

Developing internal quality processes: Why and how?

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**Quality Culture and Recognition of
Slovene Universities**

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Spread of interviews

Country of the institution	Number of interviews	Type of posts	Number of interviews
Austria	2	Rector	1
Finland	7	Vice rectors	9
France	5	Faculty leadership	15
Hungary	6	Dept leadership/ academics	11
Ireland	10	Students	6
Lithuania	8	QA officers	11
Portugal	1	Others	6
Spain	9		
Sweden	7		
UK-Scotland	4		

What is quality culture?

QUALITY CULTURE

Formal quality
assurance processes

Tools and processes to
define, measure, evaluate,
assure, and enhance quality



Quality commitment
Cultural element

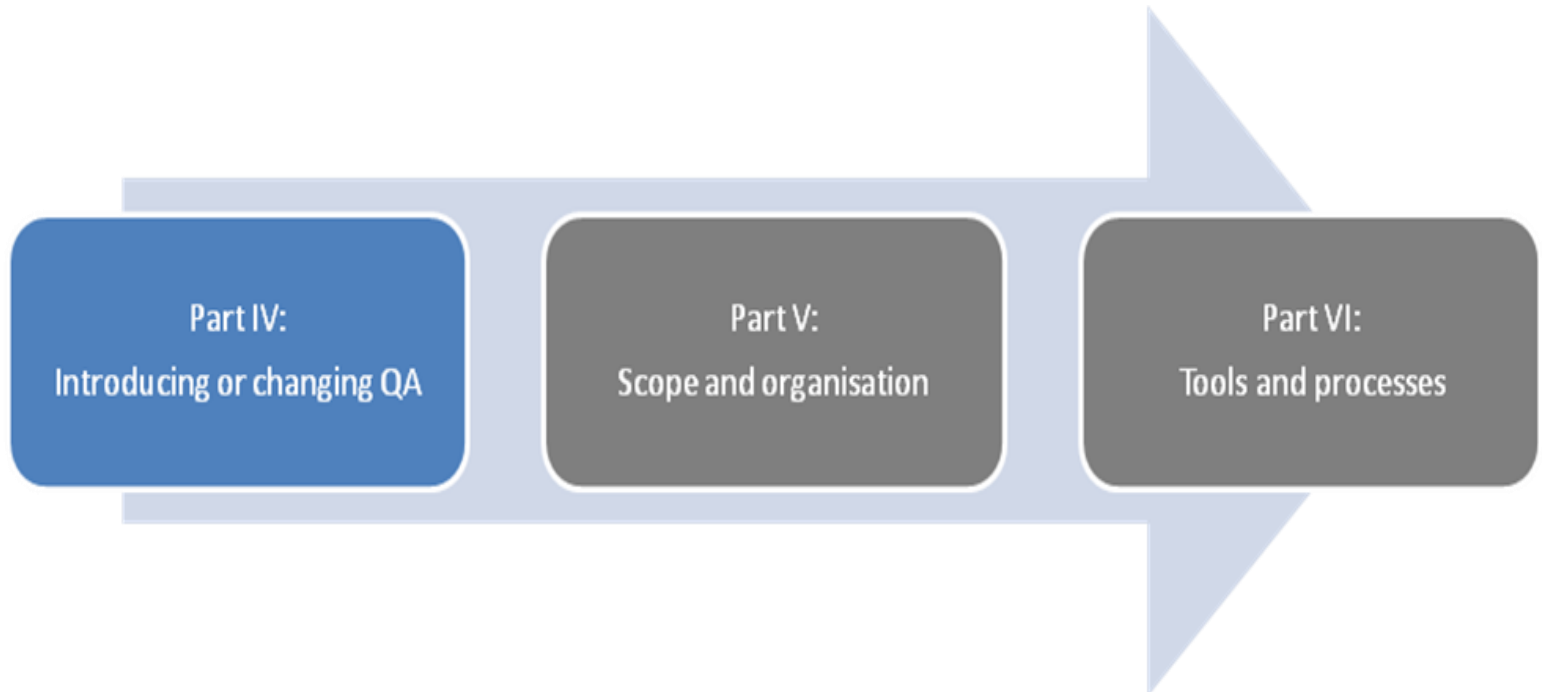
Individual level: personal
commitment to strive for
quality

