

Assessment of academic libraries in Andalusia (southern Spain): an EFQM-compliance guide

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Abstract

The achievement of excellence is the challenge facing the University Library in the 21st Century. With this objective in mind, a project has been developed, to operate at regional level, for the assessment of the Andalusian University Library System. Led by the Andalusian Universities Quality Unit (UCUA), it will be implemented by a group of librarians from different Andalusian Universities. The project team has drawn up the Self-Assessment Guide, based on the EFQM Excellence Model. This paper undertakes to describe the steps followed in the preparation of, and the issues dealt with by, the Self-Assessment Guide.

Introduction

The pressure brought to bear on public services by the demands of quality and efficiency has led university managers and administrators to take full account of the need to evaluate their organization in terms of its performance.

Within the university as a whole, the library constitutes an ever more complex organizational-technological-informational system, which must reflect the needs and preoccupations of the prevailing socioeconomic environment and adapt its products and services to suit the user.

What is the best way to identify opportunities to offer added value in university library services? What are the strong and weak points of those services? Is the library mission statement defined in terms that suitably underline the value of those services to the university community or to its stakeholders? These are all questions that need to be resolved by the new planning and assessment policies of university libraries.

The awareness of the need to provide an overall combination of services and products which best meet the demands and expectations of an ever-growing group of users, who, for their part, are responsive to the variations in the supply and demand of services generated by the (ever-more competitive) information market, and the additional requirement to manage ever-diminishing resources in the most efficient way possible, provide the framework within which the Pilot Scheme for the Assessment of University Libraries in Andalusia (1999-2002) was originally conceived(2).

Assessment and quality assurance in the higher education sector in Spain

The 1990s was a decade of assessment and quality throughout the University sector in Spain and the European Union, and began with the Experimental Programme for Quality Assessment in Universities (1992-1994), which sought inspiration from prevailing international practice. Under the remit of this programme, the Council of Universities (the public body in charge of university matters in Spain) chose to build on an integrated and institution-wide approach of self-evaluation plus external review by experts of teaching and learning, research, services and organization.

During the same period, a European pilot programme was developed, for quality management in the university administration and service areas, which greatly helped to expand the culture of quality among administrative and service staff and to spread strong support for the adoption of the EFQM model of excellence as the model for the assessment of services.

In 1994, the EU launched a new pilot project for quality assessment in the higher education sector, to develop a European model for quality assessment (limited to teaching and learning); by the end of 1996, a number of conclusions had been reached: the autonomous and independent nature of the bodies in charge of the management, coordination and development of assessment and quality assurance activities must be safeguarded; the assessment process must allow for the matching and adaptation of evaluation mechanisms to individual institutional profiles, as well as for the participation of all stakeholder and the confluence of internal and external elements; and, finally, the results of the assessment must be made publicly available.

The European Commission passed the conclusions of the European Project as recommendations, at the same time that the Spanish Government was setting up a National Programme for Quality Assessment in Universities (1995), and consequently, the recommendations of the Commission were incorporated into the Spanish programme. In short, the Commission's recommendations established that quality assessment activities must seek to improve the quality of products and services as well as to offer accurate information to

stakeholders on the use and the ultimate performance of resources channelled into the system.

From 1996 onwards, the National Programme and the adoption of its agenda by regional authorities and Universities alike, has resulted in a growing acceptance by the academic community of the challenges and opportunities offered by assessment and quality assurance activities. A nationwide, technical committee for the National Programme, several quality units and technical committees for regional authorities and individual institutions, have paved the way for the development and implementation of the tools required for a successful programme of evaluation. The first such tool was the Assessment Guide (1998), in which the principle procedures for the process of evaluation are outlined. Support services, like libraries, are to be considered in relation to the particular degree or programme being assessed, but at the same time they can be reviewed on their own, as an organizational unit serving the whole institution across campus. In this case, the assessment guide builds on the EFQM model and offers a set of performance indicators to be changed and adapted to local conditions in the self-assessment process.

