Case Study

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

International Institute for Educational Planning

Developing a Quality Culture through Internal Quality Assurance

Vienna University of Economics and Business, Austria

Oliver Vettori, Karl Ledermüller, Christoph Schwarzl, Julia Höcher, and Julia Zeeh

Austria

New trends in higher education

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Abbreviations

AACSB	Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business
AMBA	Association of MBAs
AoL	assurance of learning process
AQ Austria	Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation
CEMS	Community of European Management Schools and International Companies
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
EEA	European Economic Area
EFMD	European Foundation of Management
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register
EQUIS	European Quality Improvement System
ESG	European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
EU	European Union
EUA	European University Association
IQA	internal quality assurance
MBA	master of business administration
NGO	non-governmental organisation
PIM	Partnership in International Management
PQM	Programme and Quality Management Department
QA	quality assurance
QS-HRG	Quality Assurance Act (*Qualitätssicherungsrahmengesetz*)
WU	Vienna University of Economics and Business (*Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien*)

Introduction

The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) was established in 2010 as part of the Bologna process to increase the global competitiveness of higher education in Europe and promote the employability of its students. The main achievements of the initiative include the adoption of a common framework of easily readable and comparable degrees (at bachelor's, master's and doctoral level), the launch of the Diploma Supplement, and the implementation of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). In order to facilitate the mobility of students and the mutual recognition of qualifications, European cooperation in the area of quality assurance became a central element of the Bologna process in 2005 as. As a consequence, all European countries, including Austria, were required to engage in quality assurance, both nationally and at institutional level.

The Vienna University of Economics and Business (WU) was established as a public university in 1975. It is currently Austria's fourth largest university, with 23,000 students as of 2014. WU offers two bachelor's degrees, 23 master's degrees, and five doctoral programmes in various disciplines, including business and management, economics, social science, business law, formal sciences, and foreign languages. As WU gained greater autonomy from the Austrian Ministry for Education, Science, and Culture, it began the major reform of its governance and management structure, as well as the development of an internal quality assurance (IQA) system.

The university was one of the first Austrian universities to introduce an IQA system after gaining autonomous status in 2004. The university uses a range of instruments to meet its quality-related development goals, mainly in the areas of teaching and research. The use of the various tools and processes is supported by the Programme and Quality Management (PQM) department, which is centrally responsible for most of teaching and curriculum administration. An important feature of WU's quality assurance system is its grounding in both evidence from data and internal dialogue about quality. Its IQA system aims to create a quality culture and ensure communication and organizational learning through various feedback loops. It is based on quality analysis, quality dialogue, and quality development, with quality dialogue central to the process.

This study has been developed in the context of an international research project exploring 'innovative and effective methods of internal quality assurance in higher education' and their effects on teaching and learning, employability, and management, led by the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP). The project aims to provide evidence-based policy advice to national and institutional higher education leaders on innovative and effective solutions for IQA systems in universities. The purpose of this case study is to describe the IQA system at WU and explore staff perceptions as to the relevance and effectiveness of its IQA tools. The effects of IQA on teaching and learning, graduate employability, and management are investigated, and the factors which condition the success or otherwise of WU's IQA system are discussed. Finally, the study surveys stakeholder perceptions as to the overall effectiveness of IQA at the university.

A multi-stakeholder approach was adopted to meet the aims of the study. Considering the relative nature of quality in higher education, as well as the tension between different stakeholders in quality assurance (Vettori, 2015), approaching the issue by contrasting different viewpoints on different facets of the system fitted the purpose of the study. The stakeholders included faculty members, administrative staff, students, and personnel in academic and administrative leadership positions. Academic and administrative staff perspectives were explored in two online survey questionnaires, while semi-structured interviews were conducted with various managers, together with two focus group discussions with students. Official documents and literature on Austrian higher education

and WU were analysed to describe the national and institutional context of the IQA system at WU.

This publication begins by outlining WU's external environment, particularly the highly influential Bologna Process, but also the international quality business education networks in which WU participates. It also provides an overview of the Austrian higher education system, with a focus on the legal conditions for internal and external quality assurance. The next chapter describes WU's history, current strategic orientation, and organizational structure, with a focus on the key structures, roles, and responsibilities pertaining to internal quality assurance. The following chapters describe some of the instruments and processes that form the current procedural cornerstones of the system, before expanding on the main findings of the study. After a brief explanation of the study's methodology, the results are presented in relation to the instruments and processes described previously. The findings are then integrated to allow an assessment of the IQA system's impact on managerial effectiveness, teaching and learning, and graduate employability, which are all at the centre of IIEP's comparative study. The final two chapters synthesize the findings with regard to the system's success factors and its developmental options.

1. The external environment of Vienna University of Economics and Business (WU)

This chapter describes the development of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), driven by the Bologna Process. This process has resulted in changes in the Austrian higher education system over the past 15 years, as well as in WU's links to the global business school community.

1.1 An overview of the European context with a focus on quality assurance

The Bologna Process, which began in 1999 with the signing of the Bologna Declaration, played a central role in the development of a European Higher Education Area, formally launched in 2010. Since 1999, European governments involved in the process have committed themselves to improving the competitiveness of higher education in Europe, as well as the employability and mobility of students in the area. The 2005 Bergen Communiqué highlighted the importance of quality to the higher education agenda, prompting the development and adoption of European standards and guidelines for quality assurance (ESG) by countries in the emerging European Higher Education Area.

The Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)

The Bologna Process is a commitment by European governments 'to pursue complementary higher education reforms in order to establish a "European Higher Education Area" of compatible national systems' (Keeling, 2006): a common European framework for higher education as it was set out in 1999, leading to the adoption of the European Higher Education Area (Kasparovsky and Wadsack-Köchl, 2015). In the beginning, the main goal of the Bologna Process was to strengthen the attractiveness and the competitiveness of higher education in Europe. It also aimed to foster student employability and mobility within the area.

As the process developed, meetings between European education ministers resulted in the agenda and its core concepts being extended and specified. One key achievement was the introduction of a three-cycle system (comprising bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees) across all participating countries, creating a shared framework of degrees and leading to clearly defined qualification frameworks for the different cycles. Recognition of qualifications and prior learning became central to higher education policies in Europe, linked to support for student-centred learning, an outcomes orientation in higher education, and the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). The concept of a *social dimension* was introduced to the process in 2001, through the implementation of measures to increase the participation of under-represented groups as well as flexible education pathways ('lifelong learning') (EHEA, 2015).

Quality assurance (QA) and quality enhancement were important aspects from the beginning of the Bologna Process, recognized as critical to the achievement of its goals (EHEA, 2015). Framed as 'quality reform' at national levels (EUA, 2007), the process has been increasingly directing attention to issues such as student engagement in quality assurance processes, feedback mechanisms for teaching and learning, and staff awareness of quality enhancement processes (Gvaramazde, 2008). It is interesting to note, though, that it was not until the Berlin Communiqué, adopted by the ministerial

conference of the Bologna Process in 2003, that quality was regarded as being 'at the heart of a European Higher Education area'. Two years later, the Bergen Communiqué (2005) explicitly urged universities to enhance the quality of their educational activities through systematic internal mechanisms, linking them to external quality assurance. This resulted in considerable emphasis being placed on the development of institutional quality assurance systems between 2005 and 2010 (Loukkola and Zhang, 2010).

In 2009, the Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué (Leuven Communiqué, 2009) set out the priorities for the period up to 2020. These include:

- the social dimension: equitable access and completion;
- lifelong learning;
- employability;
- student-centred learning and the teaching mission of higher education;
- education, research, and innovation;
- international openness;
- mobility;
- data collection;
- multi-dimensional transparency tools;
- funding.

The Bologna Process goes beyond the borders of the European Union (EU). Almost 50 countries were members of the EHEA in 2015. The process is not based on a binding contract but on a voluntary harmonization process agreed upon by governments and stakeholders. Hence, the national implementation of the Bologna Process can vary between countries and each country has its own higher education system. Progress on the implementation of the common framework is regularly assessed and national reports are published every two to three years (EHEA, 2015).

The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)

Taking into account the diversity of political and higher education systems, educational and socio-cultural traditions, languages, and expectations within the EHEA, a one-size-fits-all approach with regard to quality was thought inappropriate. The *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG) reflect this approach (ESG, 2015). These standards and guidelines are not a concrete set of standards concerning quality and processes for quality assurance but rather a framework of politically agreed principles of good practice to provide guidance for higher education institutions, as well as for quality assurance agencies.

> A key goal of the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG) is to contribute to the common understanding of quality assurance for learning and teaching across borders and among all stakeholders. [...] Engagement with quality assurance processes, particularly the external ones, allows European higher education systems to demonstrate quality and increase transparency, thus helping to build mutual trust and better recognition of their qualifications, programmes and other provision. (ESG, 2015: 4)

The ESG's understanding of quality is also not clearly defined. The meaning of quality depends on the respective perspective on higher education and varies between different stakeholders. Quality, therefore, is understood to be 'mainly a result of the interaction between teachers, students and the institutional learning environment' (ESG, 2015: 5). Given this notion of quality, it is clear that stakeholders play an important role in the ESG.

In a similar vein, quality assurance is defined not by specific methods and instruments but by its purposes: accountability and enhancement. These two are considered interrelated

and can support the development of a quality culture among students, academic staff, and management. A quality culture means that all these stakeholders consider themselves responsible for quality and participate in quality assurance in all parts of the institution (ESG, 2015).

The ESG takes into account the priorities of the European Higher Education Area, especially with regard to teaching and learning, innovation, and research. It provides guidance and standards for internal quality assurance, external quality assurance, and the evaluation of quality assurance agencies. It is especially relevant to the last of these as the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) assesses quality assurance agencies against criteria provided by the ESG. Only when external review adjudges an agency and its activities to comply with these criteria is it included in the register.

1.2 An overview of the Austrian higher education system with a focus on quality assurance

Public universities have long been the dominant player in the Austrian higher education system. The higher education sector has been expanding in Austria thanks to legislation permitting the growth of universities of applied sciences (known as *Fachhochschulen*) and the growing demand for different types of institutions, such as private universities and university colleges for teacher education, resulting from the Bologna Process. With the introduction of the University Act 2002, institutions were granted full autonomy in quality assurance and management. While Austrian public universities created the Network for Quality Management and Quality Development in 2007, other types of institution maintained their quality through external quality assurance (evaluation, accreditation, certification, and/or audit). In 2012, the new Quality Assurance Act (QS-HRG) formalized the quality assurance processes of Austrian public universities through the establishment of the Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation (AQ Austria) and the introduction of institutional quality audits and accreditation.

A system with four sectors

The Austrian higher education system is diverse and includes public universities, universities of applied sciences, private universities, and university colleges for teacher education. Structurally (i.e. in terms of student numbers, staff, budget, and reputation), the public universities are by far the most important group. Overall, almost 300,000 students are enrolled across the 22 public universities. These universities offer 330 bachelor's programmes and 546 master's programmes, as well as 108 doctoral programmes (BMWFW, 2014). In addition to their research function, the public universities also serve as institutions of scientific pre-professional education, equipping graduates with the knowledge and skills necessary to adapt to the requirements of a wide variety of professionals. The Vienna University of Economics and Business (WU), for instance, is the only university in Austria that specializes in business and economics.

In 1993, a legal basis was provided for the establishment of universities of applied science. This was part of an international shift towards a more diverse, job-oriented higher education sector. A total of 43,593 students attend these institutions, making them the second-largest grouping within the Austrian tertiary education system (BMWFW, 2014). This part of the sector now includes 21 institutions and around 400 study programmes in the fields of art, design, engineering, social science, economics, the military, and safety, as well as the natural and health sciences. Universities of applied sciences and their degree programmes must be accredited. However, any provider organization can apply for such accreditation (Kasparovsky and Wadsack-Köchl, 2015: 12). These universities are, for the most part, publicly funded for around 90 per cent of the costs of a study place, with further costs covered by providers.

Private universities, on the other hand, are privately financed higher education institutions. A total of 12 private universities, with 8,086 enrolled students, have been established in Austria since 1999 (BMWFW, 2014). These institutions are officially recognized by the Austrian government (though need to be formally accredited first). They have no particular shape, and range from branches of international higher education enterprises to smaller local universities focused on diverse subjects.

Driven by the requirement to organize teacher education according to Bologna standards, 17 former pedagogical academies were re-established as university colleges for teacher education in 2005. A new legal framework made them an official part of the Austrian higher education system. Currently, 14,917 students are enrolled in such programmes (BMWFW, 2014). Prospective teachers for primary schools, lower secondary schools, special schools, pre-vocational schools, and vocational schools are required to attend a university college for teacher education to study for a bachelor of education degree, which qualifies them to teach at a particular school or institution.

Some key characteristics of the public universities system

In Austria, the general admission requirement for higher education is a school-leaving certificate (*Matura*) from a higher secondary school. Prospective students without the appropriate school-leaving qualification must pass a university entrance exam instead, and their admission is then restricted to a specific field of study. The overall system is, however, characterized by an open access policy which allows students to choose their studies freely.

For each programme at a university, a curriculum must be created and published. It must contain the qualification profile for the subject and set out the structure of the degree programme, the examination subjects, and the workload necessary to complete the programme. While most degree programmes are not subject to any kind of entry restriction, access is restricted to some fields of study, such as medicine, architecture and urban planning, biology, molecular biology, bio-chemistry, food and nutrition sciences, information technology, pharmaceutics, psychology, journalism, business and economics, dentistry, and veterinary medicine. In these cases, universities can decide on the basis of the number of applicants whether an entrance exam is appropriate. Restrictions to most of the subjects listed above have, however, been recently introduced, and it remains unclear whether they will remain, given that the largest government party opposes them vehemently.

The most common form of higher study programme in Austria is a six to eight semester bachelor's programme (180 to 240 ECTS), which is a prerequisite for enrolling on a master's programme (usually four semesters, 60 to 120 ECTS, depending on the number of terms). Upon successful completion of these study programmes, students are awarded a bachelor's or master's degree. Doctoral studies can be pursued on successful completion of a master's degree. They usually take between six and eight semesters to complete.

Since summer term 2013, students from Austria (as well as students from any other EU country studying in Austria) have only had to pay the €363.36 tuition fee if they exceed the legally stipulated maximum duration of their studies by at least two semesters. Non-EU and non-European Economic Area (EEA) students have to pay tuition fees regardless of the duration of their studies. Every enrolled student has to pay the student union fee. Austrian citizens have a right to receive financial support if they meet a predefined set of criteria. Around 75 per cent of all students are in gainful employment during their studies.

Quality assurance in Austrian higher education

Even though some basic elements of performance monitoring and reporting had been included in the Universities Act 1975, it was only with the University Organization Act

1993 that evaluation became a visible part of the Austrian university system. For a long time, evaluations were largely equated with student satisfaction surveys at the end of a teaching sequence (Stifter, 2002). Consequently, formalized internal quality assurance procedures remained practically non-existent, well into the 1990s (Vettori, 2012).

The introduction of the universities of applied sciences in 1993 and the growth of private universities after the basis for their legal constitution was provided in 1999 were important drivers of change (Konrad and Fiorioli, 2007; Pechar and Klepp, 2004). For the first time, higher education institutions and programmes had to be formally accredited. The disparity between Austria's considerable investment in its education system and the system's lack of effectiveness, as well as the well-accepted relationship between free access to public higher education and the comparably high dropout rate and poor academic performance (OECD, 2010), further highlighted the importance of developing quality assurance mechanisms within individual higher education institutions.

For public universities, the biggest change came with the Universities Act 2002. All Austrian public universities were granted full institutional autonomy regarding the establishment and development of their institutional quality management systems. The cornerstones of the reform can be summarized as follows:

- the establishment of the rector´s council as the main executive body managing the daily business of the university;
- the establishment of a university board composed of external members;
- the confirmation of the senate as the major body of shared governance;
- the introduction of a lump sum budget for all universities, including funding for research by the Federal Ministry of Science, Research, and Economics;
- additional funding based on triennial performance contracts;
- full autonomy to hire academic and administrative staff;
- full autonomy to create new academic programmes;
- the mandate to develop an institutional IQA system.

In essence, all of this meant that the specific design of a quality management system, the choice of quality management instruments and procedures, the definition of the competences of the internal quality assurance units, and decisions as to which processes should be implemented at what organizational level were left to the universities (Hanft and Kohler, 2007).

The new act not only introduced a different governmental model, including a strengthening of university management and a strong tendency towards (intra-institutional) centralization of management authority, but also required universities to develop a comprehensive institutional quality management system. The Universities Act can thus be seen to be responding to the ESG recommendations, which stipulate that the main responsibility regarding quality assurance and continuous evaluation lies with the universities themselves, emphasizing their institutional autonomy.

The universities dealt with their respective autonomy in different ways. However, most of them sought some kind of external quality assurance as part of their own institutional strategy. Raggautz (2009) shows that at least 17 of the 22 public universities had already been engaged in some form of external quality assurance (evaluation, accreditation, certification, and/or audit) between 2004 and 2009. Interestingly, though, neither the law nor the Ministry for Research and Higher Education defined what a system of external quality assurance for public universities should look like, with such systems still confined to private universities and the universities of applied science (Vettori, 2012).

As the ministry declined to impose common standards (other than the European Standards and Guidelines) on public universities, the institutions started a professionalization process of their own and established the Network for Quality Management and Quality

Development of the Austrian universities in 2007. The network currently consists of around 80 members from all Austrian public universities. WU was one of the two founding partners and, to this day, remains the coordinating institution. The network's main objective is to support and enhance the informal exchange of good practice and ideas between practitioners. It provides members with a platform to share knowledge and ideas and enables them to discuss shared issues and values as well as to implement inter-university projects. Membership registration is open to both experts and practitioners dealing with quality management issues at Austrian public universities (Vettori, 2012). Since 2014, the network has organized an annual international conference for discussion of current topics in the field of quality management and development in the higher education area.

Complementary preparations for a new law on quality assurance in higher education and the establishment of a new 'supra-agency' for quality assurance and accreditation across all sectors of tertiary education began in 2009. The Quality Assurance Act (QS-HRG) was passed by parliament in June 2011 and came into force in March 2012. The new law established the Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation (AQ Austria) and outlined rules for its internal structure, funding, and business areas. The QS-HRG further requires public universities to conduct obligatory institutional quality audits. These audits are intended to review the status of institutional quality management, with universities allowed to choose any agency in the European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies. Mitterauer (2013) argues that this marks the final shift from an internal assessment of institutional performance to an external examination. By 2015, the majority of Austrian universities had either already successfully passed the audit or at least begun the necessary formal steps to be audited over the next few years.

WU, for example, has achieved three major business school accreditations: EQUIS, AMBA, and AACSB. EQUIS (European Quality Improvement System accreditation, awarded by the European Foundation of Management) and AACSB (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business) are accreditations at institutional level, while AMBA (Association of MBAs) accredits individual programmes of executive education. EQUIS and AACSB concern all areas of an institution, including strategy and governance, resource management, quality and development of academic staff, research and teaching, and learning. These accreditations also include assessment criteria which focus on contemporary societal issues, such as sustainability, ethics and responsibility, and widening participation.

These accreditations have resulted in several developments regarding governance and organizational structure, as well as in roles and responsibilities within WU. The assurance of the learning process was developed as a result of AACSB, and the role of 'programme directors' in the organizational structure was introduced by preparations for EQUIS. In addition, some instruments (such as those used in the assurance of the learning process) were shaped by the standards of the respective accreditations. The accreditations thus have promoted dialogue about quality assurance within the institution, further facilitating the development of WU's IQA system.

2. The institutional environment of WU

This chapter describes the institutional environment of the University of Economics and Business in Vienna, its strategic orientation, and its governance and organizational structure, based on a wide range of internal documents. The strategic orientation is discussed in the context of the institutional effort to promote employability. The WU's governance and organizational structure demonstrates that quality management is an integrated part of WU's actual management processes. This section therefore provides the contextual background within which WU's IQA system operates.

2.1 Short history and institutional context

WU was founded as the 'Imperial Export Academy' in 1898, with a specific focus on preparing students for a career in international trade. The academy became the University of World Trade in 1919. Later, the university was restructured, becoming the Vienna University of Economics and Business in 1975. WU has since become the Austria's fourth largest university and the largest university focused on economics and business in the European Higher Education Area.

From the 1990s onwards, the institutional environment of WU changed continuously. On the one hand, the number of students increased rapidly, from roughly 8,000 in 1981 to more than 16,000 in 1993 and 23,000 students in 2014. On the other, as mentioned above, WU gained more and more autonomy from the Austrian Ministry for Education, Science, and Culture. This led to major changes to WU's governance system and management structure as well as the establishment of an internal quality assurance system. Furthermore, the structure of academic programmes was changed fundamentally as the three-cycle system (bachelor's, master's, and doctoral programmes), promoted by the Bologna Process, was more widely introduced. WU now offers two bachelor's programmes, 15 pre-experience master's programmes, and eight post-experience master's programmes, as well as five doctoral programmes. Of these, 11 master's programmes and two doctoral programmes are offered in English.

WU comprises 11 academic departments in areas such as business and management, economics, social science, business law, formal science, and foreign languages. In addition to these academic departments, there are 15 research institutes, three competence centres, and the WU Executive Academy.

As noted above, the number of students at WU has increased rapidly, from 8,000 in 1981 to 23,000 in 2014. WU puts a strong emphasis on internationalization and around 27 per cent of its students are international (WU, 2015*a*). Furthermore, around 36 per cent of all graduates for the academic year 2013/2014 had gained international experience through exchange semesters at one of WU's partner universities (WU, 2015*c*).

Teaching and research are undertaken by around 750 academic staff. In 2014, they produced around 1,100 works for publication (WU, 2015*c*). Students and academic staff are supported by around 560 administrative staff members (WU, 2015*c*).