Collective level: individual
attitudes and awareness
add up to culture

National policy changes in the ten countries

Source: Trends 2010

	Autonomy	QA	Funding	Mergers & federations	Others
Austria	●	●			
Finland	●		●	●	
France	●	●	●	●	
Hungary		●		●	Research
Ireland		●	●		Research
Lithuania	●	●	●		
Portugal	●	●			
Spain	●	●			Academic careers
Sweden		●	●	●	
UK-Scot		●	●		



Introducing internal quality processes

During the three years preceding the merger, the QA office organised a series of seminars, events and “Quality Days” to discuss quality assurance processes. Some of these events targeted the whole staff; others were more focused toward students, internal auditors, managers, etc. Surprisingly, there was no opposition because the university community knew that the merger was an obligation and that quality assurance processes could be the tools to achieve a better merger.

Introducing internal quality processes

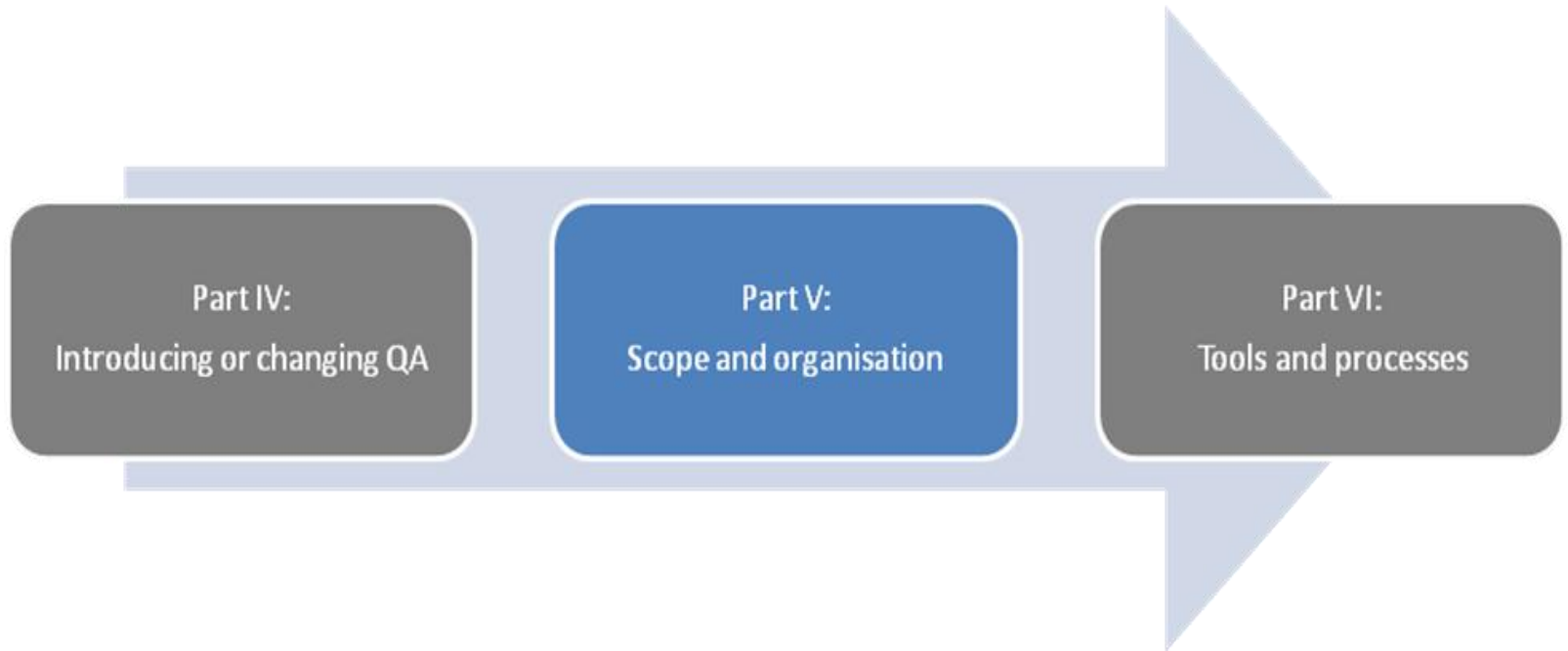
Today the academics see the quality assurance processes as a burden with which they must comply. The academics do not feel ownership of the concept and feel detached from it in their everyday activities.