Academic librarians have been committed to this culture of quality from the very start and, in most cases, have been leading the way in their own institutions. General tools, such as the Assessment Guide referred to above, developed for use in administration and services alike, were of little use for libraries; in consequence, academic libraries have been the first units to develop their own assessment guides at local and regional levels. The first of these guides was compiled by the Catalan Agency for Quality in 1999; this has already undergone practical trials in several universities. Other university libraries have gone through the assessment process without a clear reference and without even breaking ground. In 2000, the Andalusian Universities Quality Unit convened a technical committee to draft a new assessment guide for academic libraries. Based on the experience already available, as well as on the recommendations of the national Assessment Guide, we chose to develop our own guide along EFQM lines, because of the growing influence of the latter in the evaluation of both public sector and non-profit organizations across Europe. During the course of our work we were delighted to see that our approach concurred basically with that adopted by LISIM. In addition, a new guide, also based on the EFQM model, has recently been issued for the administration and services sector of our universities.

In the year 2001, the publication of the report entitled "Universidad 2000" and government proposals for a wide-ranging review of current University legislation, have sparked a debate about the future of the higher education sector in Spain. Undoubtedly, therefore, further changes and developments are ahead. However, the culture of quality management and assessment will continue to spread, academic libraries will continue to

play a leading role in the development of new approaches and to share their experiences at international events such as this.

An EFQM-compliance guide for the University Libraries of Andalusia.

ACTIVITIES TO BE EVALUATED

The use and consumption of information is increasingly necessary and the need for information, vital to the strategic development of the University mission, is constantly growing. In the future, the university user will be obliged to cultivate connections, skills and abilities which will allow him to make efficient use of the growing volume of information (both internal and external) which relates to or affects his professional activity.

On the other hand, certain trends are becoming apparent, and concern a change in teaching practice and requirements, which will have a significant impact on research performance, to the extent that the working methods and productivity of lecturers, researchers and students have become elements of the utmost importance.

If we accept that improved productivity is directly related to the particular informational policy adopted, then the library constitutes a primary support in the process of academic education and research.

On this basis, the proposed, overall assessment of the University Library (taken to mean an administrative, organizational and functional unit), involves the assessment of both traditional activities (the ability of the library to provide documents and information) and non-traditional activities, currently emerging in the new educational context (the ability of the library to provide integral training). In addition, the assessment will need to take into account the connection between each of these types of activity and the ultimate mission, and the teaching and research objectives of the University, as well as considering the extent of the role the library may play as the University Knowledge Management Unit. The activities to be assessed are as follows:

1. Global analysis of the Library System: integration, relevance of objectives, participation in multi-functional teams, etc., within the University System.
2. Products and Services that the Library System provides to the teaching and research branches of the University.
3. Ability of the Library System to provide documents and information.
4. Degree of stakeholder satisfaction with the products and services provided by the Library.

ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

The self-regulatory method is employed (self-assessment and external assessment), which involves three separate stages:

- Self-assessment, undertaken by the Self-Assessment Committee, in accordance with the Internal Assessment Guide.
- External Assessment, undertaken by a Committee of External Experts, in accordance with the guidelines set out in the External Assessment Guide.
- A Final Report, prepared by the Self-Assessment Committee, based on the findings of the two previous reports.

GENERIC STRATEGIES:

The Guide and the process of assessment it recommends, are based on the following principles:

Integral Assessment: the EFQM excellence model is an ideal tool to effect the integral assessment of the University Library System. The application of EFQM criteria in assessing the degree of quality achieved by the library helps to overcome organizational barriers (central services, branch libraries, etc.); in addition, concepts such as leadership, strategies or partnerships, are applied to the organization as a whole and help to provide a global image of the library.

Global Assessment: All the activities and tasks related to the different areas listed above are also submitted to analysis.

Emphasis on interaction: particular attention has been paid to highlighting the cause-effect relationships produced between the various EFQM criteria and sub-criteria, as well as on the relationships produced between, for example, the various activities and tasks (cataloguing, reference, teaching products, etc.), the organization of the library (central libraries, branch libraries, etc.) and the projection of results among the university community and stakeholders. A wide range of problems are pinpointed during the process of examination and appraisal of this interaction, and many opportunities for improvement are identified. An appropriate analysis of these findings will enable the most appropriate solutions to be developed.