WU has long been an active member of various international networks of business schools. For more than a decade, it has belonged to a number of European and global networks, such as PIM (Partnership in International Management) and CEMS (Community of European Management Schools and International Companies). PIM comprises more than 60 internationally leading business schools and supports the exchange of students between them. More than 80 per cent of members are partner universities of WU. CEMS is another important international network. Its activities range from research initiatives and events to study programmes and PhD courses. In addition to its membership in different

international networks, WU has strong links to the national business community through private foundations, endowments, sponsorships, and collaborations.

In 2007, WU received its first international accreditation, from EQUIS through the European Foundation of Management (EFMD). This was followed by initial AMBA accreditation in 2010. In 2013, AACSB accreditation proceedings began, with WU gaining accreditation in 2015.

2.2 Strategic orientation

The strategic mission and orientation of WU are aligned with its legal obligations, as stated in the Universities Act 2002. The mission of WU is hence to 'contribute to the personal development of the individual, and to the welfare of society and the environment' (UG, 2002: §1). WU's mission statement sets out the values and ideas which underpin its activities:

- WU is a public university offering excellent research and research-led teaching. As an academic community of students and academic staff, WU aims for education and individual autonomy through science and research, following the idea of a knowledge society.
- WU contributes to sustainable thinking as well as responsible business practice, thereby solving economic, social, and ecological problems.
- WU is grounded in a strong belief in academic freedom, especially regarding the plurality of methods and issues. All actions are guided by academic integrity, justice, and equality, as well as by diversity and open-mindedness (WU, 2014).

This mission is the foundation of WU's strategic aims, which support disciplinary variety in teaching and research, internationalization, and employability (understood as the ability of students and graduates to contribute to the economy as well as to the development of society at large).

In previous years, teaching, research, and internationalization have been major areas of development. Quality enhancement of bachelor degree programmes has been the main focus of teaching development. Achievements include the reduction of class sizes, the introduction of new area managers, and the development of the assurance of learning process. Regarding research, the improvement of the working environment has been central and one main outcome has been the establishment of research contracts, which allow extra sabbaticals for successful researchers. In the area of internationalization, the focus has been on recruiting international academic staff and introducing English-taught master's degree programmes and double-degree programmes (where students work for degrees at two different institutions in parallel), as well as attracting internationally competitive research grants. For the development of WU's profile, a new area of engagement was added: global transformation and sustainability. This has led to the establishment of a master's programme in this field as well as to two chaired professorships and the Competence Centre for Sustainability. WU is also an active member of several sustainability networks, such as 50+20 (Management Education for the World).

The university's missions have been woven into its strategic plan for the period from 2016 to 2018, and the following areas for development have been defined (WU, 2014):

- Further improvements to the quality of teaching, especially in bachelor programmes, through measures which lead to a reduction of class sizes in the first year or other activities in order to further improve the student-academic staff ratio and support students.
- Overall improvement of the conditions for conducting research, particularly through the creation of more opportunities for excellent research, for example by

reducing the teaching load for excellent researchers and through supporting young scientists.
- Support for those research areas in which WU's activity is considered excellent by international standards and for those areas with a high potential to achieve the same standards.
- Support for PhD programmes, particularly in cooperation with other universities or excellent research institutions.
- Further development of initiatives in the field of 'global transformations and sustainability' as part of WU's sustainability efforts.
- Implementation of an impact orientation regarding the university's responsibility for societal issues and the development of conditions that support academic staff to take this responsibility.
- Development of studying opportunities for part-time students (e.g. for working students). Up to now, almost all programmes have been designed for full-time students.

The strategic plan comprises the main strategy and policy documents which drive the IQA system at WU.

2.3 WU's focus on employability

WU has a tradition of cooperating with business partners, whether through networks, cooperation in research and teaching, or sponsoring. The strong dialogue with employers is the foundation for WU's engagement with employability. Through formal (e.g. surveys and programme evaluations) and informal (e.g. events and individual relationships) discussions, WU receives feedback on its activities, especially regarding students and graduates.

While its study programmes are research-led (fulfilling the mission of Austrian universities), WU is also committed to preparing its students for a career after graduation, whether in an academic institution or the labour market. The demands of the labour market, including specific professional standards and knowledge, are, for the most part, reflected in the development of study programmes, using a comprehensive reporting system based on the instruments for curriculum development described below. Consequently, students acquire both subject-related skills and social and personal competences.

Alongside WU's quality culture strategy (described in *Section 4*), the strategic plan comprises the main strategy and policy documents which drive the university's IQA system.

2.4 Governance and organizational structure

WU's standard management processes are interlinked with quality assurance processes and embedded in routine activities, in accordance with the idea of a quality culture (see below for a detailed description). Hence, quality assurance plays a role in many of the responsibilities and tasks described in this section.

The three main governing bodies of WU are the university board, the rector's council, and the senate, which set the framework for WU's quality management by defining strategic aims and areas for development. The university board is WU's supervisory body and consists of five members. Its main responsibilities include the appointment of members of the rector's council, as well as approval of the budget, the strategic development plan, the organization plan, and the draft three-year performance contract between WU and the Federal Ministry of Science, Research, and Economy. Additionally, the board signs goal agreements with the members of the rector's council.

The rector's council consists of five members and is WU's main executive body. It decides on strategic issues, such as the organizational structure, the strategic development plan, and performance agreements with the Federal Ministry of Science, Research, and Economy, as well as with WU's academic units. The council is also responsible for WU's financial management and resource allocation, personnel issues, and accountability (e.g. financial statements). With regard to quality assurance, the council coordinates the respective activities in the different areas (e.g. research, teaching, or staff) in line with WU's quality assurance goals. In this respect, responsibility for institution-wide quality assurance activities, such as accreditation, lies with the rector.

The senate is the major driver of shared governance and consists of 26 members representing different interest groups at WU: full professors (13 members), associate professors, assistant professors and teaching and research assistants (six members), students (six members), and administrative staff (one member). The senate's responsibilities include issuing and amending WU's rules and regulations (following the suggestions of the rector's council), approval of the strategic development plan, the organization plan, curricula, and, where applicable, decrees on the selection process. It is also involved in senior academic staff recruitment and preparation processes. The senate has set up different sub-committees, some of which have decision-making powers and some of which have an advisory purpose. The committee for academic programmes, for example, is responsible for decisions on curricula and their evaluation, while the evaluation committee assesses whether evaluation activities at WU are conducted in accordance with the regulations.

Department heads and quality promoters play an important role in supporting the academic structure of WU. The responsibilities of department heads include the negotiation of goal agreements with the rector's council and members of the respective departments in the areas of teaching and research. Other responsibilities include the allocation of staff and financial and material resources within the department. Department heads are, therefore, strongly involved in strategic and operational decisions concerning investment and development in teaching and research. All department heads are members of the council of department heads, which meets regularly and is chaired by the rector. These meetings have an advisory and coordination purpose for general matters which are of interest to all departments. Furthermore, the council decides on fundamental issues concerning teaching, staff, and resource management (WU, 2015*b*). The department heads are supported by quality promoters in their efforts to enhance teaching quality within their departments. Quality promoters – established academic staff from the respective departments who take up this role in addition to their day-to-day responsibilities – support dialogue about quality between members of the department and foster activities to develop programmes and courses.

The academic structure is supported by central administration units under WU's Department for Programme and Quality Management (PQM). The department is centrally responsible for almost all teaching and curriculum administration. Its activities include the management of data relating to teaching and learning resources and the results of evaluations and studies undertaken for WU's governing bodies and academic units, the support of innovation in teaching and learning, and the distribution of teaching and learning resources, including human resources. Despite this, WU's programme management remains based on a notion of shared responsibilities between different organizational units, both centralized and decentralized.

The director for PQM is the head of the department and reports to the vice-rector in charge of academic programmes and student affairs. The PQM department is organized in four line units and one staff unit. The academic control unit is responsible for managing system-generated performance data as well as capacity and resource calculations. The evaluation and quality enhancement unit is mainly responsible for managing data that

are not system-generated, i.e. data which are collected through evaluations, surveys, feedback instruments, and so on. The teaching coordination unit is mainly responsible for ensuring the viability and efficacy of processes regarding teaching administration as well as the effective use of available resources. The teaching and learning services unit supports teachers and students in making optimal use of the available infrastructure, such as WU's e-learning platform or the teaching and learning technology available on campus. Learn@WU, which is managed by the unit, is among the most used e-learning platforms worldwide. Furthermore, the unit is responsible for encouraging further development of teaching and learning at WU. The strategic projects staff unit liaises with programme managers, supervises the allocation of resources, prepares processes for accreditation, and is responsible for further development in the fields of teaching and learning.

These service units support students and academic staff in the areas of teaching, research, and continuing education. The PQM department acts as an interface between centralized, decentralized, and external quality management issues. Consequently, its main areas of responsibility concern the implementation and coordination of quality assurance and enhancement activities.

Quality assurance within the governance and organizational structure

As mentioned above, quality management is considered not as a distinct process but as an integral part of university management. This is reflected particularly in the strong link between quality and programme management at WU. Improving academic programmes is the key aim of the university's quality assurance activities.

WU has established clear processes of shared governance for curriculum design, development, and management, as well as for quality assurance. While the senate and its sub-committee for academic programmes are responsible for decisions on curricula and their evaluation, the rector's council is responsible for the operational management of the programmes and their development, especially with regard to the overall programme portfolio and its coherence.

Within this framework, the programme directors play a major role as they support the rector's council and are responsible for their respective programmes above the level of individual academic units. This includes responsibility for programme structure and content, as well as administration. Programme directors and university departments design individual programmes, determining their profile, target group, qualification profile, content, and didactic approaches. Curriculum development happens through close cooperation between programme directors and university management and includes periodic feedback from students as well as corporate representatives.

The decentralized programme units and central administration share responsibilities for day-to-day programme management. Every academic programme director is supported by an administrative programme coordinator. They are in regular contact with the Vice-Rector for Academic Programmes and Student Affairs and the Programme and Quality Management Department. Various monitoring processes support programme management in identifying problems and areas for development, e.g. regular data on admission numbers, student performance, retention, and satisfaction, as well as the jobs market integration of graduates. All these processes and instruments are integral parts of WU's IQA system, which is described in detail in the following chapter.

3. The IQA system and its key dimensions and elements

The Universities Act 2002 required universities to develop their institutional quality management systems but gave them significant freedom in how they approached this task. WU made the most of this leeway, becoming one of the first Austrian universities to successfully introduce an institutional system after gaining autonomous status in 2004.

WU's quality assurance framework is based on the 'quality culture' concept developed by the European University Association (EUA) (from 2003 to 2005 WU acted as network coordinator for round II of EUA's Quality Culture project), and focuses on aspects such as communication and organizational learning through various feedback loops. Quality at WU is thought of as a value that must be supported by the whole institutional community and nurtured on many levels and by various means. The strategy has been developed on a continuous basis, reflecting the dynamic nature of internal and external change affecting WU.

The system has secured relatively high levels of support from internal and external stakeholders. In 2007, the effectiveness of the university's QA system was one of the key factors in WU becoming the first Austrian university to receive the international EQUIS accreditation seal. In 2008, the system was recognized as best practice by the Association of Austrian University Professors. The system also features frequently in various international publications.

Overall, WU's quality management system focuses on five different dimensions: learning effectiveness, teaching effectiveness, efficiency and resource adequacy, responsiveness to academic and corporate needs, and alignment with external requirements (see *Figure 3.1*). Each of the five dimensions corresponds to various instruments and activities used by WU to ensure and enhance the quality of its education. These instruments and activities can be organized into three broad processes: quality analysis, quality development, and quality dialogue.

3.1 IQA processes

WU's IQA system largely focuses on communication between actors at all levels. This is demonstrated in each of the three key IQA processes: quality analysis, quality dialogue, and quality development.

Quality analysis

WU's Department of Programme and Quality Management (PQM) has developed a portfolio of analytical instruments that cover all of the above-mentioned dimensions and are intended to ensure maximum use of the data. Reporting of the data is therefore considered a key element of each analytical tool. The most regularly used analytical tools and methods at WU, the findings of which feed into annual programme reports as well as more specific reports, include programme evaluations, course evaluations, learning analytics, workload analyses, study progress analyses, assessment analytics, and initiatives such as WU's student panel monitoring (where each student cohort of each programme is surveyed at the beginning, during, and after their studies) and its labour market tracking (where graduates' labour market performance is monitored through their social security data).

Figure 3.1 Main quality dimensions of WU's quality management system

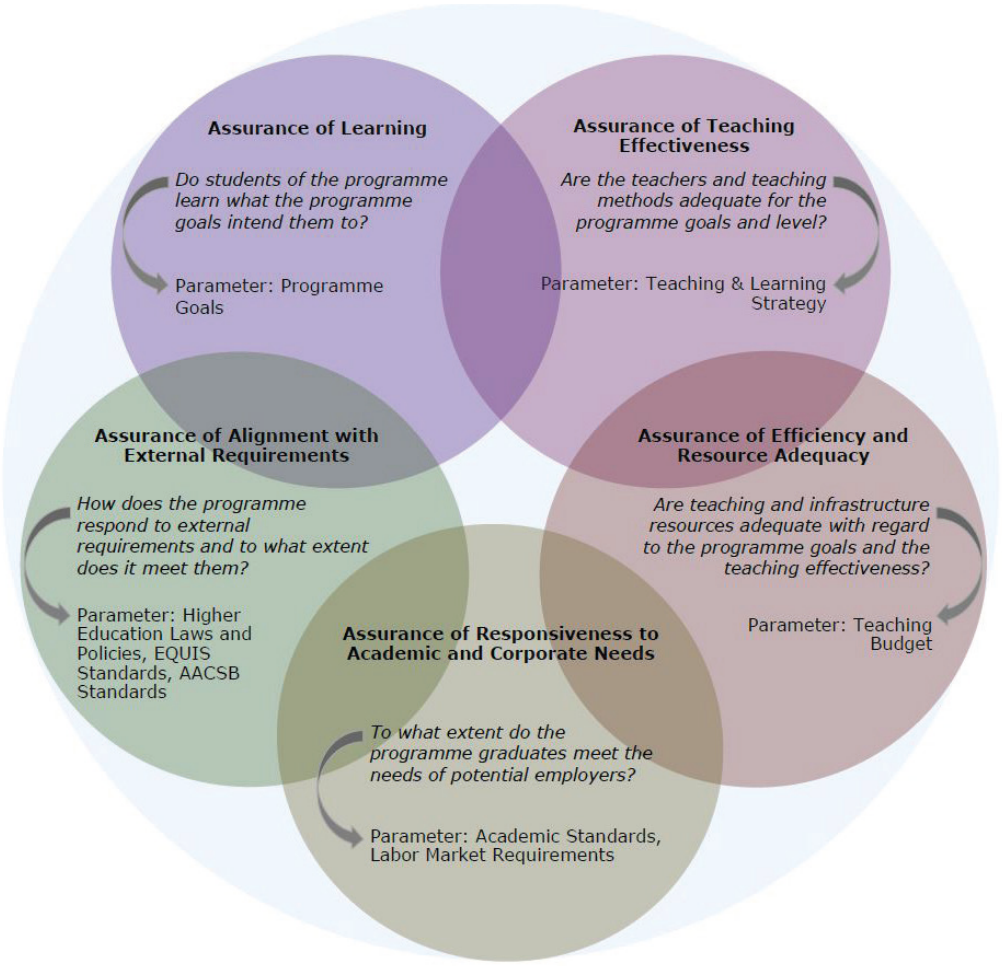


Figure 3.2 provides an example of the analytical instruments used directly for programme reports (a key management tool for programme directors).

Quality development

WU's quality assurance processes are, to a considerable degree, interlinked with broader management processes and embedded in management routines. They are, thus, generally perceived as useful rather than as a politically motivated nuisance that places additional burdens on the staff. This corresponds to one of the key principles of WU's quality culture approach. Borrowing from Williams' definition of culture (Williams, 1989), a quality at WU is perceived as a way of life, signalling that QA systems should be less preoccupied with technicalities and more with adding value to the individual sense-making and improvement efforts of individual actors. In short, quality in teaching and learning is not created by a QA system but by the interactions between teachers and students.

This integrated and development-oriented approach is reflected in the naming of WU's Department for Programme and Quality Management and in the fact that this department has responsibility for almost all of WU's central curriculum and teaching administration. Furthermore, WU makes sure that the loops within its QA processes are 'closed', meaning that actions are derived from the continuous monitoring of potential structural and individual problems.

Figure 3.2 An example of WU's reporting scheme – Annual programme reports for programme directors

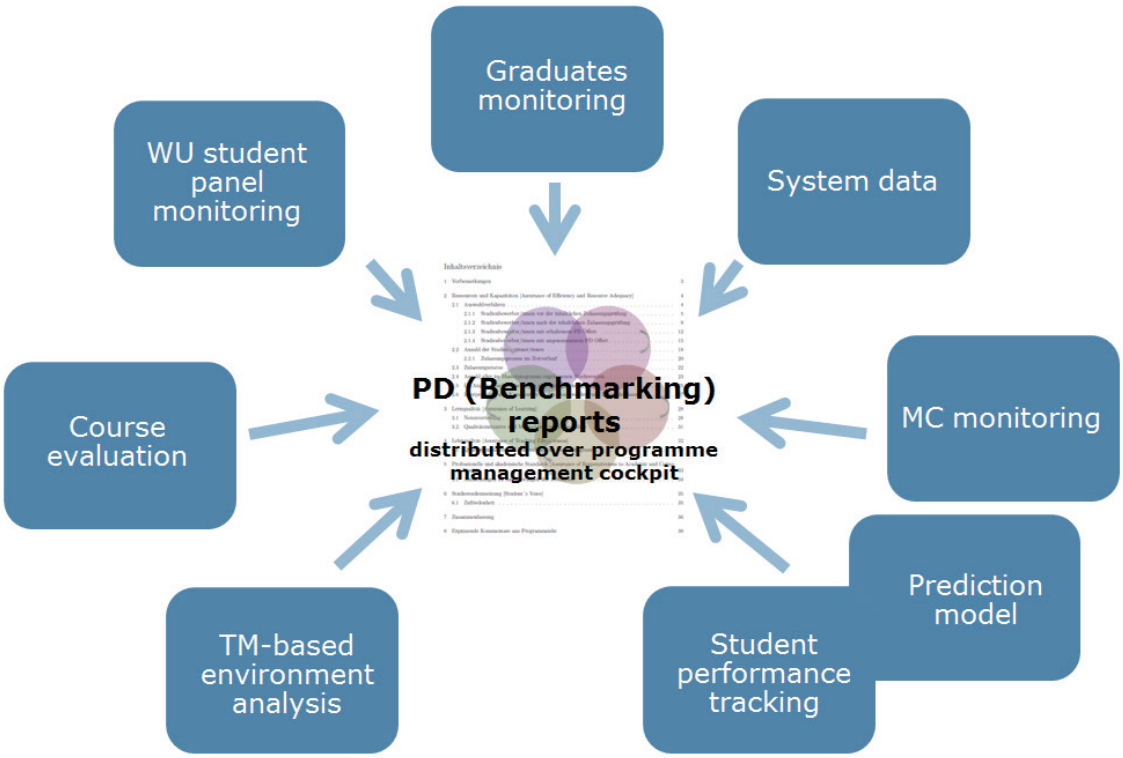


Figure 3.3 WU's curriculum development process

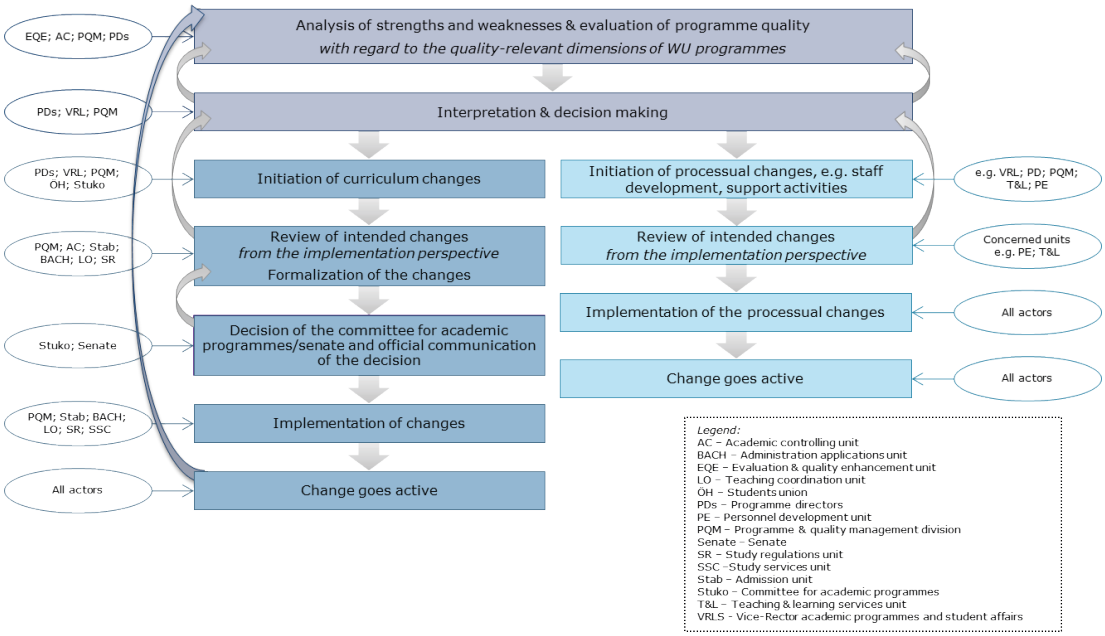


Figure 3.3 gives an example for this kind of developmental process, describing the shape of WU's curriculum development process and how it is, in several places, closely interlinked with and supported by aspects of quality analysis.

