

eua iep INSTITUTIONAL  
EVALUATION  
PROGRAMME

years of  
EXCELLENCE  
30

**IEP** INSTITUTIONAL  
EVALUATION  
PROGRAMME

Supporting institutions in  
developing their strategic  
leadership and capacity  
to manage change

**440**  
evaluations  
since 1994

**50**  
countries  
worldwide

Listed in EQAR  
eqar

# INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION PROGRAMME

*Celebrating 30 years of  
excellence*



This publication is licensed under the Creative Commons [Attribution-NonCommercial](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) CC BY-NC

This information may be freely used and copied for non-commercial purposes, provided that the source is acknowledged (Institutional Evaluation Programme/European University Association).

### **Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP)**

**European University Association asbl**

Rue du Rhône 114

Case postale 3174

1211 Geneva 3, Switzerland

+41 22 552 02 96

[www.iep-qaq.org](http://www.iep-qaq.org) · [info@iep-qaq.org](mailto:info@iep-qaq.org)

# Table of content



<b>Foreword</b>	4
<b>Message from the Director of the Institutional Evaluation Programme</b>	5
<b>The history of the IEP</b>	6
Eric Froment	6
Andrée Sursock	9
Tia Loukkola	14
<b>Voices of IEP pool members</b>	17
Methodology and benefits of the IEP	17
Reflections on the alignments of universities and their leaderships	22
The uniqueness of the IEP	26
IEP reviews, a personal impression	28
Personal Experience from Two Decades of Serving the IEP	31
<b>Voices from evaluated institutions</b>	35
<b>Congratulations messages</b>	37

## Foreword

Since its launch in 1994, the European University Association's Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) has supported 460 institutions in 50 countries in developing their strategic leadership and capacity to manage change through a process of voluntary institutional evaluations. Thanks to its tailored approach that respects the diversity of institutions and their unique contexts and challenges, the IEP has contributed to improve the performance of EUA's members and the higher education sector as a whole. The programme's reputation as a robust quality assurance agency, the dedication of its Steering Committee and the enthusiasm of its pool members are testimony to decades of success.

On the other hand, the IEP has also been crucial in advancing EUA's strategic priorities. Through the IEP, EUA gains valuable insights into its member institutions,

uncovering emerging trends, challenges and examples of best practices. This information is essential for EUA's advocacy efforts and horizon scanning activities, enabling the association to remain responsive and proactive in meeting the needs of the higher education sector. Looking ahead, the shared future of EUA and IEP is built on a foundation of mutual growth and continuous improvement.

I would like to warmly thank all those that have contributed to the establishment and development of EUA's IEP. This anniversary publication honours the programme's accomplishments and anticipates a promising future.

**Amanda Crowfoot**  
EUA Secretary General



## Message from the Director of the Institutional Evaluation Programme

When I joined EUA in 2022 and became the Director of the Institutional Evaluation Programme, I really knew very little about it. I knew it was a member of my former organisation, ENQA, I knew it was registered in the European Quality Assurance Register EQAR, and I knew it did some kind of institutional evaluation, sometimes also coordinated for entire higher education systems. I had also heard that "people in IEP are fantastic", "the pool members are incredible and so dedicated" and "it is a real community, a family". And all of those things have turned out to be true.

In these past three years, I have been able to testify to the benefit that the programme can give to institutions, not only in Europe, but also outside of Europe. Quality assurance should never be only about "ticking boxes":

it has to make sense by supporting institutions to reach what they have set out to achieve. The voluntary nature of IEP, its focus on strategic alignment and enhancement, and the engagement of peers who are mostly former or current rectors or vice-rectors, enables it to do exactly that.

IEP has benefitted such a huge number of institutions over these past 30 years, and we hope to be able to benefit many more in the years to come. My deepest thanks to all those who have made IEP what it is today!

**Maria Kelo**

Director of Institutional Evaluation Programme, EUA



## The history of the IEP



*Eric Froment*

IEP 1994-2001

The Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) was launched in 1994 by the Conference of European Rectors (CRE), one of the two associations of European universities that merged to create the EUA (European University Association) in 2001. Its launch resulted from a series of socio-economic changes that led to a significant increase in the size of many universities in Europe from the 1960s. The importance of these developments for national growth and, at the same time, the difficulty for governments to steer such a vast and diverse group of institutions generally reluctant to accept state interference was a real problem.

Faced with this issue, a number of European countries – in particular the Netherlands, France

and the UK – opted in the 1980s to make institutions more independent but also accountable. This led to the establishment of independent national evaluation agencies to ensure that the quality of university activities was maintained in the face of the pressures resulting from the growing numbers of students. This change in attitude was also the result of pressure from the Rectors' Conferences, particularly in the Netherlands and England.

In its 1991 Memorandum on Higher Education in the European Community, the European Commission (EC) highlighted the importance of the role of universities at European level and the need to "maintain and enhance the quality of higher education".

As an association of more than 500 universities, the CRE decided to support its members in their capacity to cope in this new environment. This took a two-pronged approach, one focused on autonomy and the other on accountability.

As early as 1988, members of the CRE drew up the Magna Charta Universitatum advocating institutional autonomy: "States must become more than ever aware of the part that universities will be called upon to play in a changing and increasingly international society."