Contrasting of information: a wide variety of information is employed, both in terms of the nature of the information itself (qualitative or quantitative) and the origin thereof (internal and external); this approach helps to overcome the problem of coincidences and discrepancies, an essential pre-requisite when issuing value judgements.

Systematic analysis of the results: the products provided by the library are the basic point of reference when formulating and issuing value judgements. Several tables of relevant information must be completed for each one of the products.

Emphasis on evaluation: the process of assessment entails far more than the mere compilation of data. Data collected requires due analysis and appraisal, value judgements must be formed, weaknesses must be identified and improvement actions proposed. To this end, the guide proposes the completion and analysis of a number of Tables.

AN EFQM GUIDE

The Guide is divided into 5 parts, as follows:

1. **An Analysis and Description** of the 9 criteria and the various subcriteria that make up the EFQM model, as adapted for university libraries. Each of the criteria and subcriteria are sub-divided as follows:
 - Definition of, and comments regarding the criteria/subcriteria
 - Key Performance Areas: a description is provided of those areas, within the criteria or subcriteria, which are particularly relevant.
 - Approach: this section contains a description of the most suitable approach for each of the different criteria.
 - Deployment: in the same way, this section contains a full description of the elements which are evidence of the appropriate and systematic implementation of each of the criteria.
 - Corroboration: a list of possible corroborative evidence of the criteria or subcriteria is provided by way of example.
 - Questions: a wide range of relevant questions that enable the Assessment Committee to satisfactorily complete the score table for each of the criteria and subcriteria. At times, these questions may serve to provide quantitative data for inclusion in the Tables; at others, they may serve to confirm impressions, or to provide qualitative data relevant to the assessment.
2. **Tables:** the Guide includes 35 Tables for data collection, organized into four different areas: the Library Context (University, Degree Courses, etc.), Resources, Services and Stakeholder Satisfaction (users, personnel, etc).
3. **Indicators:** The Guide includes a series of performance indicators.
4. **Excellence-rating Matrix:** an objective tool, for use by the management team, to determine the level of excellence achieved by the library on a scale from 0 to 10. It serves as a quick guide to the approach adopted and to the degree of deployment achieved in each EFQM criteria/subcriteria, and is a

useful planning tool, highlighting as it does those areas requiring improvements in quality.

5. General guidelines for the Assessment

Committees of University Departments (the basic unit of research assessment undertaken by the University) and of degree courses (the basic unit of assessment of teaching personnel). These guidelines cover the basic aspects of library services, whereby library products are converted into teaching and research resources and, consequently, these services may be assessed in terms of their impact on university research and teaching.

Strong points of the guide

1. Special emphasis is laid on the concepts of Leadership, Strategy and Partnership, as key factors to increase the competitive advantage of the library system within the university system as a whole. The leadership of the library management team is a vertical element in the EFQM model, on which the remaining criteria and subcriteria depend for support. Together, these elements form the basic skeleton of the model, the foundation on which the entire structure of excellence may take shape.

On the other hand, the cultivation of strategic partnerships with customers and suppliers is a basic tool with which to maximise resources when these are scant and insufficient, as has been the case with libraries in recent decades.

2. The Guide represents an attempt to integrate the models of quality assessment and of excellence: EFQM & ISO 9000:2000. Both models have begun to converge, although not as the result of any planned collaboration. ISO 9000:2000 sets out specific requirements for a quality management system, according to which the library must demonstrate its ability to provide products consistently to users, who need these products to be adjusted to certain *known and accepted specifications*, and concludes by recommending processes for continuous improvement and for the prevention of non-compliance.

As a result, the ISO standard is rendered not only more flexible and perfectly capable of being adapted for use with service-providing organizations, but it is also brought more closely into line with the EFQM excellence model: user satisfaction and continuous improvement.

3. Along these same lines, the Guide proposes a model for the multidimensional measurement of the library organization, to serve as a counterbalance to the 9 criteria of the EFQM model, from the point of view of strategic management. This approach will permit the development of an

integrated model of measurement, in the form of a balanced scorecard, which will combine both the model of quality and that of excellence (ISO, EFQM, stakeholder theory...).

4. Finally, the Guide contains an excellence-rating matrix, suitably adapted for use in the library context (see the end of this report) in which each criteria may be graded on a scale from 0 to 10: Leadership, Policy and Strategy, Management of Staff, Partnerships and Resources, Processes, and Customer, Staff and Society Results.