The main achievements of quality development at WU include awards for innovative teaching, excellent teaching, and e-teaching (Vettori and Blüml, 2010), comprehensive

tutoring and mentoring programmes, online tutorials for teachers and students (in the form of the open-access Teaching and Learning Academy and the student support area), and one of the best-used institutional e-learning and communication platforms in global higher education (Learn@WU).

Quality dialogue

As the importance attached to an effective and resource-efficient reporting system would suggest, equal time and effort is invested in supporting a quality dialogue with internal and external stakeholders, not simply to obtain feedback, but to discuss and determine the direction of change arising from the analytically generated findings. Generating the right kind of data in a timely fashion is only one part of a functioning quality management system; making sure the data are both useful and widely used is of equal importance. In order to ensure the data's usefulness, programme directors give regular feedback on the development of the reporting system. Yet, the construction of the overall system ensures that the approach to problems and challenges does not become too 'socio-technical'. There is a clear need for joint sense-making sessions among the involved parties, where they can interpret findings and negotiate interpretations, while also establishing agreements on future steps and actions.

Internal dialogue activities at WU are complemented by engagement with the wider world and with stakeholders outside the university. WU's QA experts are actively engaged in international discussions about QA and in various QA-related networks, and have contributed to its development through publications and presentations on internal and external quality assurance in higher education (as trainers, evaluators, presenters, advisors, etc.). WU is also the coordinating institution of Austrian universities' Network for Quality Management and Quality Development. Regular dialogue with employers, the Federal Ministry of Science, Research, and Economy, relevant external QA agencies, graduates, and peers from other institutions is a key element of WU's QA system. This is evidenced by the two externally oriented QA dimensions introduced at the beginning of this summary: responsiveness to external requirements and responsiveness to academic and professional needs and standards. Labour market representatives are, for example, a part of any programme development and evaluation process, as are members from professional associations and, in some cases, representatives from Austrian social partner institutions.

3.2 IQA instruments

Overall, WU's IQA system employs a broad range of different instruments and methods. Although many evaluative studies and analyses are conducted for steering or developmental purposes, they are designed as applied research projects and have a clear focus (for example, on student workload, student activity, or a new campus). These studies have been excluded from the present research, as they fit neither the general understanding of IQA instruments nor the project's methodology. This study also excludes more development- and infrastructure-oriented initiatives and approaches, such as WU's numerous teaching awards, the tutoring and mentoring system, or the way teaching resources are monitored and managed.

Consequently, the instruments chosen for evaluation in this case study are all analytical, continuous, and process-oriented. While not all these instruments are directly related to the goals of this case study (such as research evaluations, for example), and some could not be evaluated properly because of their recent institutionalization (such as the assurance of learning process), they are all relevant to understanding WU's quality-culture approach to IQA.

Strategic development plan

WU's strategic development plan describes WU's strategic orientation and its mission. As a strategic guideline document, it describes WU's developmental plans up to 2020 and integrates various quality-related developmental goals, mainly related to the quality of research and teaching. The document also includes WU's mission statement, its main strategic actions, its strategic budgeting focus, and its strategic market positioning plan. The process of developing and updating WU's strategic development plan involves a broad range of internal and external stakeholders, including university management, chairs, full professors, representatives of associate and assistant professors, students, and, in particular, members of the senate. It is approved by the university board (which includes representatives from public and private sectors). The plan is used as a basis not only for high-level internal decisions but also for the triennial performance contract between the Federal Ministry of Science, Research, and Economy and WU. Therefore, it provides a framework for the IQA system and for quality-related goals and activities.

Internal auditing

The internal auditing office provides support for all organizational units at the university through internal auditing and consulting services to evaluate and further develop the effectiveness, efficiency, and transparency of processes and internal control systems. The focus is on financial integrity, data security, and risk management, as well as the quality assurance and evaluation of the financial and business dimensions of higher education management processes at WU. All internal auditing and revision activities follow an annual schedule, including strategically chosen and randomly selected auditing activities. These activities follow international standards for internal auditors. Auditing reports and management summaries of auditing activities are delivered to the rector, members of the rector's council, and the university board.

Goal agreements between rector's council and departments

Every three years, the rector's council and the department heads agree the goals that WU and its departments will aim for (reflecting the constraints of given and additional resources and in alignment with the triennial performance contracts WU negotiates with the Federal Ministry of Science, Research, and Economy). The agreements cover quantitative and qualitative goals in the areas of teaching and research, as well as special issues, such as activities regarding the new campus created when WU moved in 2013. The agreed activities support WU to achieve its overall goals while also giving departments some security regarding the resourcing of their activities.

The agreements are further broken down and translated into concrete measurements within the respective departments, leading to similar agreements between department heads and the heads of academic units. All discussions and decisions are supported by internal reporting, such as the annual activity reports completed for all academic staff. Once a year, the status of key agreements is discussed by selected members of the rector's council and the respective department heads as part of the monitoring process.

Goal agreements do not apply to administrative units. However, members of the rector's council oversee most of these units and have more direct influence over them than over the decentralized academic departments.

Course evaluations

Course evaluations (or 'student evaluations of teaching') have been a key element of WU's quality assurance efforts since 1998. They are an important part of WU's approach to creating a comprehensive culture of quality. Feedback from students about the quality of a course (on the instructions, the learning environment, etc.) gives teachers

valuable insight into how students perceive both the instructor and his or her teaching. The resulting data are intended to help teachers improve and further develop their course designs, where necessary. The quantitative and partially standardized part of the evaluation questionnaires supports teachers' self-assessment in a structured manner and helps them to relate their own experiences to student feedback. The qualitative part of the questionnaires can provide teachers with new ideas and help them to make sense of the numbers.

All courses offered at WU are subject to evaluation every two years. Courses scheduled for compulsory evaluation are evaluated in two subsequent semesters (winter and summer). The year-long cycle is intended to ensure that courses held only once a year are included in the evaluation process. Voluntary evaluations are possible at any time and are independent of the cycle of compulsory evaluation.

The course instructor selects an appropriate questionnaire from the available templates. Instructors have the option to exchange individual question blocks or even to edit the entire questionnaire in the evaluation portal. Instructors also have the option of conducting an online evaluation. However, as the return rate of online surveys tends to be lower than that of paper questionnaires used for in-class evaluations, around 95 per cent of all course evaluations use the latter approach.

Results are delivered to lecturers, who use them to improve their teaching and course design, and published online, in an aggregated form, for all members of WU, including students, who use them in their course planning. In addition to providing feedback to lecturers and information to students, course evaluation results are also aggregated in evaluation reports for the heads of academic units and programme directors. These are discussed in internal performance review meetings between the head of an academic unit and the lecturers. They also allow programme directors to make better-informed choices about the academic staff on their programmes. While the central evaluation and quality enhancement unit supports WU's academic staff by organizing the evaluation and providing the results in a useful form, it is the responsibility of teachers to conduct course evaluations and it is the responsibility of teachers, heads of the academic units, and the programme directors to make use of students' feedback.

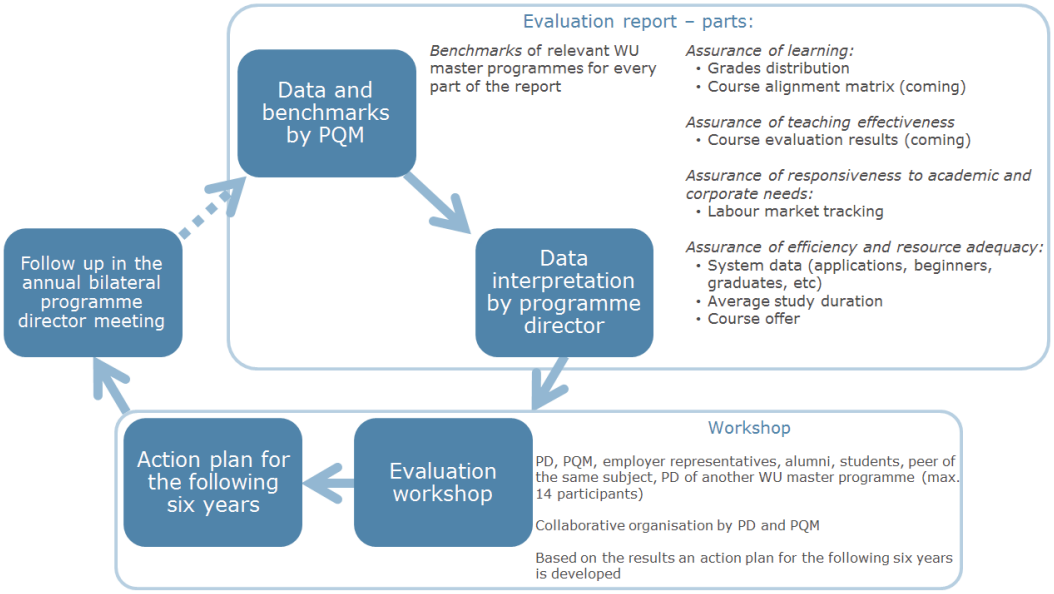
Programme evaluations

Study programmes and their contexts are constantly changing, driven by shifts in the number of applications, labour market need, legal conditions, and so on. The WU's programme evaluations aim to improve the curriculum using indicators and feedback from relevant stakeholders, such as employers or representatives of NGOs, professional associations and social partners. They are conducted approximately every six years at WU.

The annual programme evaluation reports used by programme management, supplemented by additional benchmarking and contextual data, form the foundation of WU's regular programme evaluations (see *Figure 3.4*). Moving away from the traditional format of self-assessment/peer review, at the centre of WU's programme evaluations is a one-day workshop that involves a variety of relevant actors and stakeholders (programme management, university management, students, alumni, teachers, labour market representatives, and academic peers from abroad).

The evaluation workshops are designed to identify and juxtapose different perspectives on the same problem and to negotiate the most relevant claims, concerns, and issues. Responsibility for the evaluations lies with the respective programme directors, yet the close collaboration with WU's PQM department ensures that the most important findings are followed up.

Figure 3.4 Process of WU's programme evaluation



WU's student panel monitoring and labour market tracking

WU's student and graduate panel monitoring project provides crucial information about students across the entire student life cycle (including their educational and social backgrounds, career plans, financial situation, motivation, satisfaction, and skills acquisition). The monitoring project consists of one biennial and five annual surveys, are organized by the PQM department and distributed to students/graduates via the online learning and communication platform, Learn@WU. Students at bachelor's level answer questionnaires at the beginning, middle, and end of their studies, as well as between three and five years after finishing their studies. Likewise, master's students answer questionnaires at the beginning of their studies, at the time of their graduation, and three to five years after completion of their studies. The findings can be used to answer a broad range of cross-sectional and longitudinal research questions. Survey results are delivered to relevant target groups, such as programme directors and members of the rector's council, in the form of dynamically customized reports.

To complement this survey-based research, WU's labour market tracking project monitors graduates' jobs market integration by matching university system data with job-related information from the social security database (concerning, for example, wage, contract type, and industry) of the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, and Consumer Protection, using a highly sophisticated data anonymization process, including an independent data broker, in compliance with data security laws in Austria. The main goal of this project is to gain better insight into the labour market status of WU graduates, the industries they are working in, and their income development.

Findings from WU's student panel monitoring and labour market tracking are widely used in evaluation projects (e.g. programme evaluations) and inform decisions on programme management, and student and graduate services and communication. The results from both projects are, therefore, integrated into annual programme reports and discussed within the programme management teams, as well as at the level of senior management.

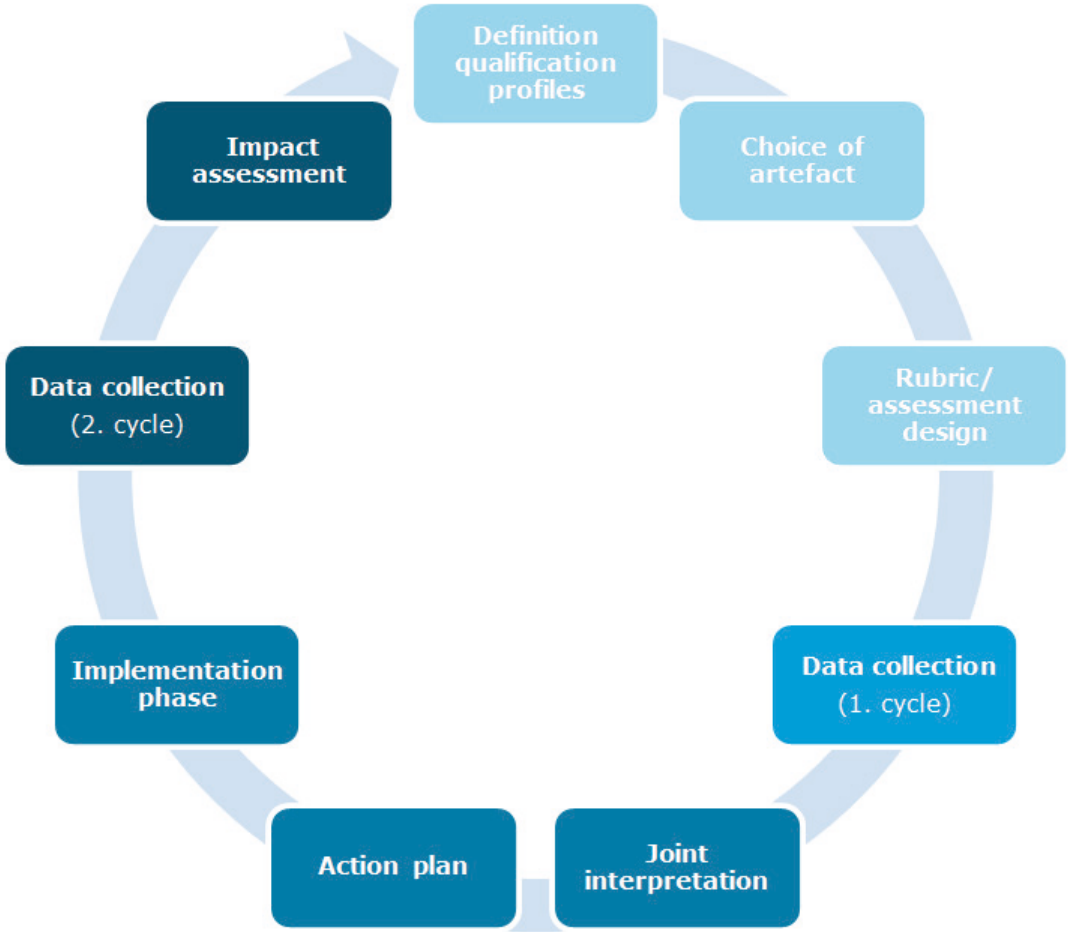
Assurance of learning process (AoL)

The assurance of learning process (AoL) is an instrument to measure whether or not the students of a particular programme have achieved the learning goals it set for them. The development of this instrument was triggered by AACSB accreditation. As such, it is a new

process and has not been evaluated as part of this study. Nevertheless, it seems to be an instrument relevant to the future development of IQA at WU.

WU's AoL process, as depicted in *Figure 3.5*, can be roughly divided into three phases: measurement, implementation (including development of an action plan), and impact assessment. These three phases are the same for each AoL cycle, while the first three steps in *Figure 3.5* (definition of qualification profiles, choice of measurement artefact, and rubric/assessment design) occur at the beginning of the process as such, and are only repeated if the respective AoL core teams (programme managers and selected academic staff, supported by PQM) for each study programme agree that a general redesign of the process is in order.

Figure 3.5 WU's assurance of learning process



The three steps will be briefly explained before the measurement cycle is described in more detail.

Each qualification profile consists of three levels: learning goals (which state the general educational aims of the programme), competences, and more precisely defined sub-skills (which are mainly an operationalization of the competences and make them measurable).

Measurement artefacts vary, depending on the qualification profile, the programme level, the programme design, and the cost of measurement. This means that, in some programmes, measurement cycles are entirely exam-based while, in others, artefacts include theses, business projects, seminar papers, and presentations. In some cases, several artefacts are used at the same time, in order to cover the profile more comprehensively.

The rubric and assessment design step is closely connected to the respective choice of artefact. Typically, programmes will use rubrics. The scale is three-tiered, differentiating between the three competence levels: 'exceeds expectations', 'meets expectations', and 'does not meet expectations'.

AoL measurement cycles are usually organized annually. The measurement periods depend on the time of the year at which the measurement artefacts are produced/handed in. For each programme, there are a number of assessors supervised by the respective AoL core team. For each measurement cycle, this team generates a condensed measurement report for each programme. The measurement reports contain information on the sample size, the survey period, and the artefacts that were used. For each competence, they show what share of the sample falls into which competence level and if the pre-defined target for each competence level has been met. Once a year, the results of a given measurement cycle are discussed by the programme-level core teams and the institutional coordinator (who, as Director of Quality Management and Programme Management, functions also as the main liaison for all programme managers). Together, they interpret the data (including input from other members of academic staff involved in the measurement), identify areas for improvement, and agree comprehensive action plans to get there.

Action plans are then developed to include detailed information on problems, proposed actions, time frame, and responsibilities. Most actions are to be applied within one to two years. In line with WU's approach of 'embedded AoL', not all actions are directly related to AoL measurement cycles. The items listed under 'further actions' have sources other than the measurements, and are included as part of WU's integrative developmental approach to programme management (avoiding redundancies and parallel processes with regard to quality assurance). The action plans are also discussed in programme director meetings.

One year after a given action plan has been agreed, the programme managers and the institutional coordinator meet again to evaluate progress and achievements to date. Based on the measurement data and other evidence from the subsequent measurement cycle, these evaluations also allow for a first appraisal of the impact of certain actions. For this reason, the final process step is called impact assessment. Actions that have not been successful or have not yet been implemented are either changed or extended and new actions are derived from the new measurements. The end of each full AoL cycle therefore also marks the beginning of a new one.

Research evaluations

All procedures for research evaluation are based on WU's FIDES research database, which contains all relevant data on the publications of WU's academic staff and WU's academic units. Regular reports on the research output of a given academic unit and annual activity reports on an individual level are generated and distributed by WU's research service centre. To ensure quality enhancement regarding research publication output, publication plans are discussed on academic staff level in performance reviews, which are linked to the goal agreements between the rector's council and the department heads. New evaluations focusing on a department's general research strategy and outputs are in development. Given the purposes of this study, research evaluation instruments were considered outside its scope.

Personnel development

Personal and professional growth are important values for WU's academic and administrative staff. WU encourages and supports continuing education for all academic staff, offering an extensive range of advanced training courses in fields such as communication, research methodology, pedagogy, teaching in English, and learning technologies. In addition, full professors have access to professional coaching, as do

senior administrative managers. All staff can access courses on conflict management, time management, and process management, among other subjects. Unusually, WU requires all new administrative staff and junior academic staff to attend a one-week trainee programme on WU's strategy, organization, legal frameworks, and other relevant topics. This formal programme is complemented by a great variety of courses, coaching, and community meetings organized by WU's Teaching and Learning Services Unit, under the supervision of its PQM department. Department-specific workshops with experts in modern pedagogy are particularly popular. Over the course of the last two years, more than 1,400 university members have attended one or more sessions of training.

4. Assessing the effects of the IQA system

This chapter provides an analysis of the findings of the empirical study of WU's IQA system, together with a description of the research methodology. The findings are presented in terms of the relevance and/or effectiveness of the IQA instruments described above. The chapter will conclude with an interpretation of the findings with regard to the main focus of this study: the effects of the IQA system on employment and employability, academic quality, and management structures and processes.

4.1 Research methodology

The research methodology used in this case study took a multi-stakeholder approach, collecting information on the perceptions of academic and administrative staff, students, academic and administrative leaders of the university, and heads of departments and programmes.

The research design were used both quantitative and qualitative methods. Data used in the study were drawn from an internal analysis of strengths and weaknesses conducted by WU's Department for Programme and Quality Management and included information from various internal documents (such as the strategic development plan, annual reports, and accreditation reports). The perceptions of academic and administrative staff were investigated using two online surveys, specifically adapted to those IQA instruments with which academic and administrative staff at WU are typically familiar. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were also conducted with senior management, academic and administrative staff, and students in order to capture their perceptions in greater depth.

Surveys of selected academic staff and administrative staff

The questionnaires are based on the original template provided by IIEP, carefully adapted to the organizational context of WU. Three departments (Finance, Accounting, and Statistics; Socioeconomics; and Foreign Language Business Communication) were selected, with the aim of capturing the diversity of disciplines and academic cultures at WU. Academic staff were asked about IQA instruments related to teaching and learning as well as employability.

For the administrative survey, staff from the above three departments invited to take part, alongside selected employees from various central administrative units. Administrative staff were asked about IQA instruments in the area of management. The summary of key data on academic and administrative staff surveys is provided in *Table 4.1*.

The following tables offer descriptions of the survey respondents.

Academic staff

According to *Table 4.2*, the majority of academic staff respondents cited economics as their discipline (40 per cent), followed by English (38.57 per cent). Those who indicated 'business and management' amounted to 21.43 per cent of all respondents.

Table 4.1 Key data on academic and administrative staff survey

	Academic staff	Administrative staff
Population staff survey	Academic staff from the departments of Finance, Accounting and Statistics; Socioeconomics; and Foreign Language Business Communication (451 in total)	Administrative staff from the departments of Finance, Accounting and Statistics; Socioeconomics; and Foreign Language Business Communication; as well as selected administrative staff from central administration (86 in total)
Instrument	Online questionnaire	Online questionnaire
Survey Process	Academic staff were invited to fill in an online questionnaire by email (with two reminders)	Administrative staff were invited to fill in an online questionnaire by email (with two reminders)
Time span	May 2015	May 2015
Received Questionnaires	70	39
Response Rate:	15.52%	45.35%

Table 4.2 Disciplines (academic staff)

Topic	Number (percentage) of respondents
Business and Management	21.43%
Economics	40%
Others, namely English	38.57%
Total	100%

Almost a third of academic respondents chose 'other' when asked to indicate their position (see *Table 4.3*). They described their positions, variously, as senior scientist, research associate, external lecturer, third-party funded faculty, and visiting professor. Of the positions listed in the survey, graduate assistant was the most popular (22 per cent). The rest were fairly evenly distributed with none of the other positions scoring above 20 per cent. Full professors accounted for only 4 per cent of all respondents.