Following the EC Memorandum, the CRE, with the help of the governments of the Netherlands, Sweden and Portugal and at the instigation of the University of Utrecht, began a pilot experiment on the modalities of an institutional quality audit. Following a feasibility study, the universities of Göteborg, Porto and Utrecht undertook a study of their quality management. After a self-assessment of their procedures, begun in February 1993, they were visited in the autumn by a group of three external auditors, Professors Hinrich Seidel (Leibniz University, Hanover), Pierre Tabatoni (Université



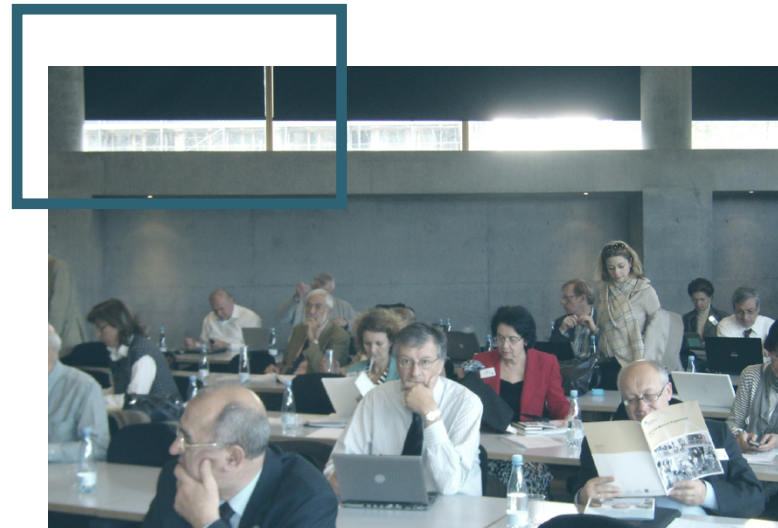
Paris Dauphine) and Sir David Smith (University of Oxford) to assess their quality management. The process was monitored by the Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS) at the University of Twente and led to the development of an evaluation framework, proposed in 1994 by the newly elected CRE Board as a service to the EUA's member institutions. The service was meant to help universities achieve greater autonomy and improve the quality of their activities.

**The four original features of the IEP are as follows:**

- This service is initiated by the universities.
- The university organises a self-evaluation – without imposed standards – focusing on the problems encountered by the university in its general development and which motivated the institution's request.
- Three rectors from other countries receive the self-evaluation and then come to the university. They are free to visit the university and interview various stakeholders within the institution before delivering an oral public report at the end of the visit, finally writing a report to the governing bodies.
- Ultimately, the university is free to decide on whether and how to implement the recommendations contained in the report.

All in all, it was a way of supporting the autonomy of universities that wanted to have a greater scope of responsibilities and to ensure that the decisions they have taken or are to be taken are evaluated.

In 2001, the CRE merged with the Confederation of Rectors' Conferences of the EU to form the EUA. Early on, the EUA Board decided to continue to offer the IEP, but in the new context of the Bologna process launched by governments in 1999, involving various aspects of higher education including quality assurance.





## *Andrée Sursock*

IEP 2001–2009

When the EUA was created in April 2001, its major purpose was to ensure that the voice of the universities was heard in European policy developments and particularly in the Bologna Process, which became an important focus of the Board and the Council. The two associations that came together to form the EUA had different agendas that were merged into one. The CRE was an association of universities, and its major activities were geared toward reinforcing institutions' capacity to manage their affairs. The CRE was involved in policy discussions but not as much as the Confederation of Rectors' Conferences of the EU. Although the EUA was tilted toward policy making, the IEP, one of the core activities of the CRE, outlived the merger.

In 2001, the IEP was still run informally. For example, its secretariat and some members of its steering committee would sit together, after dinner, in the hotel bar during the October annual seminar to form the evaluation teams for the

year. The programme was still in a pilot phase, particularly with respect to what was then called "system evaluations." The first version of these coordinated evaluations was commissioned by Portugal and focused on five medical faculties. This was followed by coordinated evaluations in Serbia (2002), Bosnia Herzegovina (2004), Ireland (2005), Slovakia (2008), Turkey (2008) and Portugal (2009), amounting to a total of 76 universities.



The coordinated evaluations required the IEP to develop a doctrine on how to approach them. The IEP guidelines for individual evaluations still held sway, but there was a need to think about how to refer to this type of evaluation and how to define their scope. The discussion focused in part on how to define a "system" or a higher education "sector" and the adoption of an approach that distinguished clearly between what each institutional evaluation report should address (institutional issues only) and what the cross-sectional report could address (system-wide issues). This doctrine was developed gradually and saw its full deployment

when the IEP was invited to conduct 70 evaluations in Romania, starting in 2012, and when all the evaluation reports had to follow the same table of contents.

These developments contributed to ensuring greater uniformity of approach whilst still not abandoning the notion that each evaluation had to consider the unique context of each institution. The role of the secretariat vs. the steering committee also matured during this time with the secretariat taking on more responsibility, notably about the quality of the evaluation reports, whilst reporting to the Steering Committee, as required.

Meanwhile, new developments in the Bologna Process had an impact on the IEP. Following the Prague ministerial meeting in 2001, the EUA was keen to develop a very close alliance with the European student union (then European Student Information Bureau or ESIB) and was instrumental in integrating them into the E4, which was formed to address the ministers' call on "... universities and other higher education institutions, national agencies and the European Network of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)... to



collaborate in establishing a common framework of reference and to disseminate best practice" (Communiqué of the meeting of European ministers in charge of higher education in Prague on may 19 2001, 2)

Each E4 member presented its own response to this request, which formed the basis for negotiations. The EUA promoted three ideas. First, the future European framework for Quality Assurance (QA) should be guided by a few generic principles such as the primary responsibility of institutions for their quality, and the autonomy of QA agencies from governments. Second, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) should focus on the professional development of QA agencies whilst another body (that would become the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education or EQAR) would verify their compliance with the agreed principles. Third, an annual QA forum would gather representatives from higher education institutions, researchers on higher education, students and QA agencies to discuss QA and higher education issues (this became the European Quality Assurance Forum or EQAF). As in

any process of negotiations, E4 members learned from one another and arrived at proposals that were endorsed by ministers in 2005 (Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, or ESG) and 2008 (EQAR). It is noteworthy that the EQAR is the only structure that was established as part of the Bologna Process and that is managed by NGOs.