The matrix represents an attempt to attach an objective, numerical value to the level of excellence of each library and to the final results of the assessment. It also enables comparisons to be drawn between the different libraries assessed, irrespective of the size of each, or their differing levels of resources.

Conclusions

Although the guide has been prepared for use in the Pilot Scheme for the Assessment of University Libraries in Andalusia, it is broad in scope, fully comprehensive and detailed.

Its purpose is to facilitate the work of the assessors, to help highlight the strengths of the libraries assessed and to provide sufficient contrasting information to enable weaknesses to be pinpointed and improvement actions to be proposed.

The use of the different materials throughout the duration of the Pilot Scheme will help to identify any shortcomings, gaps or omissions in the guide itself, which may then be submitted to a process of revision.

References

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- Unidad para la Calidad de las Universidades Andaluzas (1999) *Guía para la Autoevaluación de Departamentos* [Departmental Self-Assessment Guide]

Notes

1. A working group of the Andalusian Universities Quality Units assisted in the production of this paper. Andalusian Universities Quality Unit (<http://www.uca.es>) is a consortium of 10 Andalusian Universities, accountable to regional government, whose objective is to foster improved standards of quality in the higher education sector in Andalusia. It is responsible for the assessment of university degrees and diplomas and of university departments and services. In addition, it serves as the instrument for liaison with the National Programme for Quality Assessment in Universities.
2. The Andalusian University Libraries Assessment Guide was compiled by the Technical Committee of the Pilot Scheme for the Assessment of University Libraries in Andalusia (1999-2002). The members of the Committee include Carmen Baena Díaz (Director of the Pablo de Olavide Library of the University of Seville); Maria del Carmen Liñán Maza (Director of the Library of the University of Cordoba); Aurora Márquez Pérez, Coordinator of the Department of Standardization and Technical Processes of Cadiz University Library; José Carlos Morillo (Director of the Library of the University of Huelva); Cristóbal Pasadas Ureña (Director of the Psychology Library of the University of Granada); María Pinto Molina, Professor of Documentation of the University of Granada; Miguel Duarte Barrionuevo (Director of the Library of the University of Cadiz), the Committee coordinator.

EXCELLENCE-RATING MATRIX

| Stage | Leadership | Policy & Strategy | Management of Staff | Partnerships & Resources | Processes | Customer Results | Staff Results | Society Results |
|-------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 10 | All the members of the library management team (LMT) are actively involved in sustaining continuous improvement. | The policy and strategy defined by the LMT is known and understood by everyone. | All actions are aimed at releasing the full potential of all the library staff. | Library resources are used efficiently to achieve strategic objectives. | Value added processes are closely controlled and continuously improved. | A positive trend is apparent in terms of customer satisfaction. Objectives are being met. These are only some of the performance indicators in the library. | Regular comparison with other university libraries reveals that staff satisfaction is similar to that registered in other libraries and shows a tendency to improve. | Practically all points of view are sought in local society. The findings are taken into account in the development of library policy. |
| 9 | The LMT is demonstrably involved in the external promotion of total quality. | A best practice analysis process has been developed to assess changes in library policy and strategy, in order to retain competitive advantage. | All staff are encouraged to put forward proposals, and to develop and achieve their own objectives. | An established process is in place to cater for the provision of additional resources in order to promote the changes required by best practice analysis of the library policy and strategy. | A quality management system can be shown to exist. | 75% of customer satisfaction objectives have been achieved. | The results show that the staff feel fully integrated in the work environment. | Comparisons have been started on 25% of objectives. |
| 8 | The LMT has a uniform approach to continuous improvement strategies throughout the library. | The policy and strategy processes are benchmarked. | The staff policy supports the library policy & strategy of continuous improvement. | An established procedure has been set in place to modify and review the allocation of resources, in accordance with changing requirements. | The aims and achievements of the process are clearly linked to user requirements. | 50% of customer satisfaction objectives have been achieved. | The results show that the staff feel appreciated for their contribution to the work. | 50% of society objectives have been achieved. |
| 7 | The LMT is active in the evaluation, motivation and recognition of all the library staff, for their achievements in respect of continuous improvement. | A process has been established to change library policy and strategy. | There is an established process to encourage creativity and innovation amongst the library staff as a whole. | There is an established procedure to identify, evaluate and assess new technologies and their impact on the library. | An established mechanism has been set in place to develop and employ the appropriate means to assess the key processes. | All the staff are aware of and understand the customer satisfaction objectives. | The results should indicate that the staff are able to express their ideas freely and on a continuous basis. | There exists a link between the results and library policy and strategy. The policy is reviewed. |