Table 4.3 Academic positions (academic staff)

	Number (percentage)
Full professor	4%
Associate professor	16%
Lecturer	16%
Assistant professor	13%
Graduate assistant	22%
Other (senior scientist, research associate, external lecturer, third-party funded faculty, and visiting professor)	29%
Total	100%

As *Table 4.4* shows, almost half of academic respondents said they were heads (or deputy heads) of institute (47 per cent) when asked about their leadership position. More than a quarter (27 per cent) of respondents opted for 'I do not want to answer'. Few academic respondents chose either head (or deputy head) of programme or head (or deputy head) of department, each of which accounted for 13 per cent of the total.

Table 4.4 Leadership positions (academic staff)

	Number (percentage)
Head (or deputy head) of programme	13%
Head (or deputy head) of department	13%
Head (or deputy head) of institute	47%
Member of a committee or board	0%
I do not want to answer	27%
Total	100%

Table 4.5 shows the length of experience of academic staff respondents. The majority of respondents had worked either for less than five years or for between five and 10 years, both with 27 per cent. The same proportion had worked for more than 20 years. Less than a fifth (19 per cent) had worked at WU for between 11 and 20 years.

Table 4.5 Length of experience (academic staff)

	Number (percentage)
Less than 5 years	27%
Between 5 and 10 years	27%
Between 11 and 20 years	19%
More than 20 years	27%
Total	100%

Administrative staff

According to *Table 4.6*, almost a third of administrative staff respondents (31 per cent) were engaged in quality assurance/quality enhancement. Around one in 10 was from one of the three departments (13 per cent), financial management (10 per cent), and international relations (10 per cent). The rest were fairly evenly distributed with all the other departments lower than 10 per cent.

Table 4.6 Fields (administrative staff)

Topic	Number (percentage) of respondents
Strategic/academic planning	3%
Financial management	10%
Quality assurance/quality enhancement	31%
Facility management (incl. transport services)	5%
Human resource (administrative) management	3%
Academic staff development	5%
Student services (registration, assessment, counselling)	8%
IT services	0%
Public relations/marketing	3%
Internal auditing	3%
Raiffeisen Language Resource Centre	3%
Library	3%

Topic	Number (percentage) of respondents
International relations	10%
Other, namely administrative staff from the three departments	13%
Total number of respondents	100%

Table 4.7 describes the leadership positions of the administrative staff who took part in the survey. Almost two-thirds of respondents were heads (or deputy heads) of unit (65 per cent), while a third were heads (or deputy heads) of administration (29 per cent). Only 6 per cent of respondents said they were heads (or deputy heads) of section.

Table 4.7 Leadership positions (administrative staff)

	Number (percentage)
Head (or deputy head) of administration	29%
Head (or deputy head) of unit	65%
Head (or deputy head) of section	6%
Total	100%

As *Table 4.8* indicates, more than half of administrative staff participants held a master's degree (56 per cent). Those whose highest educational achievement was a secondary school diploma accounted for 23 per cent, with 5 per cent citing PhD/doctorate and 3 per cent bachelor degree. Eight per cent of participants cited a vocational training diploma as their highest qualification.

Table 4.8 Highest educational achievement (administrative staff)

	Number (percentage)
Secondary school diploma	23%
Vocational training	8%
Bachelor	3%
Master	56%
PhD/doctorate	5%
Other	5%
Total	100%

Table 4.9 shows that most administrative staff respondents had been with the university either for less than five years (38 per cent) or for between five and 10 years (31 per cent), with 28 per cent citing between 11 and 20 years. Only 3 per cent of respondents had more than 20 years of experience at the university.

Table 4.9 Length of experience (administrative staff)

	Number (percentage)
Less than 5 years	38%
Between 5 and 10 years	31%
Between 11 and 20 years	28%
More than 20 years	3%
Total	100%

Qualitative interviews and focus groups

To gain an in-depth insight into the innovative elements of the IQA system at WU and the effects of the IQA system, an integrated qualitative and quantitative research design was applied. In addition to the secondary data collected from WU and the quantitative survey of academic and administrative staff, qualitative data were gathered from semi-

structured interviews with decision-makers and focus group discussions with academic staff and students. The interview guides for both the focus groups and the individual interviews were derived from the basic questionnaire supplied by IIEP, adapted to the relevant cultural context and the specific profile of WU.

In accordance with the project proposal of IIEP and based on schedule availability, 11 senior and middle-level academic and administrative decision-makers (such as department chairs and programme managers) were selected for individual face-to-face interviews or focus group discussions about the IQA at WU. *Table 4.10* gives a breakdown of the interviewees' job roles.

Table 4.10 Interview and focus group discussion participants

Members of the rectorate		
Interviewed actor(s)	Type of interview	No.
Chair of the university board	individual interview	I
Vice-Rector, Academic Programmes and Student Affairs	individual interview	II
Department		
Interviewed actor(s)	Type of interview	No.
Head of department	individual interview	III
Quality promoter	individual interview	IV
Department		
Interviewed actor(s)	Type of interview	No.
Head of department	individual interview	V
Quality promoter	individual interview	VI
Other		
Interviewed actor(s)	Type of interview	No.
Programme manager	individual interview	VII
Programme manager	individual interview	VIII
Programme manager	individual interview	IX
Programme manager	individual interview	XI
Programme manager	individual interview	XII
Students		
Interviewed actor(s)	Type of interview	No.
Five undergraduate students	focus group discussions	XIII
Five graduate students	focus group discussions	XIV

The interviews and focus group discussions covered the role of quality management in the strategic profile of WU/the department/the programme, the existing understanding of the IQA system at WU, and the effects of IQA on teaching and learning, management, and the employability of graduates. Furthermore, the factors that influenced the effectiveness of IQA and its overall contribution to university development were discussed. The student perspective was also explored through focus group discussions. Ten students participated in the respective focus groups. The students were asked about the meaning of quality of education, the types of internal quality assurance activities they knew, the usefulness of

these instruments among others. Recruitment emails were sent to students between one and two weeks before the focus group discussions. The emails contained basic information on the topic and the setting of the focus group discussion. No incentives were used. The discussions were conducted in German, led by an external researcher.

The focus group participants were divided into undergraduate and graduate student groups. Each group consisted of five participants, including both males and females. The discussions covered students' experiences of bachelor programmes (across a number of different majors and specializations), as well as of three different master's programmes and WU's doctoral programme. The student's profiles were as follows:

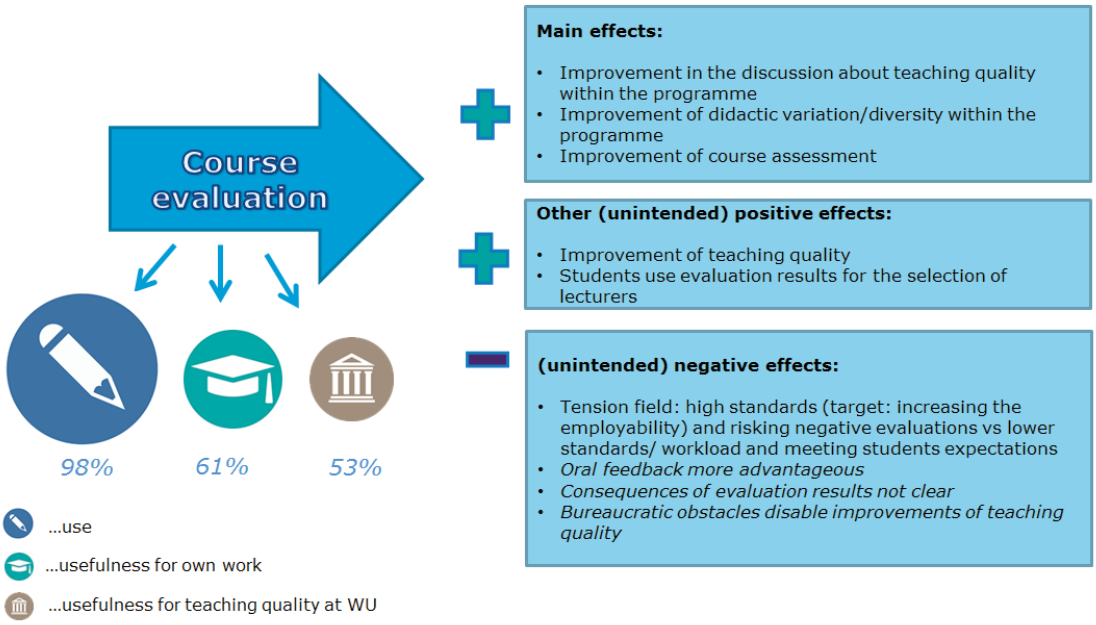
- Male, in the first year of a bachelor programme in business law at WU and a bachelor programme in sinology at the University of Vienna.
- Male, in the first year of a bachelor programme in business, economics, and social science (after one semester in a bachelor programme in political science at the University of Vienna).
- Female, in the last year of a bachelor programme in business, economics, and social science (business administration major with specializations in accounting and business training).
- Female, in the last year of a bachelor programme in business, economics, and social science (business administration major with specializations in diversity management and public and non-profit management – she took a break from her studies to work and also spent an exchange semester abroad).
- Female, completed a bachelor programme in business, economics, and social science, now in the last year of a bachelor programme in business law.
- Male, in the first year of a master's programme in information systems.
- Male, in the last year of a master's programme in business education.
- Male, in the last year of a master's programme in management.
- Female, in the last year of a master's programme in business education.
- Male, in the second year of a doctoral programme in social and economic sciences.

All focus groups and key informant interviews were recorded with audio equipment and later summarized in protocols. These protocols were translated into English and were used for developing this case study.

Aggregate analysis

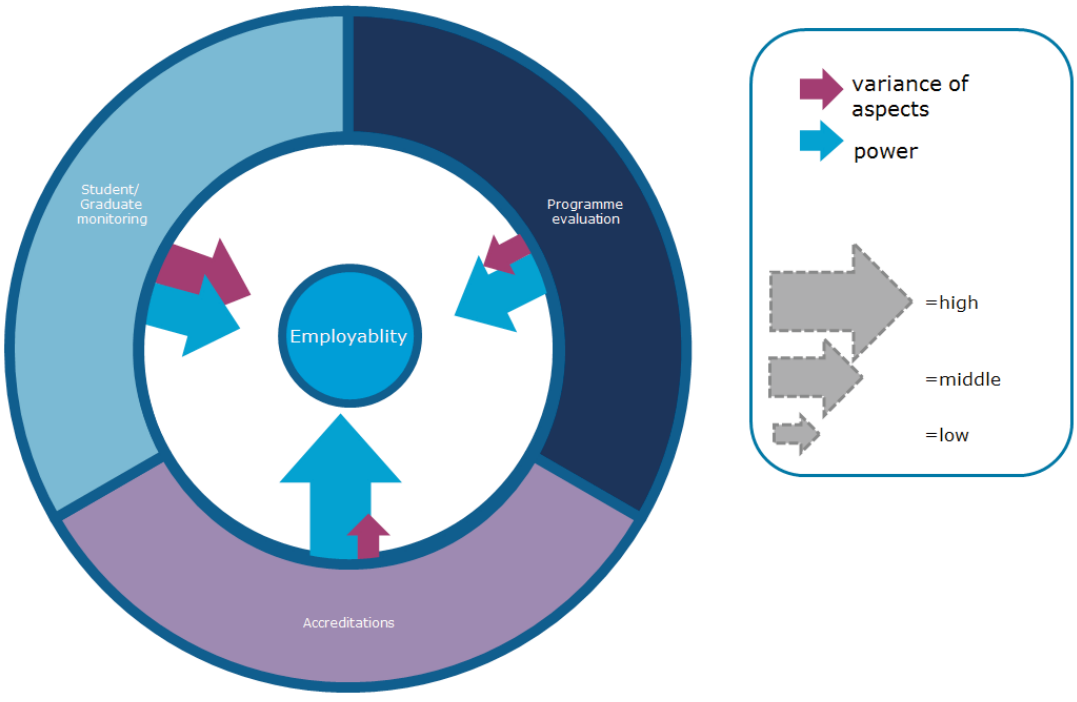
Following a multi-method approach, the patterns of usage and usefulness for a certain instrument or process (measured by means of the questionnaire), as well as the reported effects of IQA methods (investigated by means of focus groups and interviews with relevant stakeholders), were triangulated for each instrument/process. *Figure 4.1* provides an example of aggregate analysis on the instrumental level, illustrating the three layers of (perceived) usefulness. Usage on a personal level is measured on a dichotomous scale highlighting the proportion of those using the investigated method relative to all academic/administrative staff. Usefulness on a personal level and (perceived) usefulness on an institutional level are both measured on an ordinal scale of measurement using (pseudo-metric) Likert scales. These were dichotomized by summarizing the two strongest (1) and the other three (0) categories respectively for instruments related to academic staff/administrative staff. The proportion of academic and administrative staff in the dichotomous category 1 is expressed in *Figure 4.1*. Data on intended as well as unintended (positive and negative) effects were gathered from qualitative sources (focus groups and interviews).

Figure 4.1 Example of aggregate analysis on instrumental level



For the purposes of modelling the effects of IQA instruments on higher education management effectiveness, teaching and learning, and employability, questionnaire-related items have been converted to target-specific influence factors by calculating (item-frequency independent) proportional scores of the items. Scores were categorized in terms of their effects – high, middle, or low – by using thresholds of uniformly distributed score level groups. Considering item frequency (and therefore aspect variance) within several IQA methods aiming at a certain strategic target of improvement (e.g. management effectiveness), the variance of aspects where an IQA instrument is perceived to have an impact have also been presented. The example in *Figure 4.2* summarizes information on the effects of an IQA method by combining both visualizations:

Figure 4.2 Example of aggregate analysis of IQA effects



4.2 The relevance and effectiveness of WU's IQA system

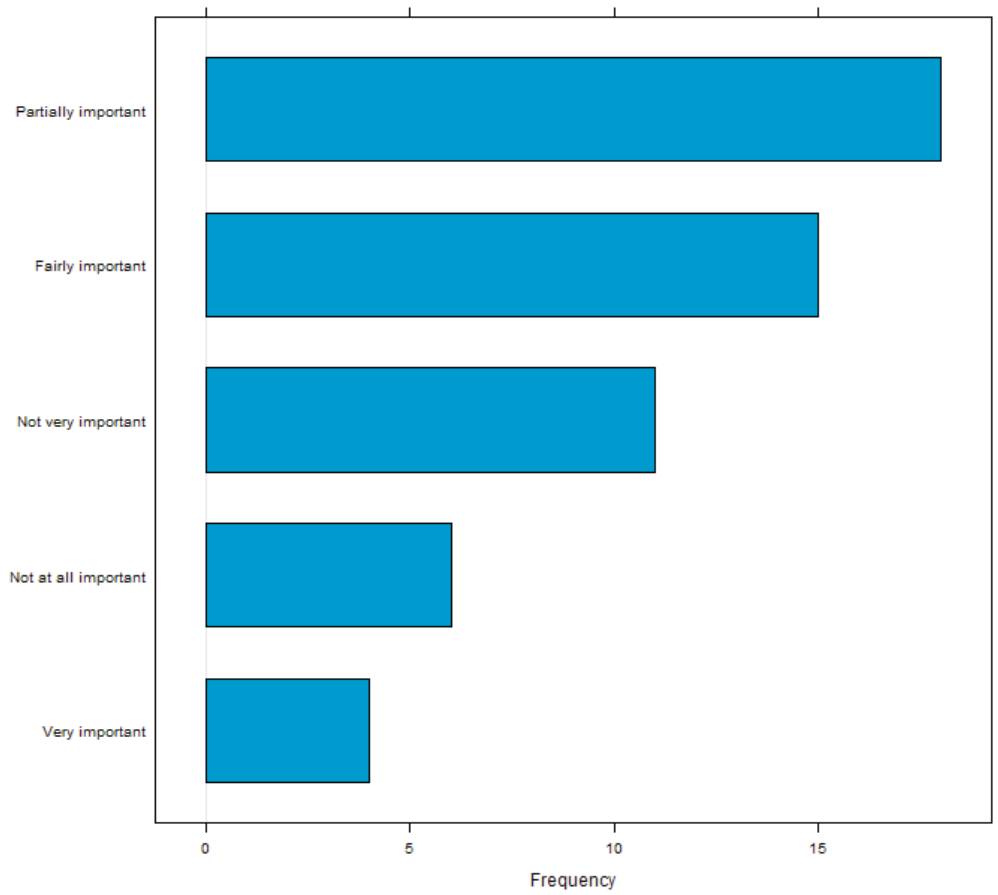
The perceptions of academic and administrative staff as to the relevance and/or effectiveness of the IQA instruments at WU were investigated through the online survey and are presented in the section below. Academic and administrative staff were asked about the instruments in which they were typically involved. Some are common to both staff groups (such as the strategic plan), but not all. Academic staff were asked about course evaluation, programme evaluation, research evaluation, personnel development programmes, student panel monitoring, and labour market tracking (student and graduate monitoring). Administrative staff were asked about internal auditing and internal goal agreements.

The relevance of each IQA instrument is assessed in terms of the respondent's awareness of it, their use of the instrument, and its perceived usefulness. A distinction is made in the questionnaire between personal relevance and the instrument's relevance in terms of course, programme, or institutional development. The effectiveness of the IQA instruments, including WU's strategic development plan, was also investigated in the survey.

The relevance of WU's strategic development plan

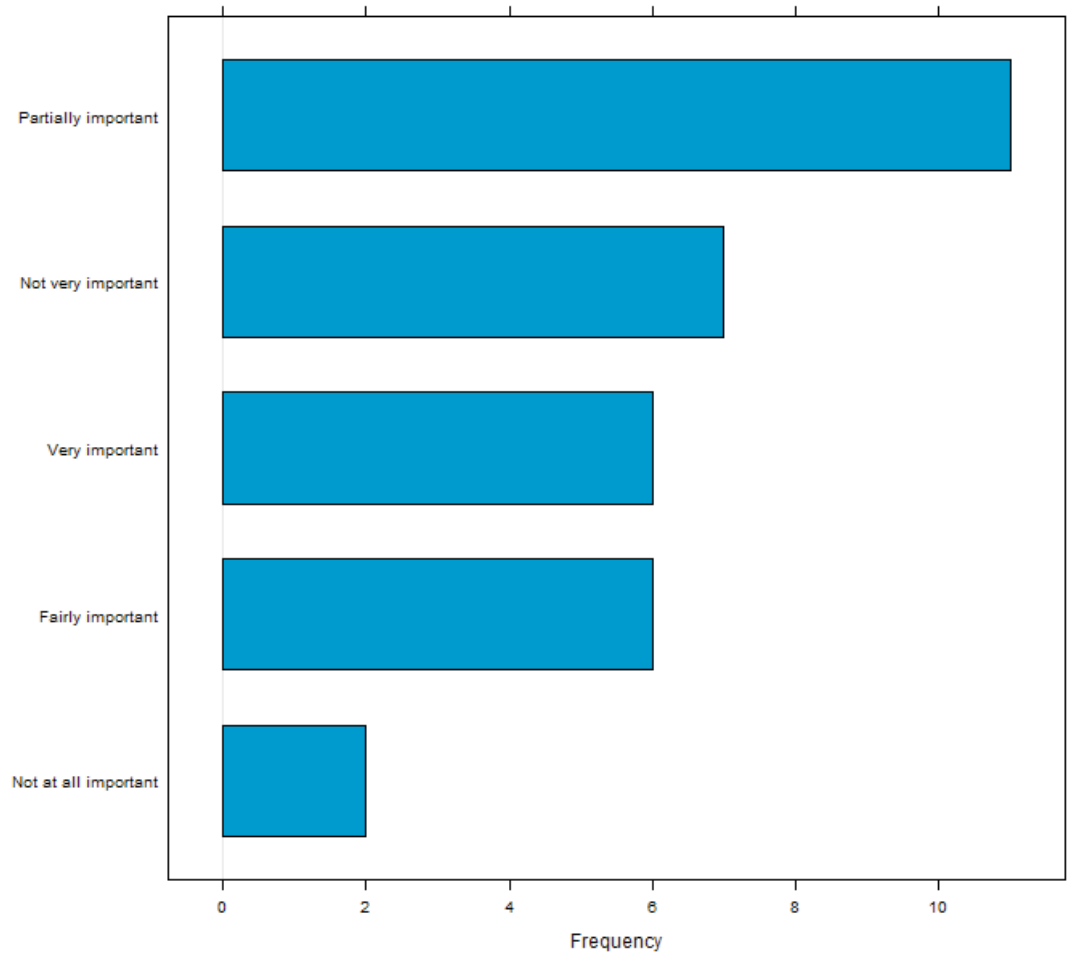
As outlined in *Chapter 3*, WU's strategic development plan describes WU's development programme up to 2020 and integrates various quality-related developmental goals. However, as an 'instrument' it is mainly used by the university's senior management and senior administration, For that reason, the perception of academic staff that the strategy is only partially or fairly important for their own daily work (see *Figure 4.3*) is unsurprising.

Figure 4.3 Perceived relevance of the strategic development plan to the work of academic staff



Administrative staff view the relevance of the strategic development plan slightly differently (see *Figure 4.4*). Administrative staff involved in quality management, programme management, or control, for example, deal with strategic issues more often than others. It seemed that the more staff were involved in quality management processes, the more they found the strategic development plan relevant for their work. Overall, the results confirm the importance of securing the broad involvement of stakeholders in the development of the overall mission/strategic framework and of ensuring the strategy is widely recognized by the members of the university. They also suggest that there are clear roles and responsibilities when it comes to translating the strategy into practice.