The EQAF did not need political endorsement and became a clear success from its launch in 2006. Participants filled all 300 available seats for this inaugural event.





The adoption of the ESG and the establishment of the EQAR led the IEP, along with most European QA agencies, to review their modus operandi and to ensure that they could demonstrate compliance with the ESG. The objective of getting the IEP listed on the EQAR was strategic and political: as more and more European QA agencies were shifting to a programme accreditation approach, the IEP represented an institutional, enhancement-led approach that could serve as beacon and counter example.

From the start the IEP approach was guided by four questions: 1) What is the institution trying to

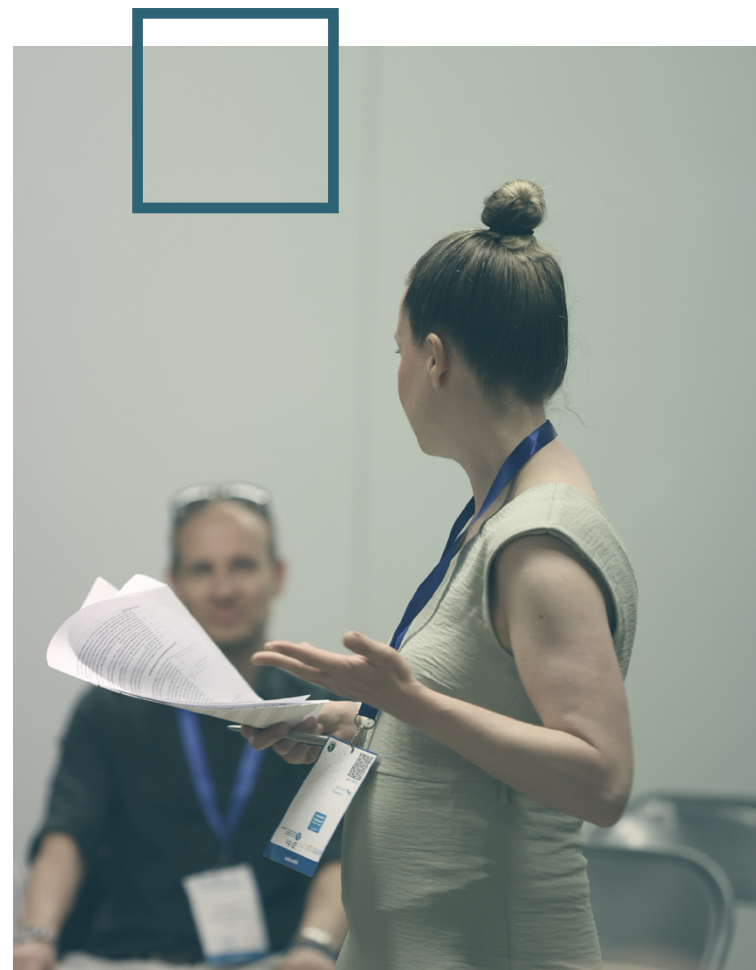
do? 2) How is the institution trying to do it? 3) How does the institution know it works? 4) How does the institution change in order to improve? The third question placed the internal quality assurance mechanisms as the centre of the evaluations. To show that the IEP was in conformity with Part 1 of the ESG, the guidelines were revised to detail the aspects that institutions must consider as part of their internal quality assurance.

Second, the ESG required that students be involved in the evaluation process. Getting the IEP steering committee to agree to this turned out to be a hurdle. From its early beginning, rectors and vice rectors were seen as the only legitimate members of the IEP teams because the focus on strategy, governance and decision making was seen as the realm of peers. In fact, the “secretaries” who were part of the teams were seen initially as those holding the pen rather than contributing to the evaluations. However, Henrik Toft Jensen, the then steering committee chair, was convinced of the necessity to include students and was able to persuade his peers that this would be a positive change. In a relatively short time, the students’ contribution was welcomed thanks to the special

training that they received initially from the IEP and later from the ESIB. In parallel, the role of secretaries was upgraded, and their title changed to “coordinators” in recognition of the greater attention paid to both their selection and training.

Third, the ESG stated that QA agencies should be independent of higher education institutions and governments. As a service of the EUA, the IEP had to make explicit what the practice was, as well as the independence of the steering committee and the lack of involvement of the EUA Board in the IEP’s decision-making process.

In closing, I would be remiss if I did not salute the commitment of the whole IEP pool and the work of two long-standing members of the IEP steering committee, namely Alberto Amaral (University of Porto), who was involved from the launch of the IEP, and Henrik Toft Jensen (Roskilde University) who served as the IEP chair for seven years, as well as the chair of both the Quality Culture Project and the EQAF. Professor Jensen also participated in the E4 discussions. Professors Amaral and Jensen were central to the development and visibility of the IEP during the period 2001-2009.



