Geographic distribution of reports in the sample

Country	Number of reports/evaluations	EHEA country
Brazil	1	No
Czech Republic	3	Yes
FYR Macedonia	2	Yes
Hungary	2	Yes
Ireland	1	Yes
Kazakhstan	1	Yes
Kyrgyzstan	1	No
Lebanon	1	No
Lithuania	2	Yes
Luxembourg	1	Yes
Poland	1	Yes
Slovenia	4	Yes
Turkey	5	Yes

7.2 Annex 2: Topics covered by the recommendations

1. Governance and institutional decision-making
1.1 Mission and vision
1.2 Strategy and implementation
1.3 Governance structure
1.4 Institutional leadership and management
1.5 Organisational structure of the university
1.6 Administration and Central level
1.7 Faculty management
1.8 Internal communication and transparency
1.9 Communication/marketing
1.10 Student involvement in decision making process
1.11 Student centres and support services
1.12 Staff management, appointment, development, workload, support
1.12.1 Academic staff
1.12.2 Administration staff
1.12.3 General HR
1.13 Financial matters
1.14 Cooperation with various stakeholders (at overall level)
2. Teaching and learning
2.1 Strategy
2.2 Infrastructure
2.3 Curriculum development and delivery
2.4 Assessment
2.5 Dropout rate
2.6 Sharing of practices (internally)
2.7 Teaching-Research links and balance
3. Research
3.1 Strategy and implementation
3.2 Research collaboration (internal, external)
3.3 Financial strategy
3.4 Doctoral studies
4. Service to society
4.1 Strategy and implementation
4.2 Consultancy services offered by the university
4.3 Lifelong learning studies
4.4 Relationship with Alumni
5. Quality culture
5.1 Strategy
5.2 Tools and processes
5.3 Follow-up (closing the feedback loop)
5.4 Structures and staff/student involvement
6. Internationalisation
6.1 Strategy
6.2 Collaboration with external partners
6.3 Mobility
6.4 Foreign language provision