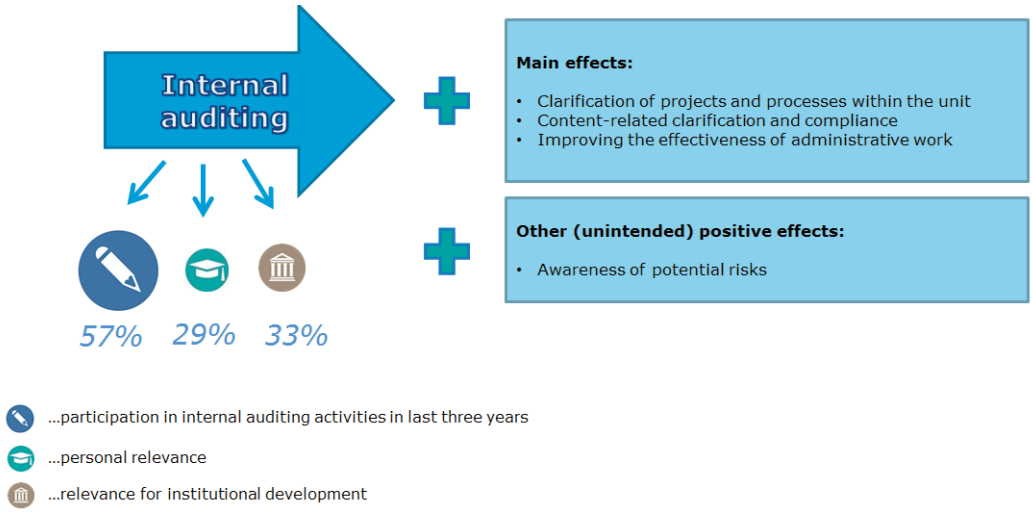
Figure 4.4 Perceived relevance of the strategic development plan to the work of administrative staff



The relevance and effectiveness of WU's internal auditing

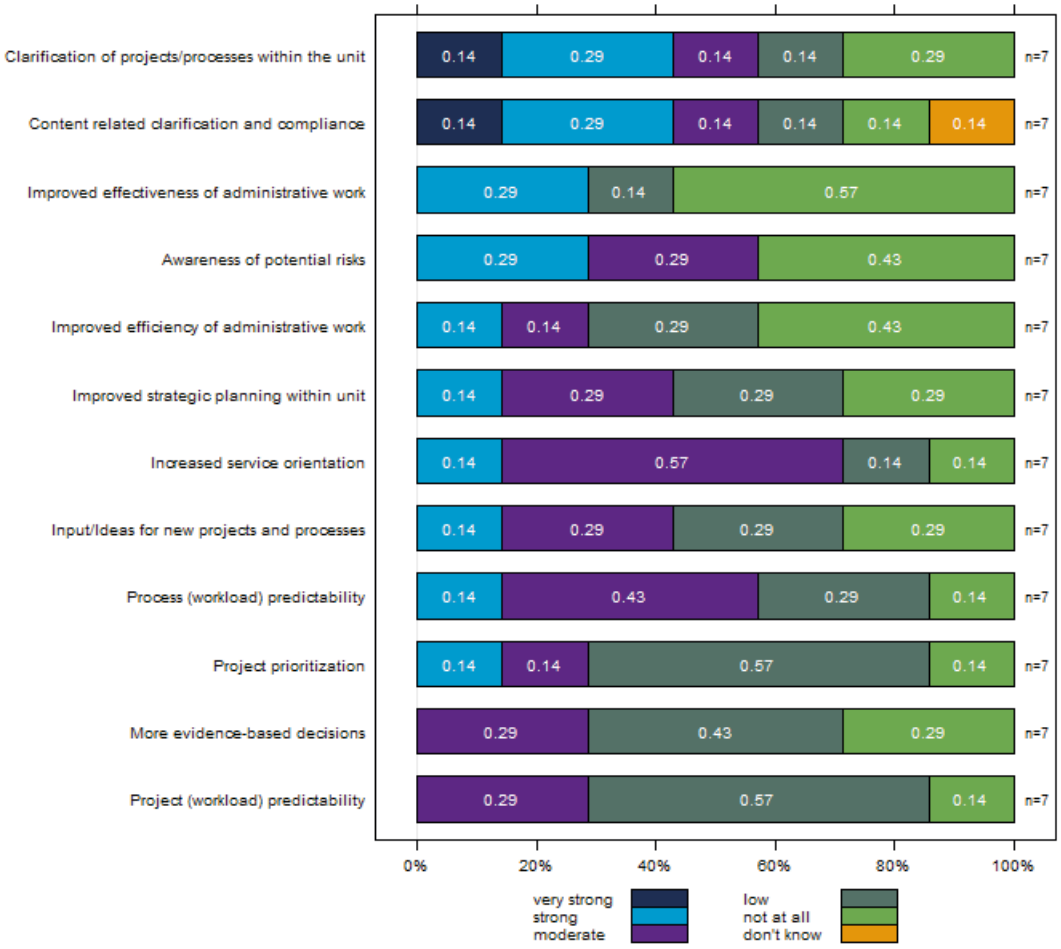
As the internal audit office usually works only with senior management and the supervisory staff of individual units, many administrative staff have no relevant experience of internal auditing and thus found it difficult to assess the effectiveness of the process.

Figure 4.5 Aggregate analysis of the effects of internal auditing



For those who had been involved in the past, the main benefits lay in clarifying procedure within the unit and in improving compliance with internal and external standards and requirements (see *Figure 4.5* and *Figure 4.6*). The impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of the respective processes, as well as on strategy and decision-making, was regarded as small. One reason for this may be that the internal audit office focuses on general administrative routines and financial management, whereas most units within a university tend not to emphasize this aspect of their daily work.

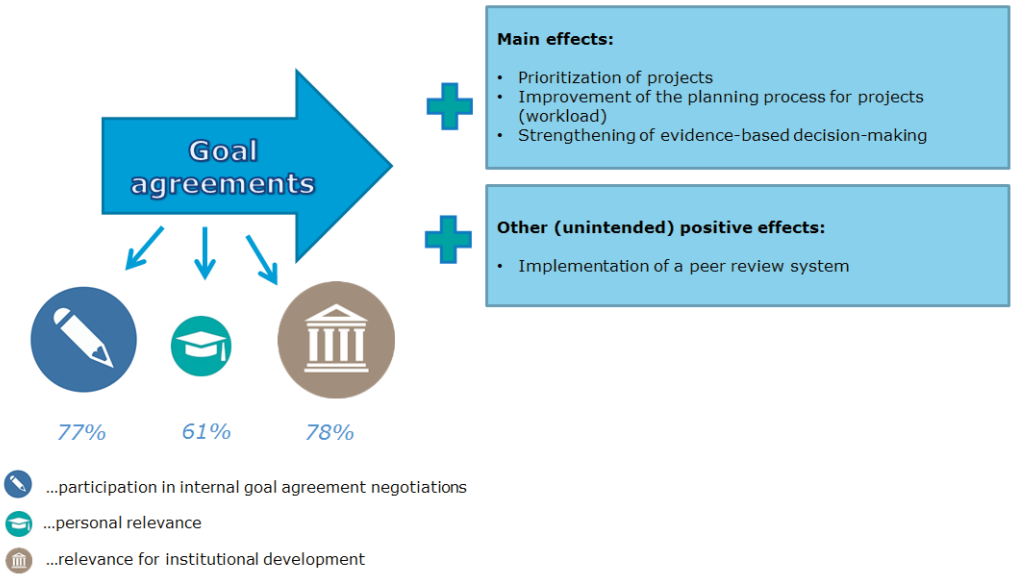
Figure 4.6 Impact of internal auditing from the perspective of administrative staff in detail



The relevance and effectiveness of WU's internal goal agreements

Those university members who answered the survey questions on internal goal agreements generally felt that this was one of the most powerful developmental instruments on an institutional level. More than three-quarters of administrative staff regarded the instrument as relevant or very relevant to university development (*Figure 4.7*).

Figure 4.7 Aggregate analysis of the effects of goal agreements from the perspective of administrative staff



As *Figure 4.8* indicates, the biggest perceived benefit of goal agreements in terms of quality improvement lies in improving evidence-based decision-making. The goal agreements also help to prioritize internal projects, for example, by calculating the resources and workload needed in order to achieve a certain goal. Strategic planning is another area that can be improved through goal agreements, yet there appears to be little impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of administrative units. This finding can be explained by the fact that goal agreements are far more relevant and comprehensive for academic units. However, even from an academic perspective there is still room for improvement. A department's efforts in meeting the agreed targets of a given agreement are viewed positively by the rector's council, but do not lead to any other (financial) benefits (interview, department head).

The relevance and effectiveness of WU's course evaluations

WU's course evaluations are among the most used and widely accepted IQA instruments within the institution, as illustrated by *Figure 4.9*. The fact that a considerable number of academic staff evaluate their courses on a voluntary basis, in addition to the evaluations they are obliged to carry out, indicates how strongly this instrument features in daily teaching and learning routines.

Figure 4.8 Impact of goal agreements on various levels from the perspective of administrative staff

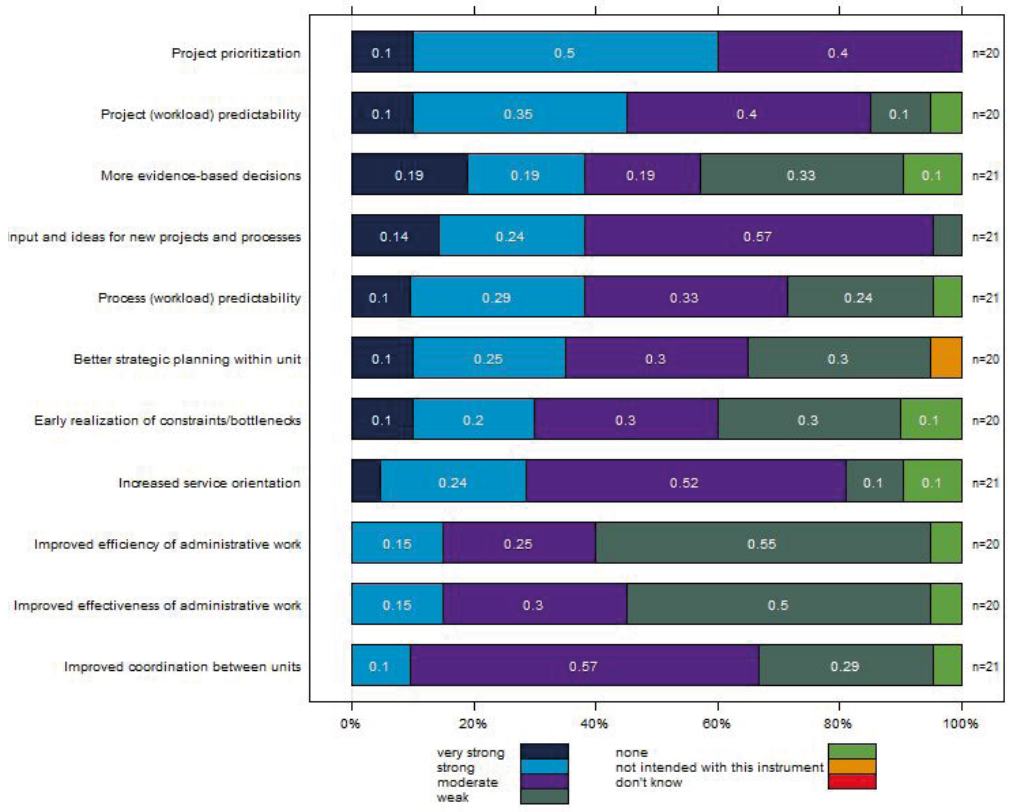
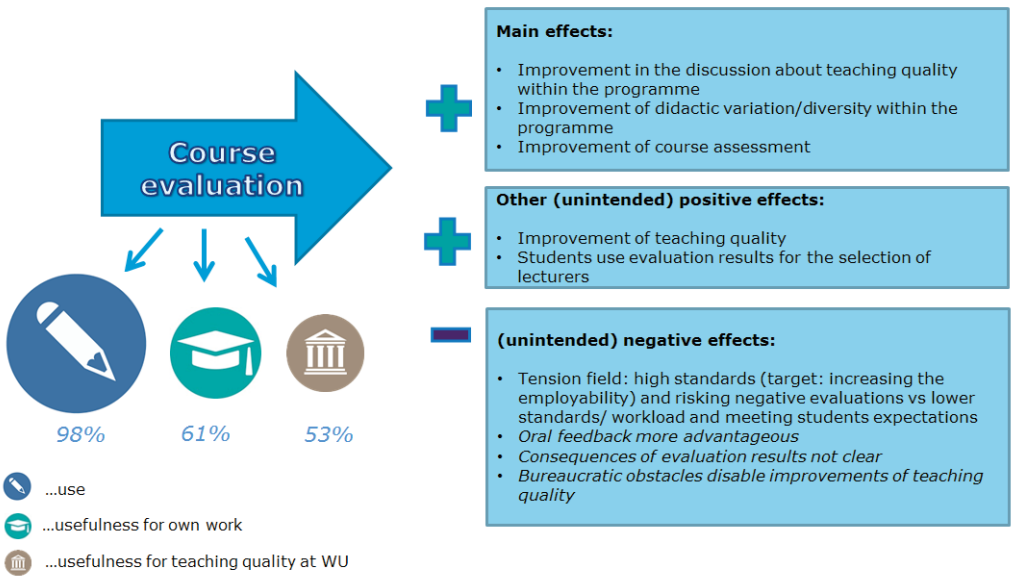
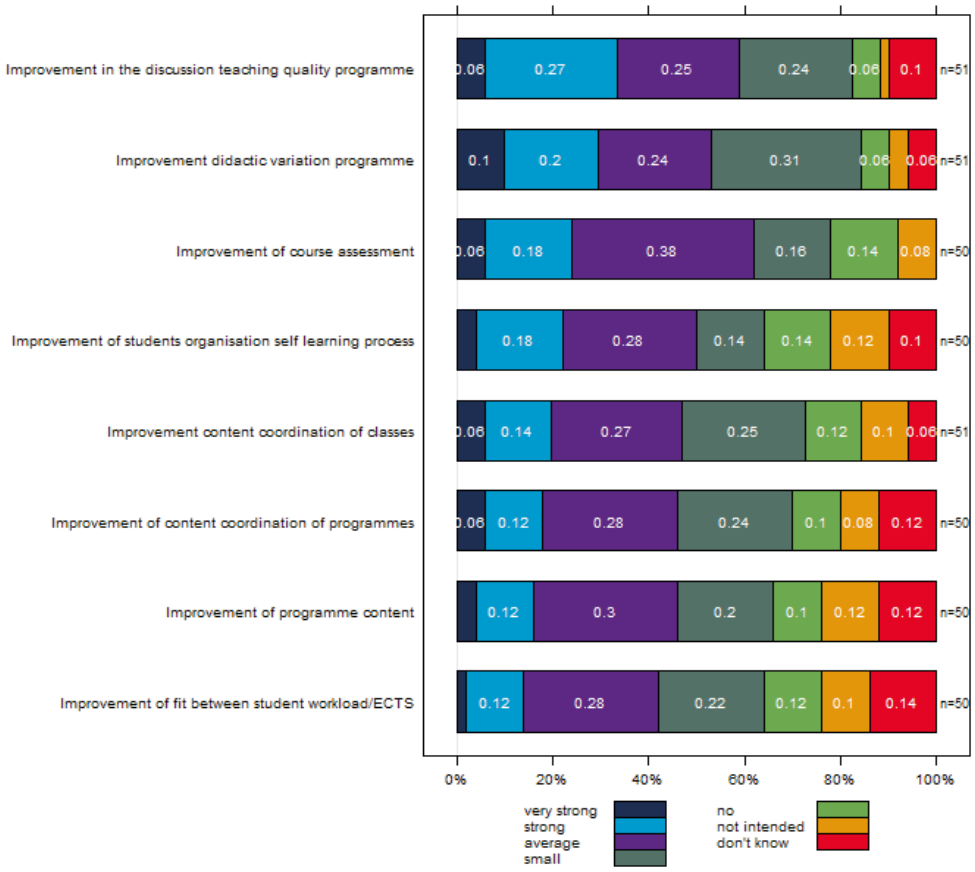


Figure 4.9 Aggregate analysis of the effects of course evaluation from the perspective of academic staff



When asked how course evaluation affects aspects of teaching at WU, academic staff overall were convinced that it encouraged discussions on teaching quality and provided an opportunity to reflect on the learning environment of particular courses (*Figure 4.10*).

Figure 4.10 Effects of course evaluation on aspects of teaching in detail, as perceived by academic staff



By contrast, the effects at curriculum level (content, coordination, and course-level workload) were perceived as lower. This is very much in line with the arrangement of IQA instruments at WU, where course and programme level are covered by different kinds of evaluations.

From the student perspective, course evaluations are widely known and are a regular part of their university life. Students reported that the most effective course evaluations take place not at the very end of the semester, but a few weeks before, so the results can be discussed between them and the lecturers. Such feedback loops are very important in helping students appreciate the consequences of their reviews (focus group, graduate students).

The relevance and effectiveness of WU's programme evaluations

Programme evaluations, as described in *Chapter 3*, are a new IQA instrument to WU. Therefore, only a minority of academic staff members are acquainted with such evaluations. This explains the relatively low response rate in the survey (see *Figure 4.12*). For those who had experienced programme evaluation, the main benefit was perceived to lie in the improvement of programme content and the organization of the programme. There was much less recognition of benefits to student learning and student workload. Overall, the instrument is highly valued by university staff who have experience of it, mostly academic staff and administrative staff involved in programme management (see *Figure 4.11*).

Figure 4.11 Aggregate analysis of the effects of programme evaluation from the perspective of academic staff

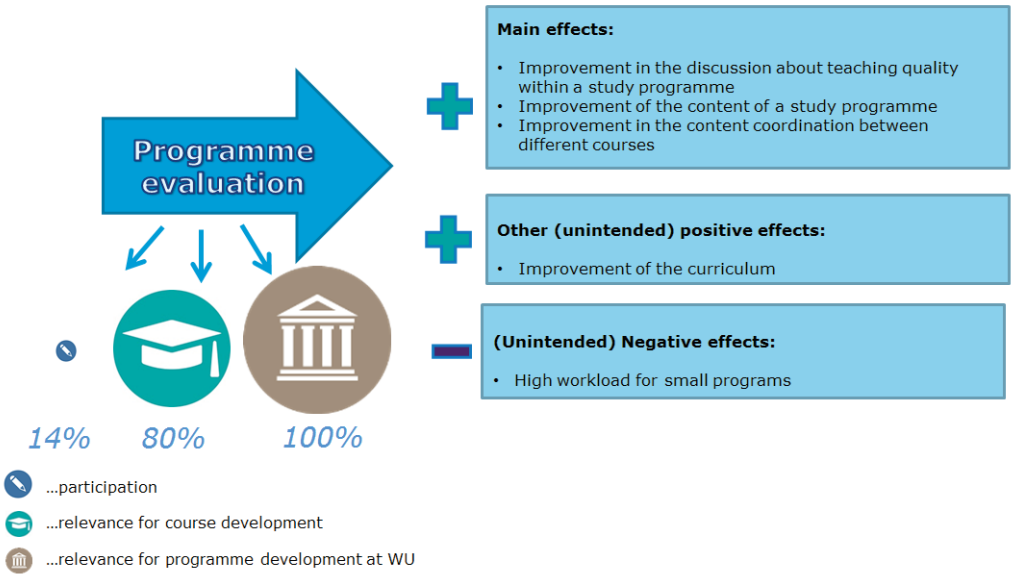
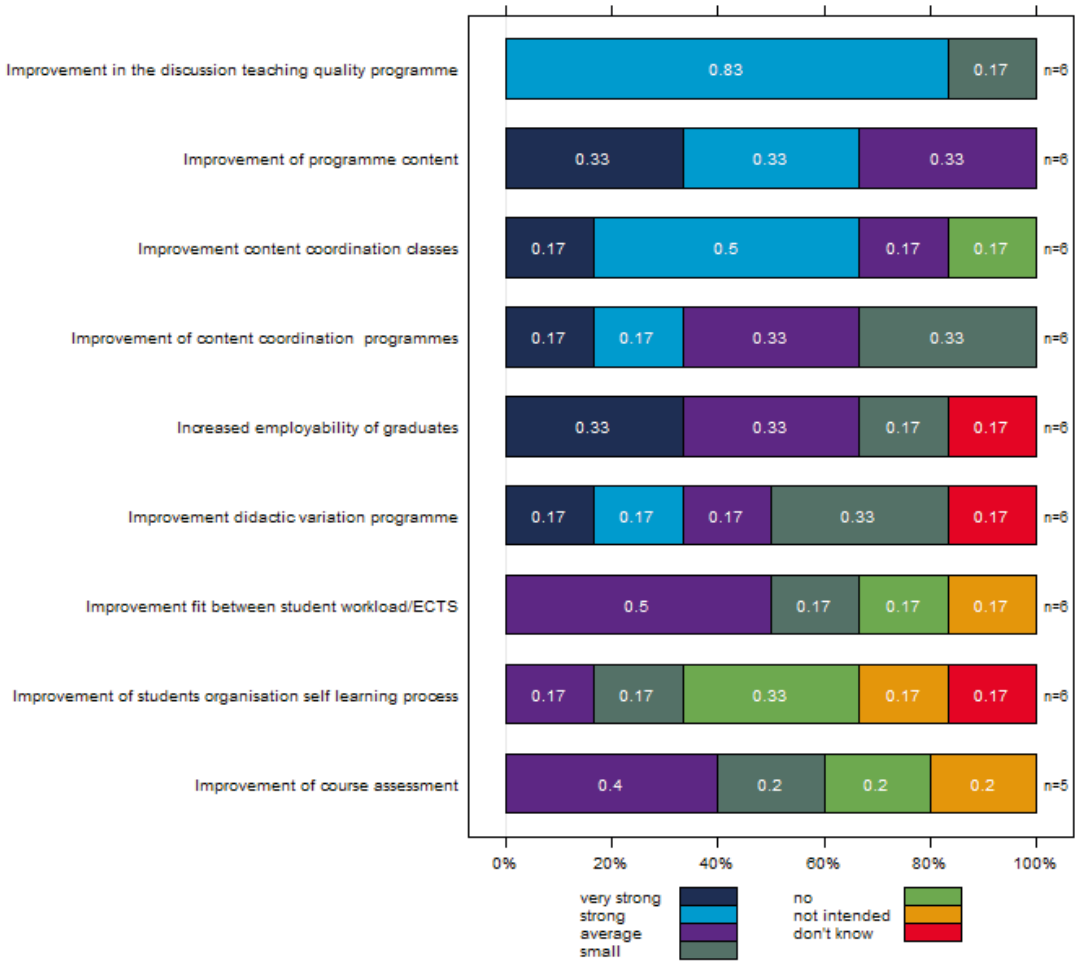