In 2009, it was time to put the IEP to the test to see how effective the transformation from an informal membership service to an external QA agency as defined by the ESG had been. An external review led by the ENQA verified the IEP's substantial compliance with the ESG 2005, while also suggesting areas for further improvement, as is typical in such reviews.

However, the IEP's 2010 application to be included in the EQAR was initially rejected. This decision, which sparked further policy debates, was based on the Register Committee's interpretation that only agencies overseeing national quality assurance systems were eligible. The Register Committee was of the view that the IEP was a voluntary and consultative exercise and that the ESG were not designed for this type of approach. In its appeal, the IEP stressed that although not a national agency, it is fully in line with the objectives of both the ESG and the EQAR. This rejection highlighted the core philosophy shared by both the EUA and the IEP: the respect for



institutional autonomy and the commitment to allow universities the freedom to choose their QA provider amongst those complying with the ESG. The IEP successfully appealed the decision, and its registration in the EQAR was confirmed at the end of 2011. This significant milestone helped expand cross-border quality assurance

and enhance choice in QA agencies within the European Higher Education Area. It allowed other internationally based agencies to be listed in the register, thus giving more choice to universities in countries where legislation allows that.

In the following decade the IEP worked on further consolidating its programme. Three themes are worth mentioning here given their importance for the programme going forward.

First, it introduced a template for evaluation reports to ensure that the ESG were consistently addressed, and the steering committee mandated the secretariat to provide external feedback to

enhance report quality and accessibility. This move was partly inspired by the coordinated evaluations conducted in Romania (2012-2014), the Republic of North Macedonia (2017), and Montenegro (2013-14 and 2017-2018).

Second, the introduction of many new evaluators necessitated careful consideration to maintain a diverse and skilled evaluator pool. The attention to this aspect was needed because of the sharpening focus on student-centred learning in the ESG 2015 as well as by the increased number of evaluations, thanks to the considerable number of coordinated evaluations commissioned to the IEP.

Third, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 posed unique challenges, as international travel restrictions impacted site visits, two site visits having been a crucial component of IEP's methodology until then. Initially, some evaluations were postponed, while others transitioned to online and subsequently hybrid formats. The experiences gained from these experiments prompted a subsequent revision of the IEP's core methodology.



Reflecting on its first 30 years, the IEP has demonstrated a commitment to its foundational principles while adapting to evolving educational landscapes. The participation of senior university leadership in evaluation teams underscores a focus on governance and management, even if deep dives are now made on issues dealing with quality assurance of teaching and learning and research. Furthermore, the programme's voluntary nature and respect for institutional autonomy and the evaluation teams' independence remain central.

In the course of its history, the IEP has significantly influenced the European quality assurance landscape both by evaluating numerous higher education institutions across various countries and providing policy recommendations to national authorities. In the past decade, recent shifts in national quality assurance systems have increasingly focused on institutional quality rather than programme accreditation, dominant in the early 2000s, mirroring the values that the IEP and EUA have championed since the early 1990s. Its

pioneering work in cross-border quality assurance and advocacy for institutional responsibility in quality assurance has shaped policy and provided the EUA an evidence base for its policy work.

The next Bologna Ministerial meeting is expected to invite the E4 to start a new revision of the ESG. It is hoped that, on the occasion of its 30-year anniversary, the IEP can again be the innovator and bring its experience to bear in drafting the new ESG for the benefit of the students and the European higher education sector.





## Voices of IEP pool members



### *Methodology and benefits of the IEP*

**Tatjana Volkova**

HEIs often adopt diverse approaches to quality assurance in institutional management and strategic planning practice. There are no standard solutions in quality assurance as existing practices depend on the leadership approach, the maturity level of the university, requirements set by legislation, and other factors. However, a common characteristic nowadays is understanding that quality assurance and quality culture must be continuously improved.

The IEP, as an independent membership service of the EUA, plays a crucial role in supporting HEIs by offering evaluation services that aid in the continuing development of their institutional management and governance, including strategic management, performance management, teaching and learning,

research management, internationalisation, service to society and internal quality culture. The mission of the IEP is to support higher education institutions and systems in developing their strategic leadership and capacity to manage change through voluntary institutional evaluation.

During the last 30 years, the IEP maintained its unique core methodology (the peer-review approach) based on an improvement philosophy covering the critical areas of institutional activity. The four key questions driving IEP evaluations could be applied to institutional management and governance and to guide quality improvement in any functional area of university activities.

During the last few years, the IEP has diversified its offer to universities by proposing special focus evaluations on internationalisation, the management of research and the use of research results. Coordinated evaluations are also provided and carried out by the IEP, initiated at the joint request of institutions and public authorities in a particular country.

The IEP enhancement-led approach to institutional evaluation, the high level of experience of the panel of experts, context-sensitivity and the ongoing support provided by the IEP secretariat are the key attributes that attract universities to apply for evaluation. For example, the IEP secretariat offers a personalised videoconference to help institutions prepare for the review. The IEP secretariat is in close, ongoing contact with the evaluation teams and institutions, and organises online meetings when necessary. This allows for immediate response to their needs.

It is emphasised during the site visit that the panel's role is to act as 'critical friends' and, based on gathered evidence and opinions, to provide a roadmap to improve quality and institutional management and governance. Very often, quality

assurance is perceived as a bureaucratic activity and is faced by staff inertia. Building a quality culture requires strong, systemic, systematic efforts from management and governance structures, as well as commitment. It could be said that IEP evaluations are an internationally recognised activity, instrumental in quality assurance and the enhancement of quality culture in universities.