EXCELLENCE-RATING MATRIX continued

| Stage | Leadership | Policy & Strategy | Management of Staff | Partnerships & Resources | Processes | Customer Results | Staff Results | Society Results |
|-------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 6 | The LMT is actively involved in the development and support of improvement groups (IG), and act as leaders thereof. | A process has been developed to assess the continuing relevance of current policy and strategy on the basis of information gathered. | IGs have been established and have the necessary support. | Established systems have been set in place to monitor, supervise and review Key Performance Areas, with a view to reducing operating costs. | The resulting process is reviewed and returned to the improvement cycle. | The elements which are pivotal to customer satisfaction have been identified and this information is used to modify customer satisfaction objectives. | Improvement objectives are established and made public. | There is a growing awareness. |
| 5 | A process has been developed to ensure that the LMT works directly with customers and suppliers. Whether or not the process is effective is subject to review. | The library has a policy and strategy statement which takes into account all 8 EFQM criteria featured in this matrix. | The training and developmental needs of all the staff and of the IGs are regularly reviewed. Gaps in training are identified with reference to staff aspirations and the needs of the library. | Systems have been set in place to reduce the cost of materials. | A strategy has been devised to improve the key processes offering added value. | Customer satisfaction levels are shared with the University as a whole. | The different trends have been established. Positive and negative trends are parameters which are fully understood and are measured in a way which is significant to the staff. | |
| 4 | A process has been developed to ensure that the LMT shows clear and direct involvement in the provision of role models for the improvement of the library within the University System. The efficacy of the process is subject to review. | There is a clear process of communication of the library mission and vision and of the Key Performance Areas to all library staff, to the extent that everyone is aware of them and understands them | A system of assessment for all library staff has been set in place. | A process has been developed to control the dissemination of information destined for users, suppliers and staff. | A strategy of improvement has been established and improvement objectives have been set. | The importance of customer satisfaction objectives may be demonstrated. | Internal dialogue and communication is valued and the degree to which it is effective is closely monitored. | |

EXCELLENCE-RATING MATRIX continued

| Stage | Leadership | Policy & Strategy | Management of Staff | Partnerships & Resources | Processes | Customer Results | Staff Results | Society Results |
|-------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| 3 | A process exists to facilitate communication between the LMT and the staff. | An established procedure is in place for the collection of all the relevant, external information required in an analysis of the Key Performance Areas. | A two-way system of information exchange and communication has been set in place in the library. | Relationships are developed with suppliers to ensure that quality and speed of service are hallmarks of their mutual dealings. | The effectiveness of the existing key process is evaluated. | Improvement objectives have been established. | The data is used to produce a graphic representation of staff satisfaction. | |
| 2 | A process exists to create and promote the continuous development of the library corporate culture. | An established procedure is in place for the collection of all the relevant information required in an analysis of the Key Performance Areas. | A publicly acknowledged commitment exists to promote the development of the staff as a whole, in order to improve performance and meet objectives. | A procedure has been set in place to identify essential resources. | The key processes offering added value are identified, and are presented in the form of a graph or are documented. Process relevancy is established. | The data is used to provide a graphic representation of the trends in customer satisfaction. | Key elements in staff satisfaction have been identified. | |
| 1 | The LMT has set in place a process to develop its own awareness of the concepts of total quality. | The LMT has developed a mission statement and has defined the Key Performance Areas. | An established process is in place to sound out and take into account the opinions of the staff. | A process exists to identify available resources and the way in which they are being used. | The principal library processes have been identified. | Customer complaints are recorded and produce an "ad hoc" result. | Staff complaints are identified on an "ad-hoc" basis. | |