Figure 4.12 Effects of programme evaluations on quality-related aspects from the perspective of academic staff in detail

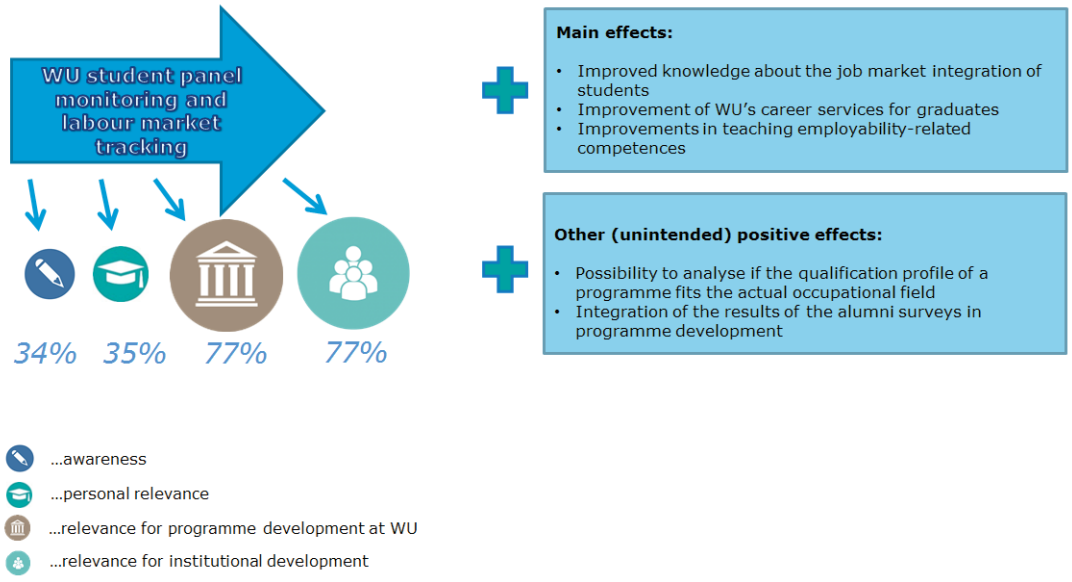


This is mirrored by the perspective of those in programme management positions. One programme director, who had recent experience of programme evaluation, particularly appreciated the 360-degree feedback provided. Allowing different stakeholders (peers from abroad, employers of graduates, alumni, students, and teachers) to discuss a set of evaluation questions, as well as the long-term orientation of the programme, is regarded as a highly effective IQA component.

The relevance and effectiveness of WU's student panel monitoring and labour market tracking

Those respondents familiar with WU's instruments and processes for student and graduate monitoring found them very useful in programme development (see *Figure 4.13*). This was echoed by a senior manager who commented: 'Recent surveys showed that technical knowledge (economics, business) was available at a satisfactory level, but also indicated a lack of skills in other areas (e.g. leadership skills). As a consequence, more enrichment courses focusing on social skills were offered, specific offers for alumni (e.g. courses at WU Executive Academy) were created, and the curricula were partly changed in order to implement social skills exercises into additional courses.'

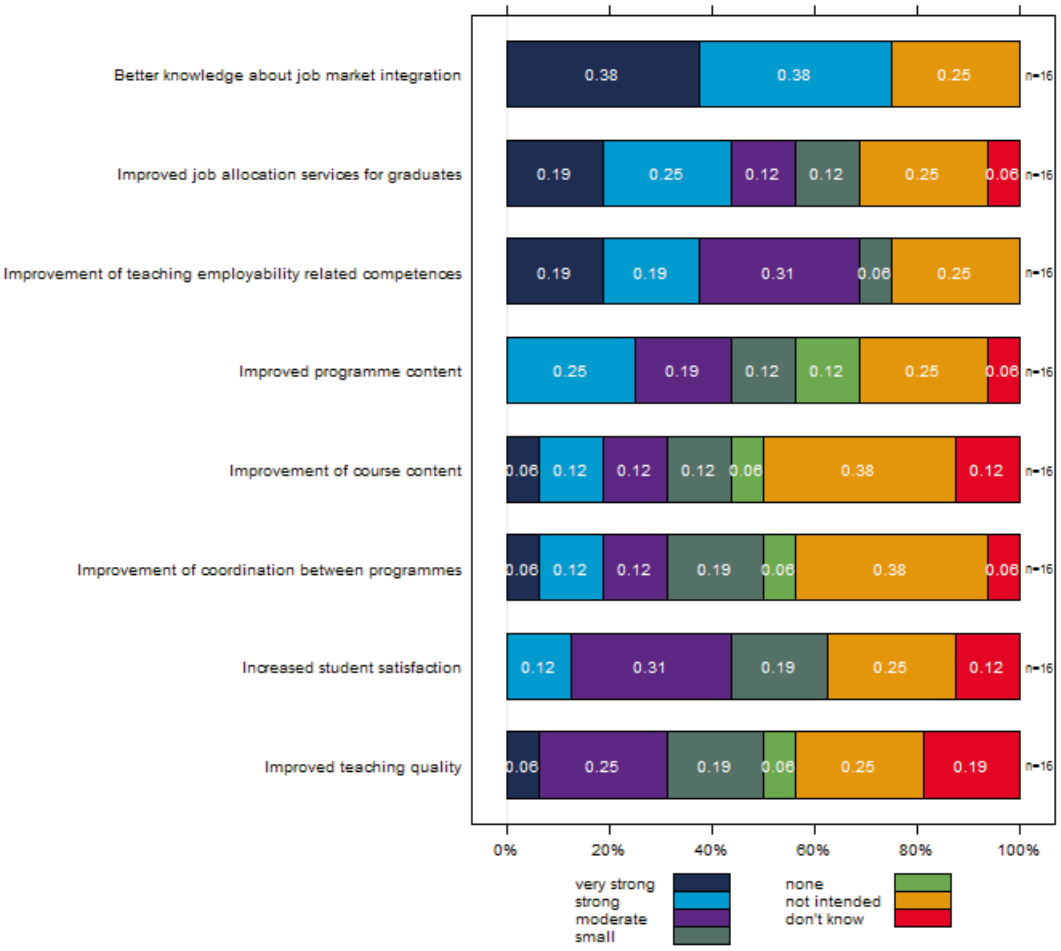
Figure 4.13 Aggregate analysis of the effects of WU's student panel monitoring and labour market tracking



However, according to the academic staff members who responded to these questions, the relevance of these instruments and processes is not limited to programme level, but also impacts on organizational development (see *Figure 4.13*).

According to the survey results (see *Figure 4.14*), WU's student panel monitoring and labour market tracking provide better knowledge as to the jobs market integration of students and graduates, and help programmes to develop clearer qualification profiles (including competences that are clearly employability-driven). In addition, they provide a basis for the university to position and further develop its various career and alumni services.

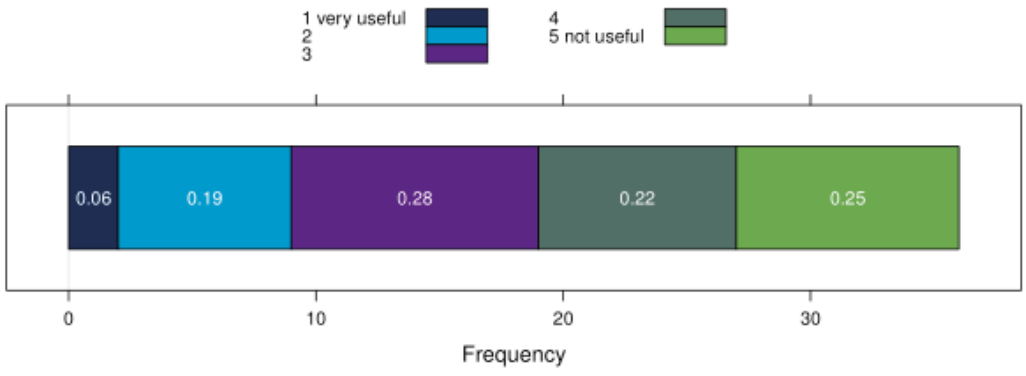
Figure 4.14 Effects of student and graduate monitoring on various quality-related aspects from the perspective of academic staff in detail



The relevance and effectiveness of WU's research evaluations

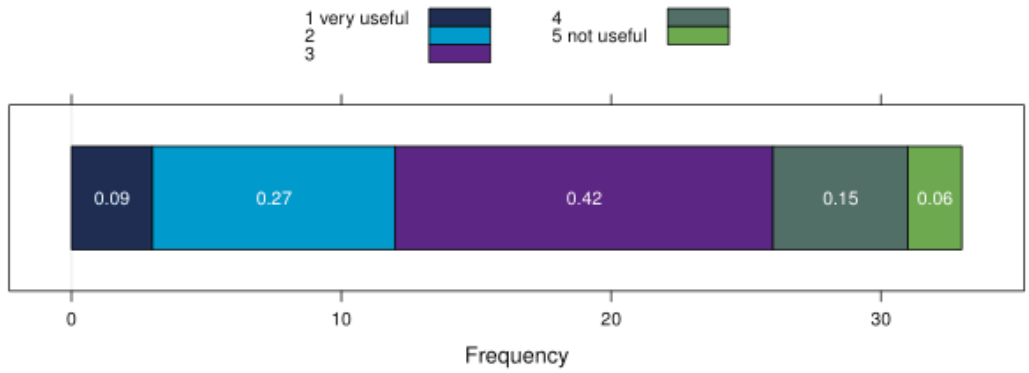
Research evaluations at WU are viewed more ambivalently than teaching evaluations. As *Figure 4.15* shows, not many of the academic staff surveyed regard the current research evaluations as useful in their own work. This may well be due to the fact that these evaluations (as described in *Chapter 3*) are very much output-oriented with the data obtained used chiefly by the university's management (e.g. in terms of performance reviews of individual academics or academic units).

Figure 4.15 Usefulness of research evaluation in terms of impact on one's own research



Although the results improve when the focus shifts to the level of the institution, many staff members remain sceptical (*Figure 4.16*). This may be because the current evaluation scheme only marginally takes into account a department's research strategy and the conditions in which it operates, and is primarily output-oriented. As mentioned in *Chapter 3*, a new evaluation design is being developed. However, the university's senior management expressed doubts about the usefulness of research evaluation at institutional level. Even though it is necessary to document and monitor how effectively money is spent, questioning the freedom of research (and teaching) could very well impugn the university's own status (interview, university council).

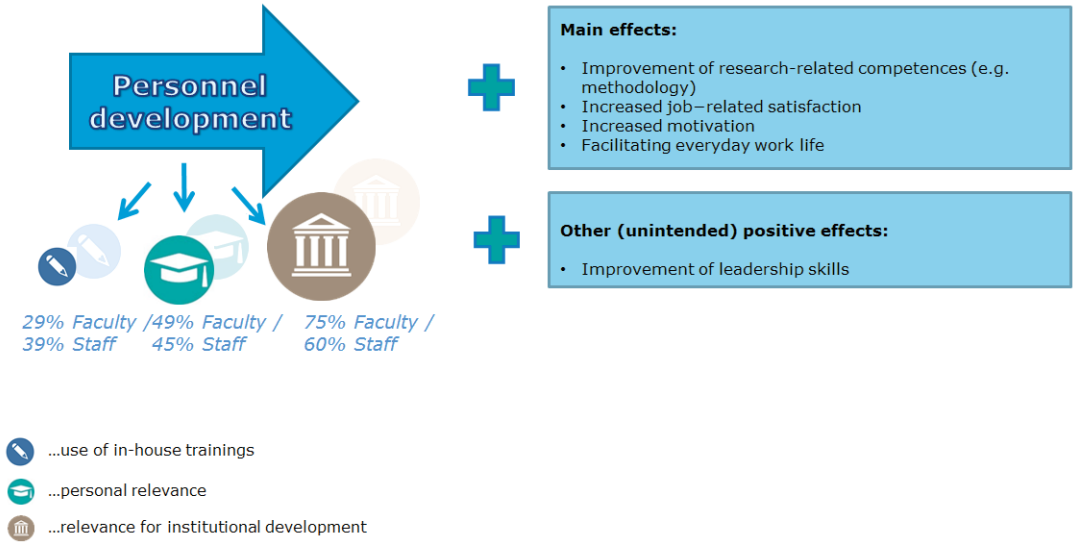
Figure 4.16 Usefulness of research evaluation in terms of quality development on institutional level



The relevance and effectiveness of WU's personnel development programmes

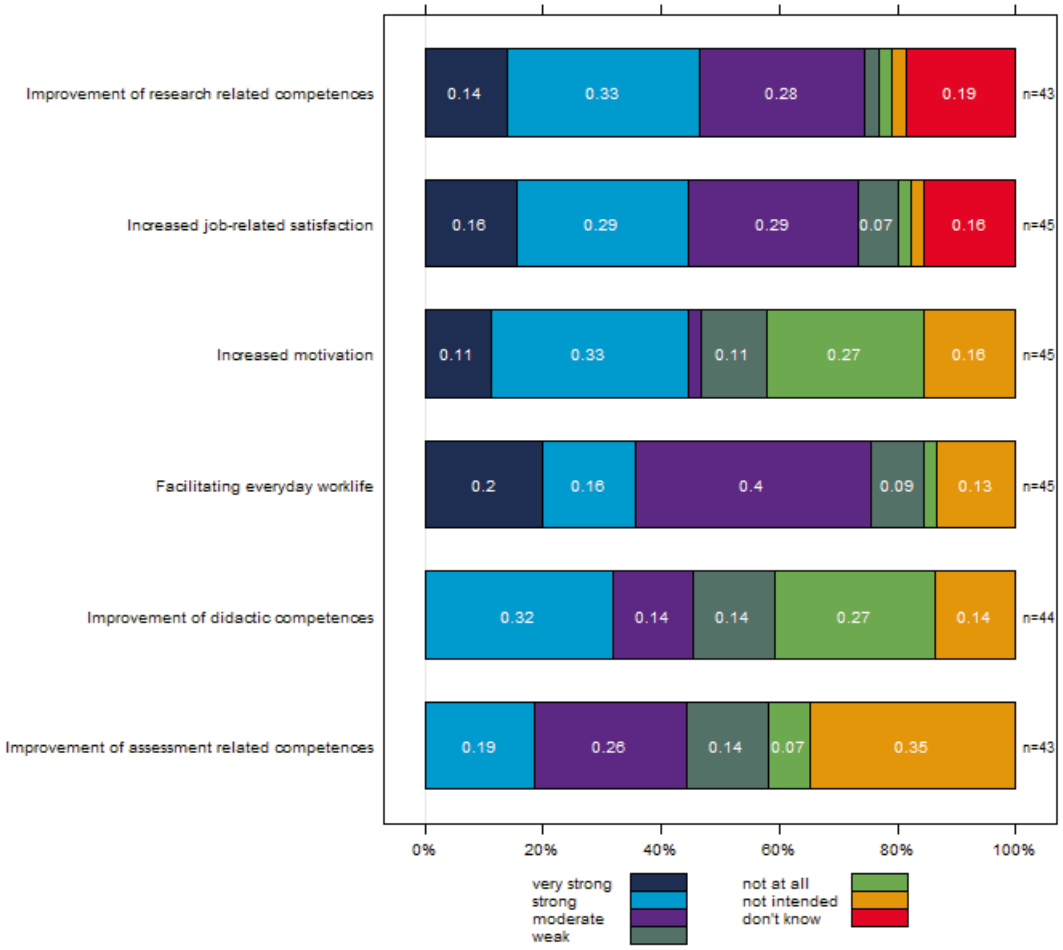
The high level of attendance in various staff development offerings over the last two years (*Chapter 3*) can be attributed to WU's move to a new campus with a new and highly sophisticated teaching and learning infrastructure (see also WU's annual reports). Continuous education is a key value at WU, for academic and administrative staff alike (see *Figure 4.17*).

Figure 4.17 Aggregate analysis of the effects of personnel development



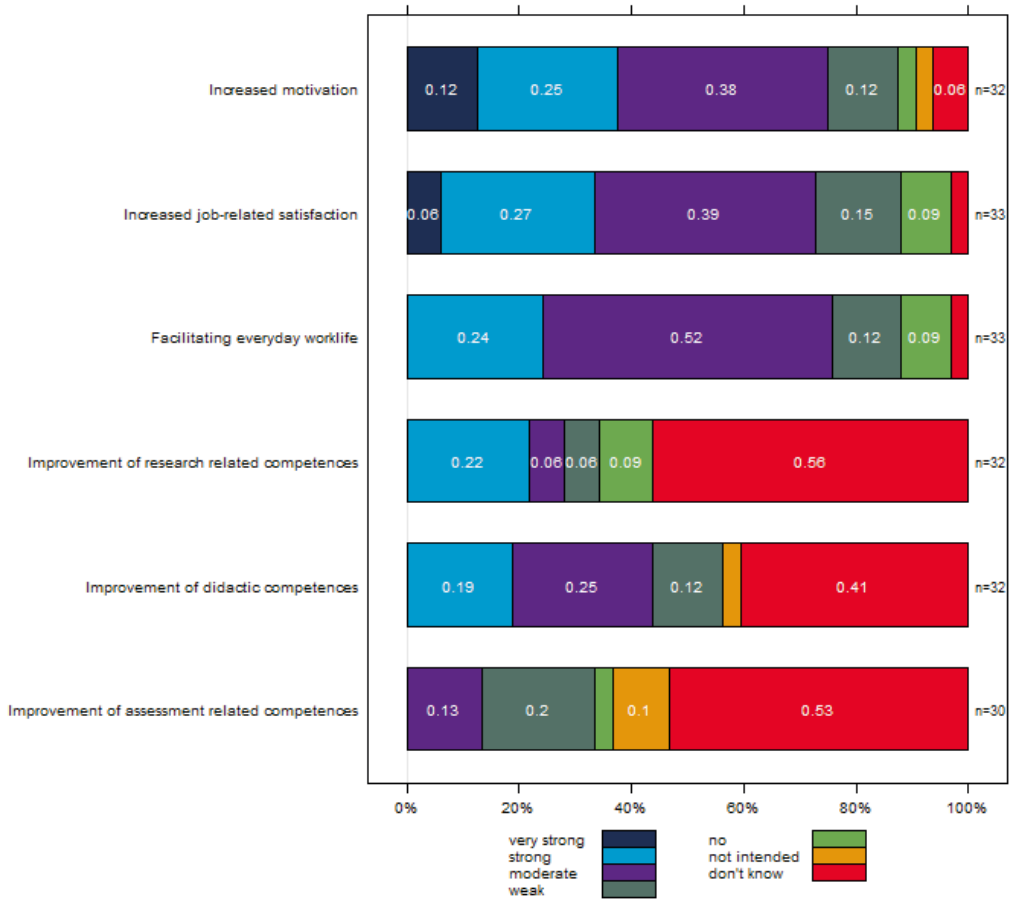
Comparing the two staff groups, it becomes evident that administrative staff use formal staff development programmes more often than do academic staff. Although a variety of development formats (e.g. department workshops, Coffee@Learn community meetings) contribute to improving the teaching and research of academic staff, these activities are not regarded by participants as 'formal staff development'. Both staff groups highly rate the relevance of the staff development offer.

Figure 4.18 Improvement effects of staff development for academic staff in detail



Academic staff (see *Figure 4.18*) rated improvements to their research-related competences (e.g. through courses on specific research methodologies), job satisfaction, and motivation the highest. Improvements in competences related to teaching and assessment were rated less highly. Administrative staff (*Figure 4.19*) also recognize an impact on their job motivation and job satisfaction. Unsurprisingly, they note little benefit in terms of teaching or research skills.

Figure 4.19 Improvement effects of staff development for administrative staff in detail



4.3 Overall assessment of WU's IQA by academic and administrative staff

Overall, all staff rate WU's IQA approach and the system into which it was translated as highly effective and reflexive, particularly in the area of teaching and learning. One department head argued that the main strengths of the IQA system at WU were the high level of innovation and the large pool of available IQA instruments and processes. Although newer instruments, such as programme evaluations or the assurance of learning process, were promising, the data gained from traditional instruments, such as questionnaires for course evaluation, were an important basis for the very well-elaborated reporting system.

According to another interviewee (a programme manager), WU also benefits from the highly competent Department for Programme and Quality Management and from the professional infrastructure provided by its staff. This support helps ensure the staff responsible for IQA within the respective academic units are not overloaded. Even though academic staff experience IQA activity in the area of teaching and learning to be already very intense (*Figure 4.20*), there is little reluctance to engage with it and a comparatively high level of demand for further measures and activities, although the majority are satisfied with the current level (*Figure 4.21*).