The decision to apply for an IEP evaluation already shows management's openness to the external assessment process and readiness to critically reflect on their activities and performance results,



sharing experiences with peers and learning from them. The benefits of IEP evaluations start from the self-evaluation process, which helps the self-assessment team understand their institution better and promotes collaboration and exchange between colleagues. Sharing the self-evaluation report (SER) with the academic community, administrative staff, and students is vital to promoting a quality culture. IEP evaluations help promote achievements of the university and improve international visibility and brand.

By fulfilling its academic citizenship role, the peer-review panel, including students, demonstrates its commitment to and engagement with HE development.

There are usually a set of online meetings and one site visit to the university. This allows for gathering additional information required to get a full picture of university activities.

Before the online meetings, the IEP panel, under the leadership of the team chair, carefully reads the SER and other available documents, spending significant



time and effort to understand both the context in which the university operates and the SER findings. At the same time they form and exchange opinions about the coming visit.

Many meetings occur with diverse target groups during the site visit, allowing the panel to get a full spectrum of views on institutional governance and management. The visit ends with the panel's initial findings and recommendations shared with the university community. It requires a high level of engagement from the panel's members built on their international expertise, experience gained in administrative positions and academic achievements. As panel members, the students help provide perspectives on the issues discussed.

After the site visit, the panel prepares the evaluation report, which will be shared with internal and external stakeholders, thus setting further development priorities. In addition to teaching and learning, the report's recommendations are related to strategic planning, optimising governance structures, research and use of research results, ensuring effective communication among staff, developing further quality culture, revising existing partnerships, etc. These areas and critical reflection on them are crucial for quality assurance enhancement, especially in a fast-changing environment. The organisational ability to manage change is also evaluated as it impacts quality provisions. Management teams

must be prepared to deal with constant internal and external changes and deliver efficient and effective solutions.

After the evaluation report is received, the university has time to reflect on the experience and make relevant decisions. For transparency, the IEP evaluation reports since 2009 are available on its website as well as on the Database of External Quality Assurance Results (DEQAR) and are a rich source for learning from peers' experiences at other universities.

The IEP continues to remind evaluated institutions of the expectation that they submit a progress report nine months after their evaluation and provide brief comments on the reports received by the institution. The progress report, which is sent to the evaluation panel for feedback, reflects on the impact made by this evaluation.

To monitor its quality and impact, the IEP takes a comprehensive approach to feedback collection. This includes follow-up videoconferences three months after the institutions receive the final evaluation report, and two post-evaluation surveys



(one to evaluated institutions and one to the evaluation teams). This commitment to feedback underscores the IEP's dedication to continuous improvement and transparency.

In conclusion, building an overarching, cross-institutional system of quality assurance, including governance arrangements and development of quality culture, is not an easy task for university management teams, especially alongside daily activities requiring close attention. Therefore, getting an external look or 'helicopter view' through the lens of the IEP's unique methodology of institutional evaluation is an effective way to address current and future challenges and find solutions.



## *Reflections on the alignments of universities and their leaderships*

**Brian Norton**

### Introduction

With multiple missions, forms of statutory establishment and regulation, subject mixes and physical and cultural contexts, universities exhibit a wide, but necessary, diversity. Many comparative insights, lessons and trends can be drawn from across the evaluations of universities conducted in the EUA-IEP and in other contexts. Many paradoxes become apparent. One of these is that, occasionally, "cause does not lead to effect." More specifically, sometimes seemingly insightful and well-meaning university leaderships are demonstrably unsuccessful. Conversely, sometimes apparently successful institutions are "led" by seemingly very detached leaderships. Usually there is some coherence between leadership and outcomes. Even then, that does not inevitably lead to success. Some possible reasons underlying these institutional alignments and misalignments are examined in this short paper.

### Background

Each aspect of a university's work is evaluated differently. Evaluations of the effectiveness of leadership practice can take various forms. These include, for example, objective assessments of the extent to which specified time-limited goals have been achieved. Evaluations of quality vary depending on the specific outcomes being assessed. For teaching and learning, quality criteria



can, for example, include student progress and achievement, student satisfaction and relevance of graduate attributes. For research, innovation and “third mission” social and economic engagements, the quality of their impacts can be assessed by a variety of indices and evidence depending on the contexts of activity, discipline and operating environment.

An indicative and illustrative subjective mapping of effectiveness of leadership practice to the corresponding quality of outcomes is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. An indicative mapping of university leadership effectiveness to quality of outcomes



## Discussion

As indicated in the upper-left quadrant of Figure 1, the ideal paradigm is that leadership practice and outcomes are excellent. Such institutions have clear achievable goals, excellent international communication and engagement with clear organisational responsiveness and responsibility.



This is combined with an effective set of collegial decision-making processes and effective use of resources. Obviously this is a utopia; real institutions will in certain aspects and at particular times fall short of this. However, many universities do approach this paradigm, not in some general sense but in the context of their own particular missions

The worst case is indicated in the lower-right quadrant of Figure 1. Again, as with the ideal paradigm, the worst case is, in its extremity, very rare. However, there are many institutions that do not have adequate resources to achieve their goals but stubbornly refuse to reset more attainable objectives. This leads to low morale and disenchantment. Equally common are institutions with sensible goals but whose organisational structures do not allocate clear responsibilities for the execution of detailed plans to achieve those goals. This can ensue, for example, when immutable structures are set by government statutes and/or key roles are neither resourced appropriately nor effectively embedded in decision-making processes.