Introducing internal quality processes

Externally or internally-defined QA processes?

Several universities felt that the scope and definition of internal quality assurance arrangements as set by their national QA agency were not appropriate to their purposes or too narrow.

These institutions went beyond the national requirements and took the initiative of defining their quality assurance systems in a way that fit their own mission, objectives and values.



Organisation: role of leadership

Leadership role is crucial. If the leadership does not believe in the importance of quality assurance, it will not penetrate. The rector communicates the importance of this by talking to the deans. It is then up to them to discuss it in their faculties. One of the most important aspects of quality assurance arrangements is that they offer a tool for the leadership: through the measurements (input, output and process), they can get an overall picture of how the university is doing.

Organisation: role of students

Students are involved at all levels of the university, from planning courses to university strategy and budgets. I was very surprised to see that the university was very open to student input in decision-making. Students are consulted in a meaningful way but they are more useful on some topics (courses) than on others (university budget). At the faculty or department level, students are involved in course planning and course development. They sit on the department councils which give input to the faculty. Teachers get together in programme groups (no student) and in programme boards that review programme proposals (with students).

Organisation: role of staff and stakeholders

- Role of staff:
 - Academics are usually involved, particularly through programme committees... but
 - Administrative staff are rarely involved
- Stakeholders:
 - Involved through programme committees... But
 - A possible trend toward developing alumni relations and alumni questionnaires that would feed into the quality discussions

Organisation: QA offices - main functions

- Supportive role and providing expertise:

The visits to departments and faculties made the difference. People felt listened to and were happy that someone from the central administration came to them. You can't imagine the amount of coffee I drank, the number of biscuits I ate and the stories I heard!

- Coordination role:

My main interactions are with the vice rector for quality, the head of pedagogical development with whom I brainstorm regularly and a senior planning officer, with whom I work on issues connected with institutional data performance

Organisation: QA office - main functions

- Interpretive role:

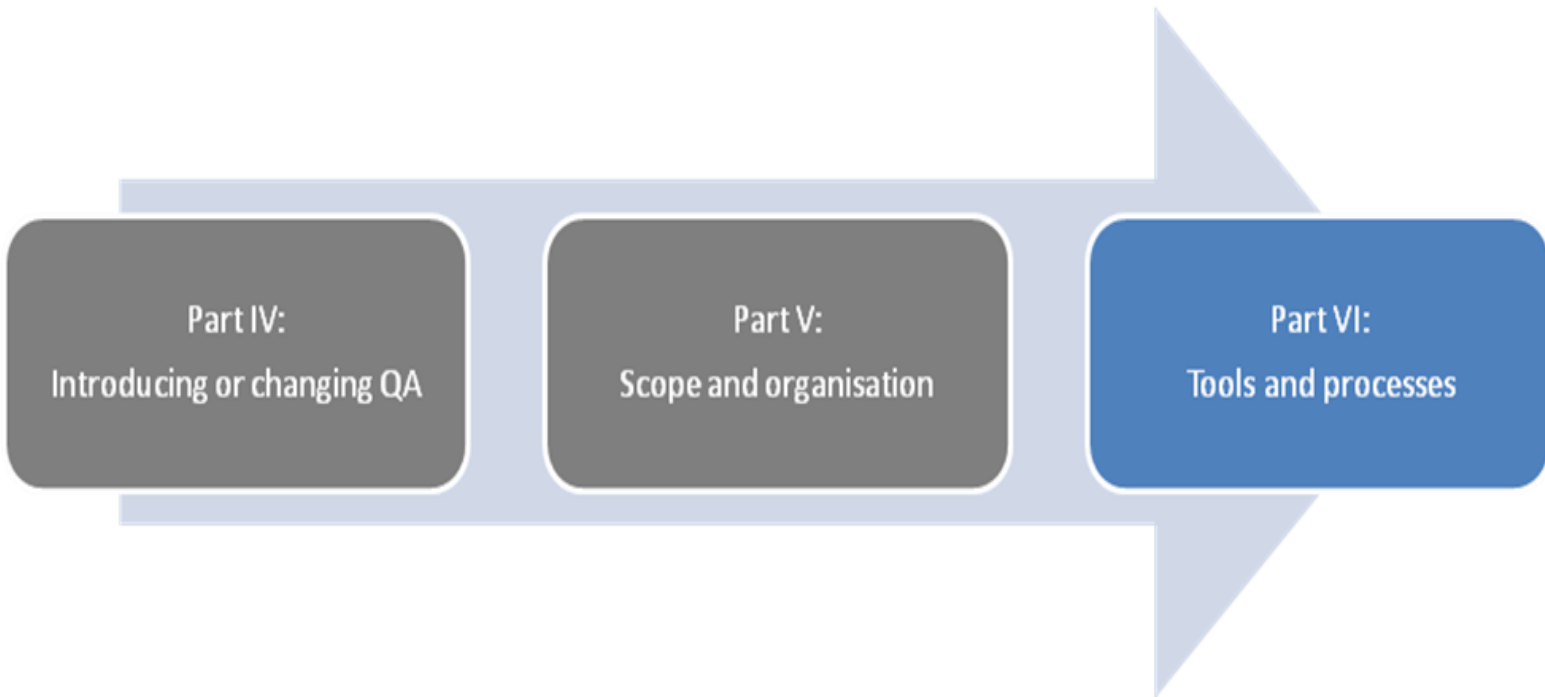
I do not know the national QA requirements and I do not want to know them. We have decided to avoid the question altogether. It is the QA officer's job to follow national developments. Our aim is to develop a quality culture adapted to the institution (an academic staff).

- Monitoring role

- Administrative role

Coordination and governance

- Coordinating QA, staff development and institutional data collection/analysis
- Feedback loops, streamlined structures and clear responsibilities



Tools: students questionnaires

- Most common way to introduce QA processes:
 - 71.6% of respondents to the EQC survey
 - 92.4% of those take the results into account in the assessment of teaching staff
- Some good examples, BUT...

Tools : key performance indicators

- *The annual review provides important data on a variety of performance indicators (number of students who graduated, number of publications, etc.); how the quality assurance system is working; if there have been any complaints. The faculty executive team examines the problem areas and makes decisions about resources.*
- *There is a sense that the metrics are insufficient to capture the complexity of the reality on the ground (e.g., pass rates) and are open to a variety of interpretations. Interpretation from the university centre tends to be inadequate and to simplify the situation.*

Tools: staff development

- Growing awareness that it is an important building block of the quality processes
- Linked explicitly or implicitly to them
- Resources: HR unit, Centre for L&T, external expertise

Main conclusions

- It is important not to rely on a single instrument, such as the student questionnaires, particularly if it shapes staffing decisions.
- The most effective internal QA arrangements are those that derive from effective internal decision-making processes and structures and give some measure of local adaptation in the faculties.
- Like external quality assurance, internal processes are also about power and internal quality assurance can be contested if it does not successfully engage the university community.