Figure 4.20 Perceived level of IQA intensity by academic staff

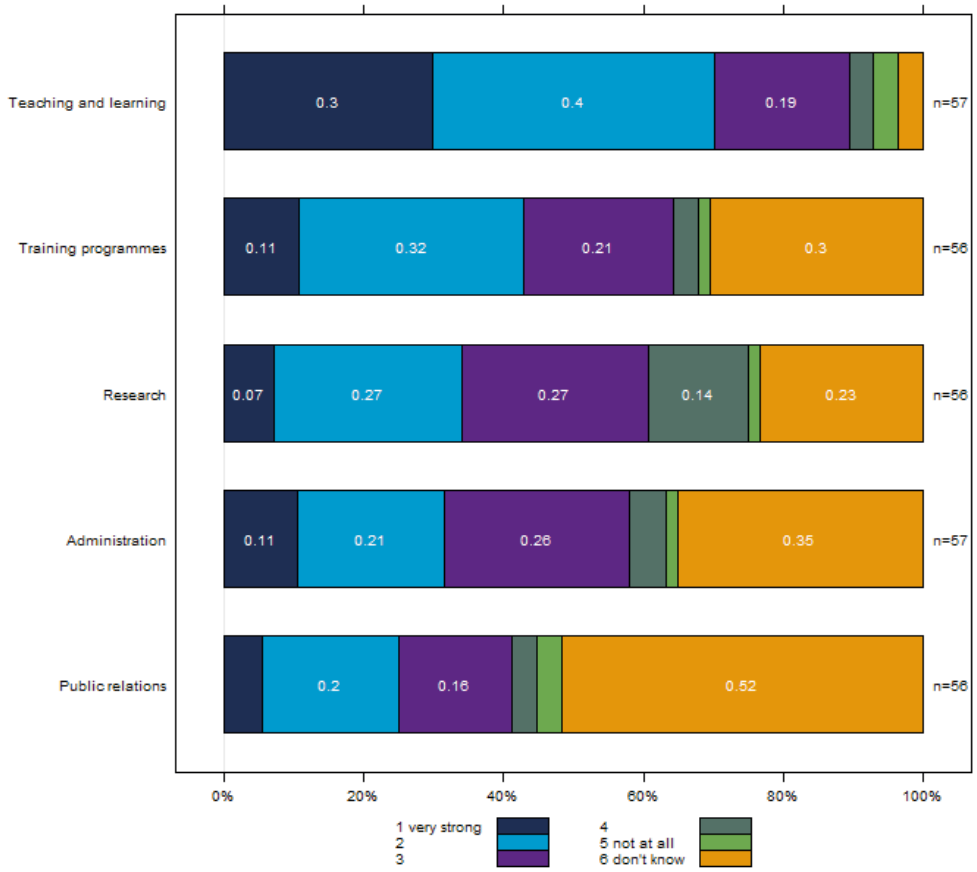
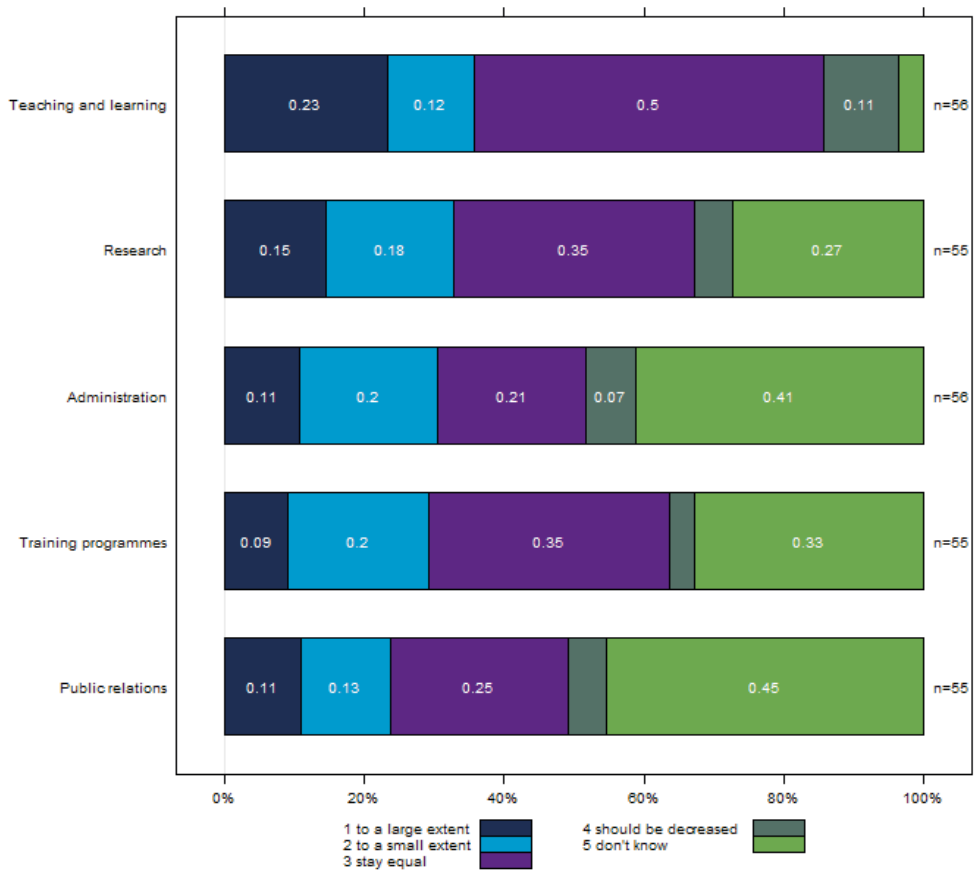


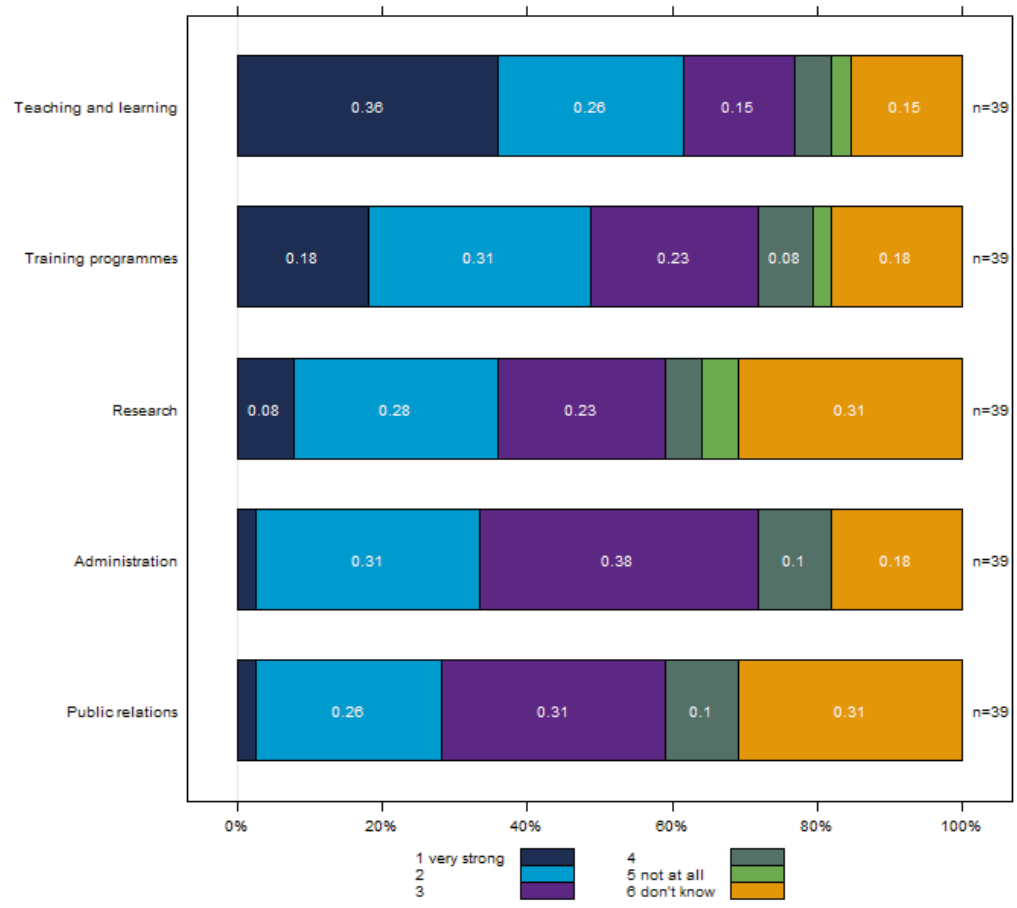
Figure 4.21 Demand for an increase/decrease of IQA intensity by academic staff



Students at both undergraduate and graduate level have little familiarity with the formal IQA system, though they are involved in course-level evaluations. They do, however, recognize that positive changes have taken place to their curriula and in terms of quality and employability and assume that WU has mechanisms in place for initiating these developments and improvements (focus group, undergraduate students). In addition, the students know that they can contact the PQM department in the event of any difficulties. The student union, the official representative of students within the university, can also be approached and can discuss any issue with the responsible staff at WU (focus group, graduate students). In general, feedback loops are perceived to be very important in helping students understand the impact their reviews have had.

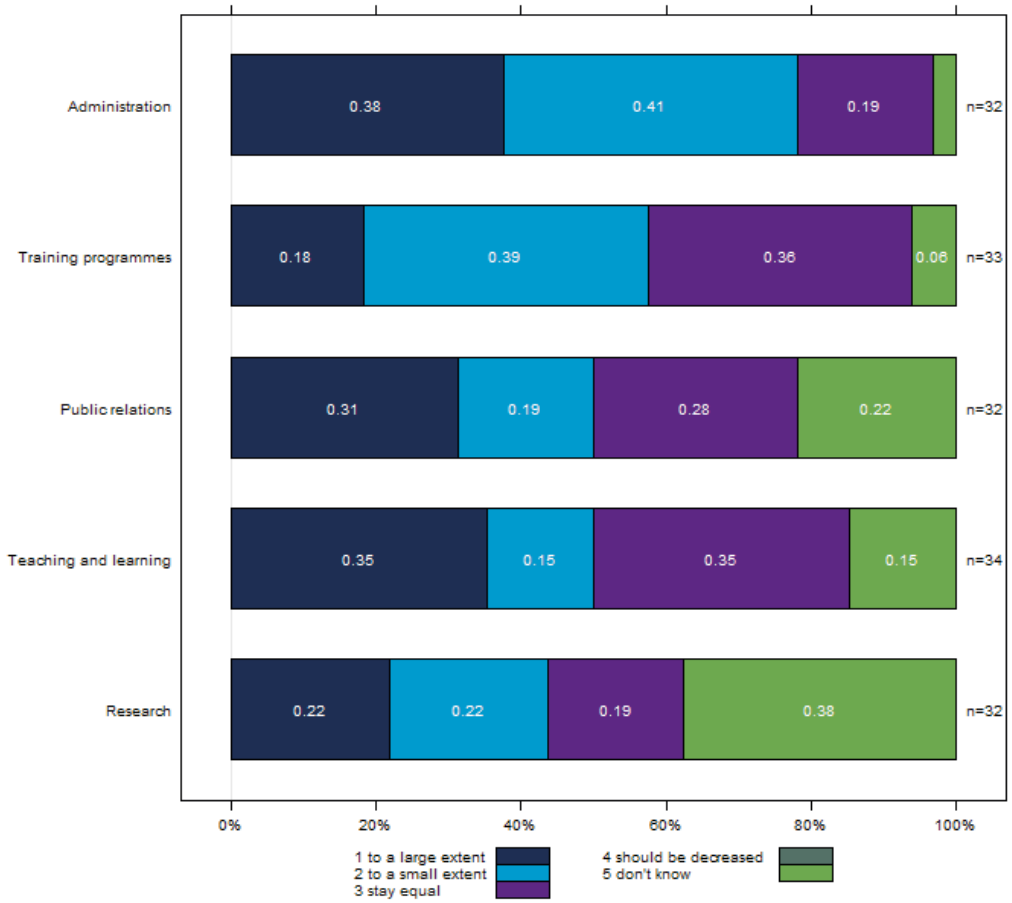
Administrative staff also feel that WU's current IQA efforts are addressing a variety of issues and pervading the institution to a high degree (see *Figure 4.22*). However, they also indicate that IQA activities are more intense in the areas of teaching and learning, training programmes, and research, rather than in administration and public relations.

Figure 4.22 Perceived level of IQA intensity by administrative staff



As with academic staff, administrative staff would like to see more efforts made in their respective working areas, as well as additional training offers in order to improve their work (see *Figure 4.23*). There is little evidence of resistance to more quality assurance, indicating that WU's quality culture philosophy is deeply rooted.

Figure 4.23 Demand for an increase or decrease of IQA intensity by administrative staff



4.4 Special focus: The effects of the IQA system on employability of students

According to WU's academic staff, IQA systems are of most relevance to prospective and current students (see *Figure 4.24*), and less useful to alumni and employers. There are, however, benefits for employers and alumni, though, as the interview and focus group data suggest, they tend to be indirect.

These indirect effects include the role IQA plays in developing for the image of the university. According to the graduate students, the quality of education is reflected in the good reputation WU has among companies (nationally and internationally). However, during the discussions, the students voiced criticisms of the alignment of university studies with the labour market. General knowledge, defined as 'broad knowledge in business administration, accounting, and economics', was seen as more important than detailed, job-specific knowledge, since procedures and processes differ from company to company (focus group, undergraduate).

University managers offered further evidence of the indirect links between IQA and employability. Ensuring employability is the main goal of WU's study programmes, one department head said, and IQA's role was to make sure they fulfilled it. A programme director observed that a good curriculum is problem-oriented, provides a high level of professional expertise, and boosts the employability of graduates. The curriculum should have a degree of stability and not be subject to change too often. Nevertheless, adaptation of the programme should be carried out if it appears necessary on the basis of feedback from IQA instruments. To ensure that the programme can be studied within the standard period of time, professional coordination of the programme in terms of content

and a well-matched schedule of courses is necessary. It is the role of IQA to facilitate and support all these different aspects (interview, programme director). Another programme director said that the main objectives of the review of the curriculum were to focus even more on the qualification profile of the programme and the competences needed for the prospective occupational fields, as well as to ensure the studies can be concluded within the designated time frame (e.g. matching workload with ECTS points).

Figure 4.24 Relevance of IQA by stakeholder group from an academic staff perspective

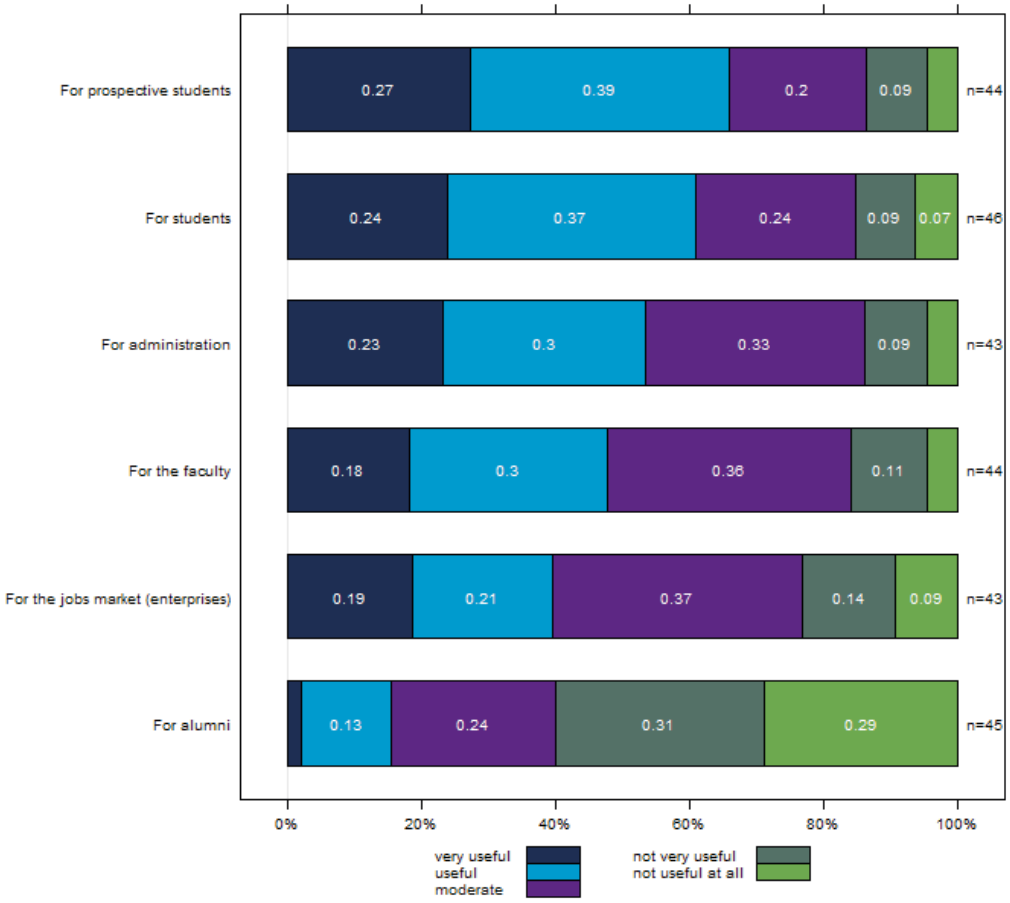


Figure 4.25 Influence of WU's IQA on employability

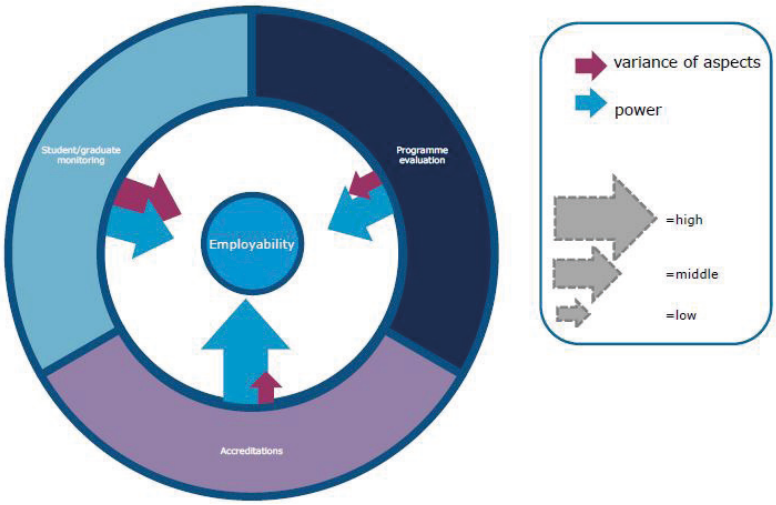
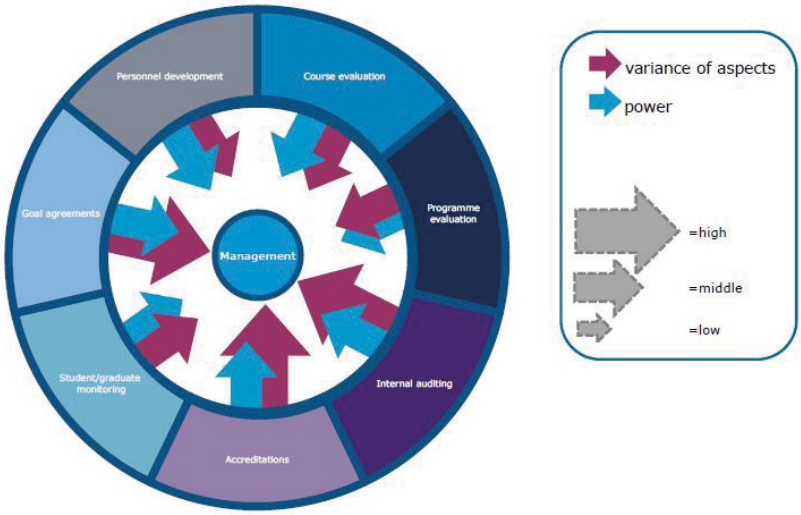


Figure 4.25 summarises the perceived influence of WU's quality assurance instruments and processes on employability (for the methodology behind this summary please refer to *Section 4.3*). As the graph shows, only three of the instruments are perceived to have an effect on employability. The most powerful instrument was thought to be accreditation, which gives a certain prestige to WU graduates in the eyes of employers (explaining the low variance of relevant aspects). WU's programme evaluations and student and graduate monitoring activities are also thought to exert an influence on graduates' job prospects by providing impulses for programme and institutional development activities and helping to sharpen qualification profiles. It is clear from this that the marketing and information function of quality assurance is seen as the most important with regard to links to the labour market.

4.5 Special focus: The effects of the IQA system on management effectiveness

Figure 4.26 Influence of WU's IQA on management effectiveness



As *Figure 4.26* shows, the effects of WU's QA instruments on management effectiveness are more diverse than those on employability. In terms of power, all the instruments depicted in the graph seem roughly equal. However, the number of aspects on which the instruments are perceived to be influential differs, with goal agreements, internal auditing processes, and accreditations showing a broader variance than the others. As we saw in *Section 4.2*, goal agreements support evidence-based decisions and help to professionalise planning and prioritizing. Internal auditing processes ensure that the decisions are carried out in an efficient manner, compliant with various relevant standards.

Course evaluations and student and graduate monitoring activities had relatively little impact on management, unsurprisingly as they are not usually associated with management and certainly not with senior management. It is course administrators, programme directors, and heads of service units who benefit most from them. The respective instruments provide data and insights which support them in improving the areas for which they are responsible. It is important to note that QA can also influence management activities on a micro level, despite the fact that QA systems are usually considered influential only at the macro level of the management.