The upper-left and lower-right quadrants of Figure 1 are intuitive. Less so are the circumstances in the



lower-left and upper-right quadrants of Figure 1, aspects of both of which are quite common.

The upper-left quadrant is where management practice is excellent but the quality of outcomes remains poor. This can arise when goals are achieved but, perhaps because of legacy issues, those goals are too limited as much greater change and progress is necessary. This can be because there is a low capacity for change across the institution as a whole. That in turn may, at its root, be related to inadequate resources, often in the context of low salaries that make a university less attractive as an employer. High student attrition, particularly in the first year of programmes, can arise where national policies incentivise very large, but largely unmotivated and uncommitted, initial student intakes.



Institutions that fall within the lower-right column of Figure 1 are extremely well-resourced. However much of those resources often accrue directly to distinct parts of the university. The latter leads to both extensive local autonomy and multiple sub-institutional cultures and practices. Such institutions succeed despite, rather than because of, their overall leadership. In the extreme, overall university leadership roles become restricted in practice to advocacy, fundraising and celebration of achievement. However, even in such gilded settings challenges arise. Most of these are caused by unevenness between different parts of the university, their facilities and their students' experiences. As a

consequence, the leadership role often becomes one of deciding what to do with the relatively failing (that in another institution would be seen as successful) parts of their university.

## Conclusion

The categorisation of leadership and outcomes depicted in Figure 1 presents a highly simplified perspective on the many challenges of maintaining a successful university. Nevertheless, it does provide a potential route to positioning institutional performance, or the performance of part of an institution. It essentially identifies whether it is a strategy (upper-left quadrant) or its implementation (lower-left quadrant) that needs to be improved or, more often, fundamentally changed.

It can also be concluded that, whatever the current condition of a university, to avoid some of the pitfalls discussed, a university must always maintain a capacity for objective self-analysis and change. In support of the latter, universities should consider objective external evaluation, such as that provided by the EUA-IEP.



## *The uniqueness of the IEP*

**Ondrej Havelka**

The IEP represents a unique platform for assessing institutions, significantly different from other evaluation agencies I have ever worked with. The primary goal of the IEP is not merely to evaluate but, above all, to stimulate, inspire and contribute to the improvement of the institution. What sets the IEP apart is its independence from overly formal evaluation procedures. Instead, the evaluation team focuses on identifying areas where the institution can strengthen its capabilities and achieve higher levels of efficiency and quality. The aim is not just to find shortcomings but instead to provide space for creative approaches because each institution is highly specific, and there is no universal advice for all institutions.

A key differentiator is the intent of the evaluation team, which consists of persons who were or are responsible for running universities in different European countries. Instead of traditional assessment, team members engage in collaboration with the institution to unfold potential and attain

optimal results. Therefore, the panel becomes a partner in motivating positive changes and finding institutional blind spots.

A prominent characteristic of the programme is the emphasis on mutual understanding between members of the evaluation team and the entire IEP, which works in unity as a relatively small family. This personal interaction creates a confidential and open environment for sharing opinions and prevents



contradictory recommendations. Mutual knowledge enhances collaboration and aids in crafting specific plans and establishing unity during the process of understanding the evaluated institution as well as the national education system.

Overall, it can be said that the IEP introduces a new dimension to evaluation processes – a dimension of fostering positive changes that no other system demands. Its unique approach to institutional assessment emphasises not only finding weaknesses but also supporting strengths and aiming for overall development of potential. It brings a highly valued external perspective to the table.



## *IEP reviews, a personal impression*

**Anja Oskamp**

When I applied for participation in the IEP my motivation was twofold. I hoped my experience in higher education and research would contribute to helping other universities improve their processes and outcomes. But I also wanted to take away something and see how universities in different circumstances work and what I could learn from that. I knew (confirmed by my experience) that the cultures at universities through Europe differ more than one would expect. I was also curious to see how I would function in a group with people from different backgrounds.

Were my expectations met? The answer is a wholehearted yes—in more ways than one.

Helping the university to improve its processes and outcome is the purpose of an audit, and especially an audit as a critical friend. The auditor is only there to advise and it is up to the organisation to decide what to do with that advice. To advise optimally, auditors have to step out of their bubble. For instance, I had been used to solid research funding

(although always complaining that it is not enough), but I found that this is usually not the case in the universities I visited. Yet they often succeeded in doing research with their limited funds. The same goes for education. Nevertheless, I found that with my experience I could contribute to improvements by using a critical view and sharing best practices. It was important to discuss these with the other team members in order to find the right words and the right tone in which to give advice.



I observed various and interesting reasons why an IEP evaluation was requested: sometimes the request was made by the government, and sometimes by the universities because they were committed to improving the quality of their education. Of course, this affected the evaluation. On all occasions I observed (slightly) nervous administrators, staff, teachers, researchers and students. Everyone wanted to make a good impression or get a good outcome, and I hope the advice and recommendations helped.

And did I learn from the audits I was involved in? Even more than expected. I learned a lot from the organisations that I visited, how they cope with challenges to provide good education and research, and how open they usually are for advice (although that was not always the case). It struck me that during the pandemic institutions were able to continue their work despite all kinds of struggles. Universities turned out to be very dedicated in their work and inventive with their solutions to problems.

I learned a lot from working in the teams. Most of the time it was a real pleasure and it was good to



see how quickly a team can come together when goals are shared. Even when things don't work out as one wishes, the team is still able to get a good result. Sharing experiences from work and culture enriched me a lot. I missed that when we had to do online reviews during the pandemic.

Then there were the challenges of travelling: I remember standing beside the highway for over an hour on one occasion because the taxi broke down and it took some time before another taxi towed us away. There were missed planes and arrivals past midnight, hours spent at the airport because of delays and still more hours standing in line in the

travel chaos directly after the pandemic. Those are all experiences that have formed me as a person and given me stories to tell.

In the end, the IEP gave me a lot and I thoroughly enjoy being part of the pool. I hope my contribution brings the universities something as well.



## *Personal Experience from Two Decades of Serving the IEP*

### **Jürgen Kohler**

Anecdotal, telegram-style notes arising from memories of an estimated number of some 30 IEP evaluations covering more than 20 years of service as a team chair in almost all European countries, arranged in sequence of the IEP site visit schedule

#### **Ten Memorable Observations**

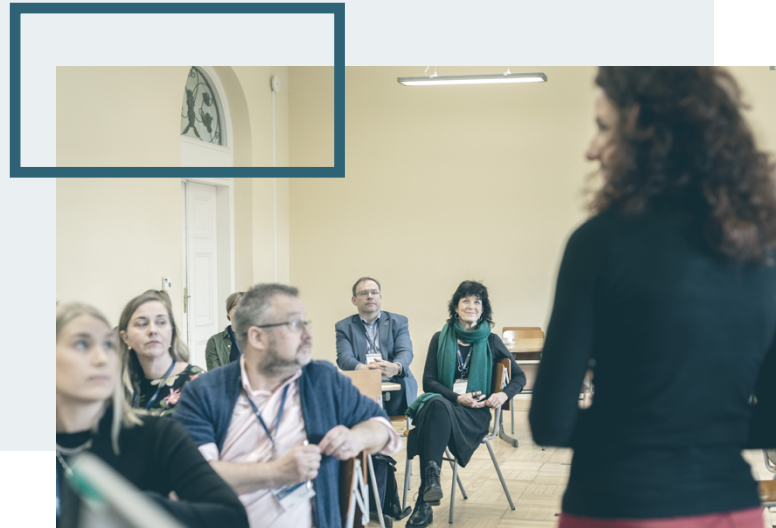
- for a broad smile or for serious concern;
- for the author, with lessons learnt; and
- for readers, perhaps, with lessons to learn.

1. When evaluating a university with a faculty of medicine, the team was invited to visit the gynaecology ward to inspect the diagnosis of a woman awaiting examination on a gyno-chair. The team politely declined the offer.

**Lesson to learn:** Be prepared for facing boundaries of tact and privacy, even though your hosts may see these matters in a more robust manner.

2. A university faculty of veterinary medicine was convinced that the team should be shown a cow being tilted by ninety degrees to lie on its side for easier examination; however, the cow indicated its disapproval of this procedure by emptying its gut.

**Lesson to learn:** Stay detached from the object of scrutiny to maintain good spirits for the sake of unbiased assessment.



3. During a site visit of a university which had just moved into a new building without a pantry, coffee was served by carrying coffee mugs from a cafeteria some three hundred metres away across a busy road and a sand-bowl type parking lot, thus enriching the coffee with a film of dust. The team sipped the coffee gingerly.

**Lesson to learn:** Make sure to show a stiff upper lip under all circumstances, not only when your lips are whitened by a non-dairy product.

4. Several dozens of site visits took place without any of the IEP teams' not-so-young rectors, vice rectors, and team coordinators falling sick, while unfortunately there was more than just one site visit where the student member dropped out due to poor health.

**Lesson to learn:** Comparably low mileage in lifespan is as little a guarantee for sustainability as is the case when purchasing a second-hand car on grounds of its favourable mileage count.



5. Drafting the oral report had to be done in a messy three-by-four-metre, smoke- and oil-filled back office of a filling station owned by the hotel manager's cousin because the hotel chosen by the university was unable to provide any meeting room facilities. The team worked as rapidly as possible.

**Lesson to learn:** Keep up good spirits under all circumstances in order to do more with less.



6. In earlier IEP evaluation rounds, when IEP methodology was less stringent and the teams' routines were less developed, drafting the oral report may occasionally have kept teams busy right into the small hours of the morning. This served neither good team spirit nor optimal report quality.

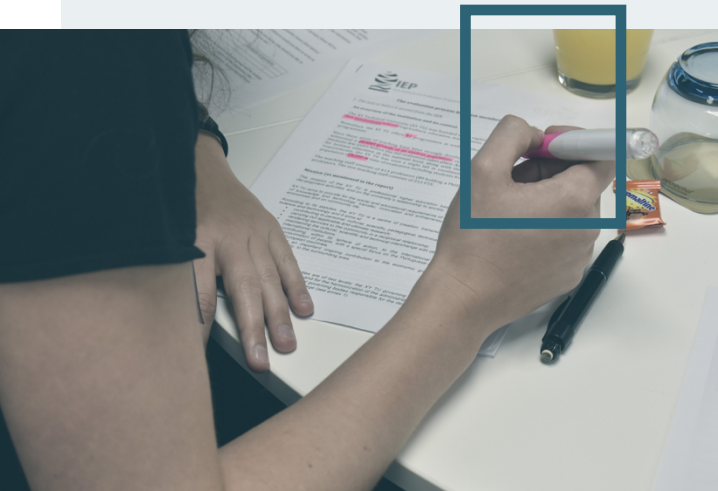
**Lesson to learn:** Providence, alternately the wisdom of IEP management and guidelines for teams, should ensure that teams are endowed with clear methodology, structured thinking, discipline in reasoning, and a chair – or else a team coordinator – carrying a whip.