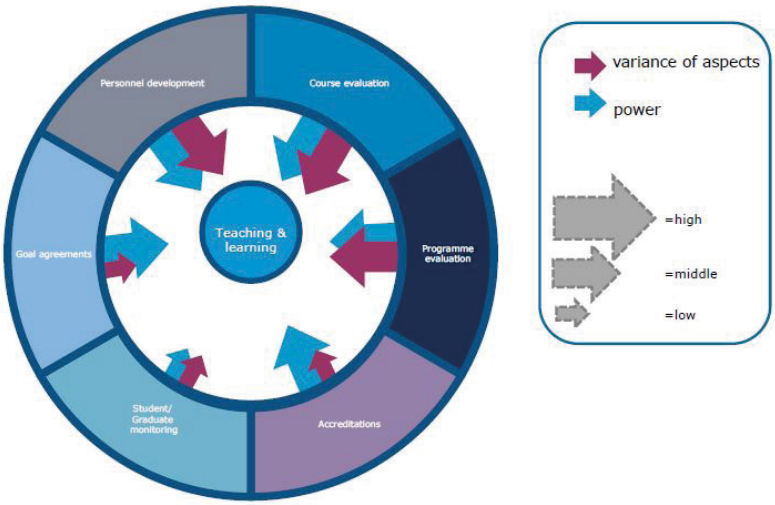
This reflects the views of some of the academic quality promoters interviewed for this study. One said that IQA should be integrated into daily work. No formal IQA system should be needed since everyone has internalized the relevant aspects and applies them

to their everyday practice. The main task of the QA unit is to set the framework and provide the necessary infrastructure (e.g. reports, online teaching support area). Another quality promoter reported that the implementation of quality assurance instruments and processes should be decentralized to a considerable degree, as the diversity of situations and challenges within individual departments makes it necessary to manage them locally.

4.6 Special focus: The effects of the IQA system on teaching and learning

With regard to the effects of WU's IQA instruments and processes on teaching and learning, the most influential seem to be course evaluation, programme evaluation, and administrative staff (personnel) development training (see *Figure 4.27*). Course evaluations can influence teaching and learning in a great variety of ways, whether through course design, teaching style, or content. Programme evaluations are considered to have similar effects, though at the level of the wider curriculum (for details see also *Section 4.2*). One staff development activity might deserve more attention. As one programme director put it, WU's teaching awards for innovative and excellent teaching should be more widely recognized as major drivers for quality development and didactic enhancement.

Figure 4.27 Influence of WU's IQA on teaching and learning



The influence of goal agreements and accreditation is perceived to be powerful, though one-dimensional. The former can provide new impulses for teaching development and make them explicit, while the latter helps to shift attention to teaching and learning, especially if accreditation is learning-oriented, as is the case with AACSB. WU's student panel monitoring and labour market tracking were perceived to have a minor effect with regard to new teaching and learning impulses.

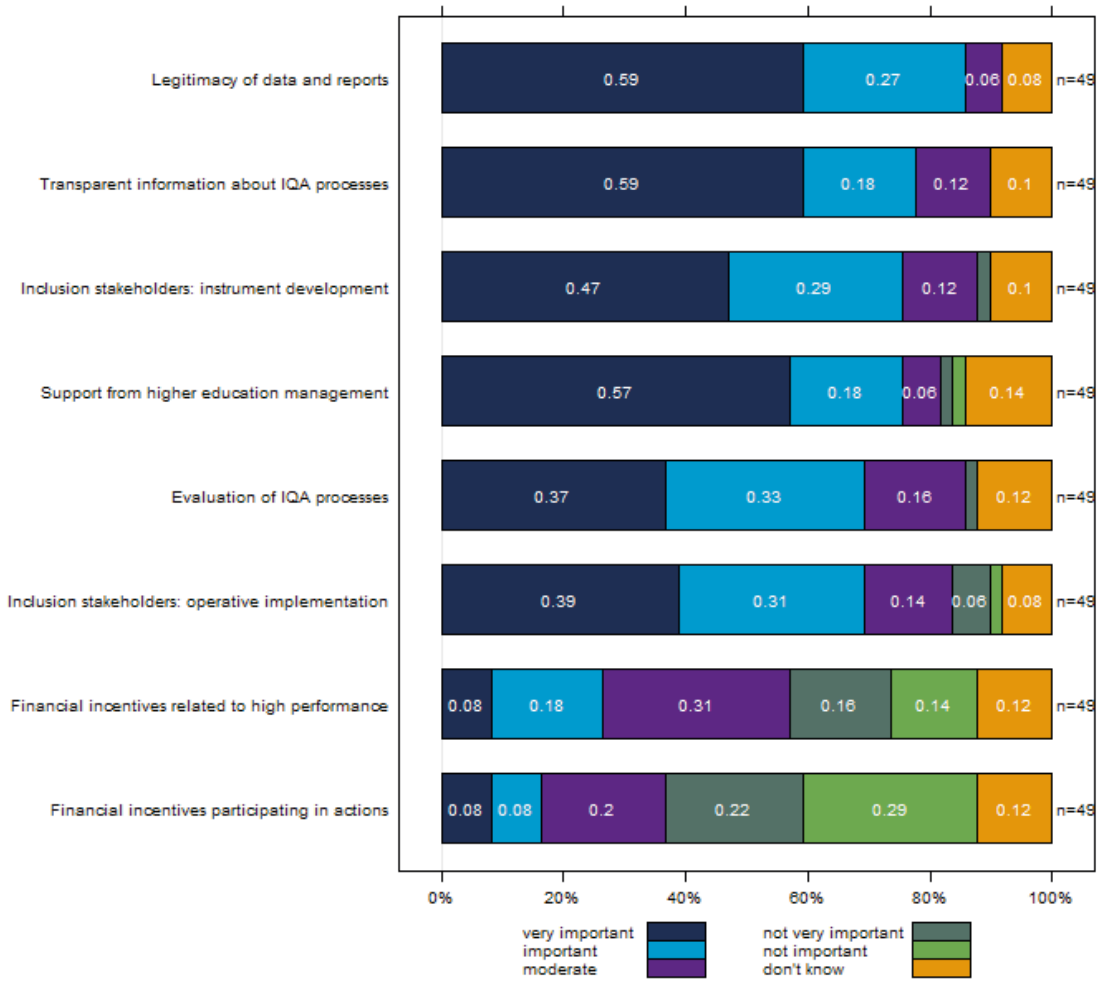
Students, in their focus group interviews, suggested that transparency in the assessment of student performances and grading policies, central to the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG, 2015), is crucial for improved teaching and learning. Transparency might be achieved through the gradebook function on the e-learning platform, Learn@WU, which works as a kind of student portfolio and helps students to track their individual development.

Finally, one way in which WU expects to improve its teaching and learning is through the assurance of learning process described in *Chapter 3*. The impact of the initiative will be carefully assessed as it develops.

5. Success factors for IQA

There are several factors in WU's IQA system that are perceived as successful by most stakeholders. The detailed factors are presented in the section below.

Figure 5.1 Success factors of IQA from academic staff perspective



According to academic staff, the legitimacy of the data and reports generated by the IQA system and the transparency of information about IQA play the biggest role (see *Figure 5.1*). If the methodology is sound and the data are trustworthy, any decision-making based on them can command higher acceptance. This seems highly plausible from an academic point of view, where high academic and scientific standards are the basis for any kind of progress.

The professional way in which data are gathered and analysed at WU was raised by almost every interviewee from the university's management. One of the programme directors saw a particular strength in the strong empirical evidence IQA provided for any kind of discussion (e.g. in the form of alumni and student surveys). Another programme manager emphasized the professional processing of large amounts of data, the gathering of indicators, and, again, the sound empirical basis as key strengths of WU's IQA system.

The generation and analysis of data are not sufficient, however, without the effective communication that helps to transform data into information and deliver it to the actors who need it. Growing professionalization in reporting over the past few years was seen to

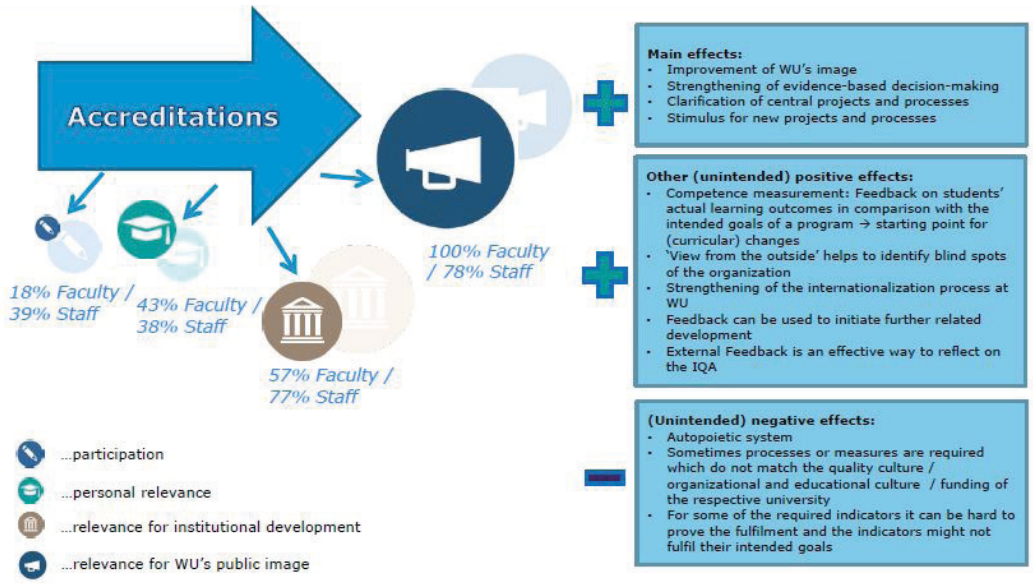
be very helpful in this respect. Compiling the key indicators of the programme director's report in the central PQM department makes it possible for the programme director and programme coordinator to analyse relevant trends without having to create a specific reporting system by themselves (interview, programme manager).

Academic staff rate the transparent handling of the respective processes and outcomes and the involvement of relevant internal stakeholders (mainly academic staff and students) as of roughly equal importance. Much more important to them, though, is support from the university's senior management. One quality promoter noted that the well-structured IQA system covered the needs of different stakeholders, programmes, and organizational units very well. Overall, the relation between centralized and decentralized IQA roles, structures, and processes seems well balanced at WU (interview, vice-rector).

The perception that financial incentives and rewards are less important owes something to the prevailing quality culture at WU. WU has a long tradition of constructive dialogue, which is an important aspect of the IQA system (interview, vice-rector). The quality culture, which WU has been cultivating for more than a decade now, has encouraged actors at every level to engage with quality imporvment. As a result, WU's academic staff regard incentives and rewards as largely irrelevant to the success of IQA (*Figure 5.1*).

Finally, any successful IQA system must undergo external review regularly. External quality assurance is seen as an important driver in this regard (interview, university council member). WU's strategy of acquiring elite accreditation has been a pivotal factor here. This is demonstrated by *Figure 5.2*, which shows how important WU's academic staff regard accreditation as being in terms of institutional development.

Figure 5.2 Aggregate analysis of the effects of accreditations

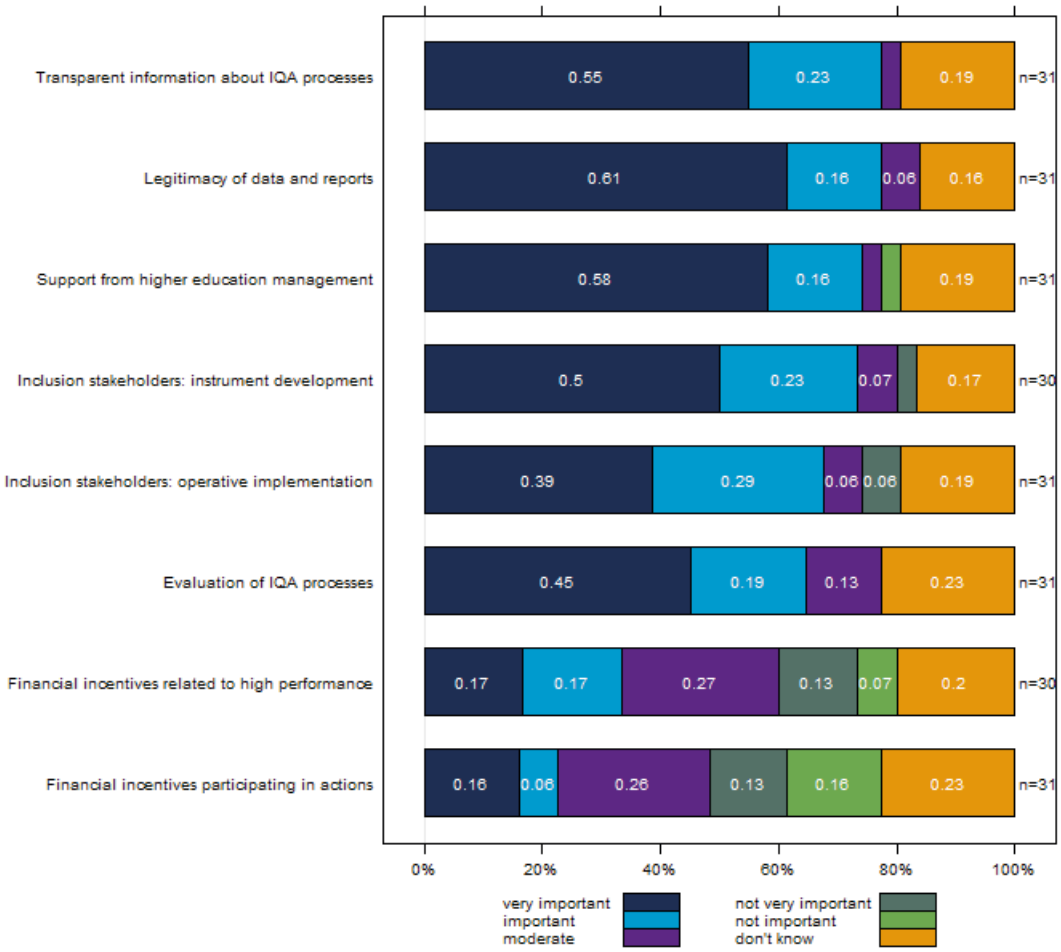


According to one of the interviewees, there are also negative side effects, for example when accreditation requires certain methods or instruments designed to suit the system of higher education of their country of origin. Another interviewee was critical of what he saw as the fast-growing accreditation industry. To him, accreditation agencies justify their activities with high requirements for quality from the higher education institutions and have developed an almost self-perpetuating system.

The perspectives of administrative staff on success factors for IQA show some expected similarities – but also some interesting differences (see *Figure 5.3*). Transparency and the legitimacy of data and reports rank as the two most important aspects (and have

only switched places) – yet the involvement of internal stakeholders is seen as far less important, by comparison with the perceptions of academic staff and students. One possible explanation for this is the different roles of the actor groups. Academic staff and students often perceive themselves as the 'concerned' parties in matters of quality assurance (Newton, 2000; 2002). Administrative staff, on the other hand, are mostly tasked with coordinating and supporting the IQA system. From their perspective, any additional actor that needs to be taken on board makes their jobs more difficult, and the outcome less predictable. Unsurprisingly, the involvement of senior management is the exception here: without them, success would be difficult to achieve.

Figure 5.3 Success factors from administrative staff perspective



The students defined the success of an IQA system not in terms of its processes but by its impact on their learning. To them, the quality of education is characterized by clear responsibilities and contact people who can help them, as well as by an adequate staff-student ratio and regular communication between administrative or academic staff and students. They also identify the need for adequate teaching-learning infrastructure, lecturers with appropriate professional and teaching skills, and a curriculum that is meaningful and can be completed within an acceptable timespan (focus group, undergraduate students).

6. Conclusions

This chapter reviews the main findings of the study. The key factors that characterize the IQA system at WU, and which are responsible for its current state of maturity, will be presented, and some areas for improvement identified. Some of the plans currently in train to strengthen the system will also be set out. Readers should be aware that the findings and future plans must be understood in the context of WU's own institutional culture and cannot, therefore, be straightforwardly transferred to other institutional contexts.

Figure 6.1 Overall assessment of WU's IQA system

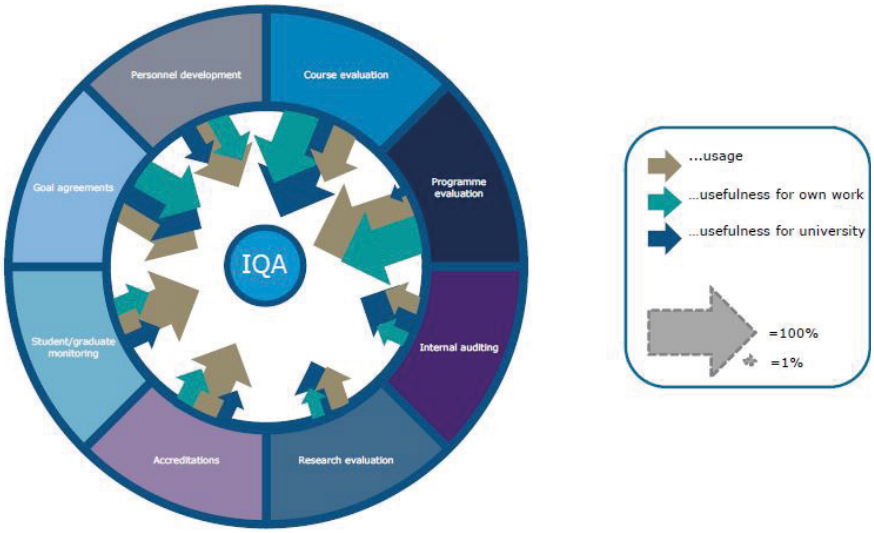


Figure 6.1 summarizes the findings concerning the use and usefulness of IQA instruments from *Section 4.2*. Based on the surveys of both academic and administrative staff, the graph reflects the strong integration of different instruments and processes into the routines of university members. It also demonstrates the extent to which they are perceived as useful for the improvement of individuals' work as well as for institutional development. The resulting picture is a complex one.

There are instruments, such as WU's new programme evaluations, that are hardly known or used in the institution (largely because of the instrument's newness, but also because only a small number of actors are actively involved in it), though they appear useful. Other instruments, such as course evaluations, are known by almost everyone in the university, yet are of comparably little relevance for developments at the institutional level.

There is also some room for improvement, given that staff development instruments are regarded as being of more importance for the institution than for the individual actor. And the internal view on research evaluations indicates a need to broadly discuss the current approach as well as the expectations attached to it.

Moving away from instrumental issues, summarizing the interview results provides some interesting insights as to the strengths of the overall system, and the gaps that exist within it:

Table 6.1 Overview of interview and focus group results (H – high, M – medium)

		Institutional level	Department level	Programme level	Students
Management information system	Management information system (data, reporting, evidence)	H	H	H	
Roles & responsibilities and organizational set up	Competences and skills of relevant actors	M	M		
	Management infrastructure (e.g. programme director meetings)	M		M	
	Cooperation centralized/ decentralized responsibilities		H	M	
Quality culture and communication	Positive climate/dialogue orientation	M	M	H	
	Integration of QA into everyday life	M	H		
	IQA awareness		H		M
Transparency	High level of transparency		M		M
Follow-up phase	Feedback and complementary measures		M		

Table 6.1 shows a clustered and condensed summary of all the interview and focus group results and, thus, allows a synthesized view of the main strengths of WU's IQA system, from the management and student perspective. It is important to note that the categories are derived from the source material; this is not a predesigned grid against which the results were then assessed.

The results show that two aspects are particularly important: the management information system, as the backbone of any managerial process, and the quality culture, as the foundation for engagement with quality enhancement at various levels. There are too many isolated reports that simply follow the logic of the survey or data query upon which they are based. A management information system needs to be more than a data warehouse that brings together different data sources. It should help to bring the right kind of data to the respective users and make sense of the findings. Without a structured environment where people can exchange their views on problems and challenges, and a climate in which they are willing to do so, defining a problem and developing acceptable solutions (which are both at the heart of any quality management cycle in higher education) will be almost impossible. In this process, aligning different stakeholder perspectives is a key function – but also a key challenge – for an IQA system. This has to happen across disciplines and roles within an institution – and in awareness of the need to balance centralized and decentralized responsibilities. Creating a quality culture is, therefore, as important as establishing the management information system.

Table 6.1 not only highlights the strengths of WU's current IQA system, but also its blind spots and potential weaknesses. Following the column on students, it is clear that their view of the system differs markedly from the others. The students are familiar with only some small parts of the overall system; they lack any 'backstage insights' and are rarely informed about the achievements of the system. As with all the other groups, students approach quality via proxies, but the proxies differ. In their case, the proxies, for the

most part, are the image of the university, the duration of their studies, and the question of employability. As long as feedback loops are only implemented in one direction (i.e. with the students providing feedback but not knowing what happens afterwards), the students and the institution cannot benefit from full cooperation on quality development. In other words, the communicative quality culture at WU, as described above, needs to be extended to involve students and graduates in a more meaningful way. Above all, infusing processes with meaning and helping actors to make sense of the organization and its relevant environment is, in our view, one of the most intriguing (and important) challenges for quality assurance systems in general.

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The case study

Quality assurance (QA) has become a central element of the Bologna process in Europe. In Austria, with the introduction of the University Act in 2002, higher education institutions were granted full autonomy in QA. As a public university, the Vienna University of Economics and Business (WU) was one of the first Austrian universities to introduce and develop an internal quality assurance (IQA) system. Grounded in both evidence from data and internal dialogue, this system aims to create a quality culture, as well as to ensure communication and organizational learning through various feedback loops.

Conducted within the framework of an international research project implemented by the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), this case study focuses on how WU's IQA system – strongly based on a culture of quality – influences the university in terms of teaching and learning, employability, and management.

The authors

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