7. The team had worked long hours to complete the oral feedback report and was looking forward to enjoying a good dinner in the evening as a reward for hard work, only to find that it took the restaurant more than three hours to serve rather mediocre food.

**Lesson to learn:** Even though a sense of disappointment may prevail when dinner is served well beyond midnight, team members should show stamina and be happy to eat humble pie.

8. The university rector, though taking great interest in the team's feedback in private, did not turn up for the oral report given to the university plenary. The team found out that the rector abstained due to his understanding that he was not allowed to attend the public oral report.

**Lesson to learn:** Nothing seems to be self-evident, hence IEP guidelines cannot do without stating even the most obvious.



9. At the end of the evaluation of a university with a faculty for wine cultivation, each team member was offered a bottle of excellent red wine harvested from the university's own vineyards to take home as a gift. Grudging inwardly, the team declined with sincere regret, bearing the IEP code of ethics in mind while stating that this unfortunate rejection was due to the airline security policy not to admit liquids to aircraft cabins.

**Lesson to learn:** Be sure to have a valid excuse at hand when needed, even if it breaks your heart for reasons of severe temptation.

10. The return flight after an evaluation turned out to be a real nightmare due to extremely severe gales which resulted in the aircraft being tossed about in all directions, making a safe landing impossible and resulting in an extra day at the airport of departure.

**Numerous lessons to learn:** You should face the possibility that your trip may take two full days instead of arriving back home on the day of

departure. Additionally: The IEP may provide for some experience you may not wish to ever repeat in your lifetime. Finally: Your survival may be at stake due to your support of the IEP; nonetheless, make sure to keep believing that each and every minute of an IEP evaluation is worth each and every sacrifice!



## Voices from evaluated institutions



The IEP evaluation was useful for our institution because we had the chance to see an outside and objective opinion given by a team of real experts with a great experience in the management of higher education institutions.

**Valahia University of Targoviste, Romania, 2014**

The IEP helped to increase the awareness of all stakeholders at the university about the importance of continuous development of quality culture.

**University of Nova Gorica, Slovenia, 2015**

We value greatly the professionalism of the EUA evaluators and we also appreciate the keen interest of the EUA representatives for following-up on the impact of the evaluation.

**“Iuliu Hațieganu” University of Medicine and Pharmacy Cluj-Napoca, Romania, 2015**

The final recommendations “provide us with the outside lens from which to admit and declare our strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement and enhancement”.

**University College Cork, Republic of Ireland, 2020**

We, at Tomas Bata University have been extremely pleased with the quality of service received from the Institutional Evaluation Programme. The international evaluation team's professional attitude and extraordinary communication ability made the whole evaluation process smooth and rewarding.

**Tomas Bata University in Zlín, Czech Republic, 2020**

This peer-based evaluation and the resulting recommendations will provide a strong basis for future reforming processes. We started implementing some of the recommendations as soon as the experts left and before the final version of the report was handed to us.

**Grigore T. Popa University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Iasi, Romania, 2022**

The IEP team was very well prepared for the evaluation process. (...) they were very friendly, polite and professional.

**Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Georgia, 2022**

To get an independent external feedback from an international panel is really a valuable source of information and gives opportunity to use it as a reference to support internal decision making, to take relevant decisions and to influence internal processes.

**Brno University of Technology, Czech Republic, 2023**

The team was great, very professional, very patient and understanding. They were a pleasure to work with.

**Pan-European University, Slovakia, 2024**



## Congratulations messages



### **From the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA):**

From everyone at ENQA, congratulations to IEP on reaching the impressive milestone of 30 years' contribution to the quality of higher education! This makes IEP one of the oldest quality assurance agencies in Europe. Your profile and approaches are an important part of the rich diversity of the sector.

At ENQA we very much appreciate your active contribution to our work. We wish you all the best for the next 30 years and look forward to our continued cooperation.

### **From the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR):**

Heartfelt congratulations to IEP for your 30th anniversary! IEP was admitted to the Register in 2009, which means that IEP has been an EQAR-registered agency since 15 years. Double celebration are thus in order! Keep up the good work!

### **From the European Students' Union (ESU):**

The Steering Committee of ESU QA Student Experts' Pool congratulates the EUA's Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) on reaching its 30th anniversary!

Over the past three decades, the IEP has played a pivotal role in supporting the development of higher education institutions across Europe through quality enhancement. Your commitment to fostering improvement through peer review and constructive feedback has made a lasting impact on the academic community!

This milestone is a testament to the hard work and dedication of all IEP expert pool members, employees and evaluated institutions. Grateful for our strong cooperation, we look forward to the continued success and positive influence of the IEP in the years to come!



**IEP** INSTITUTIONAL  
EVALUATION  
PROGRAMME

**Supporting institutions in  
developing their strategic  
leadership and capacity  
to manage change**

**440**

evaluations  
since 1994

**50**

countries  
worldwide

Listed in EQAR

**eqar**

Consistent with institutional autonomy, the mission of the Institutional Evaluation Programme (IEP) 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 programme was launched in 1994 with the aim of supporting institutions in fulfilling their responsibility for assessing and improving the quality of their own activities. With experience gained from over 450 evaluations carried out over two decades, we continue to offer evaluations based on the founding principles of the programme.

**in**

[www.iep-qaa.org](http://www.iep-qaa.org)  
[info@iep-qaa.org](mailto:info@iep-qaa.org)

Listed in EQAR

**eqar** ///

Member of ENQA

**enqa**.