

SECTION IV
STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP
INTEGRATION OF GRADUATES ON THE LABOR MARKET,
OBJECTIVE OF QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract:

Quality expresses the set of characteristics of a service that allow it to meet the needs, both explicitly and implicitly. The identification of the future students, based on the quality criteria imposed by each university, the completion of an ample qualitative educational process and finally having graduates who meet the quality requirements, represents for all universities, objectives of quality management. By fulfilling them, it should be possible to correlate the educational offer with the requirements of the labor market.

In order to reduce or even avoid the difficulties in identifying and occupying a job in the graduated field, it is necessary a collaboration of all the interested parties, in order to identify solutions. For this, it is considered appropriate to maintain a close link between universities and the business environment, holding regular meetings, public consultations, in order to identify existing problems and solutions for the future.

This paper represents a plea in favor of integrating the optimization of the insertion of graduates on the labor market among the major, strategic objectives of quality management in universities.

Key words: *quality management, graduates, higher education, labor market*

Classification JEL: *L15, I23, J44*

1. Introduction

The opportunity of a higher education based on academic values that satisfy the requirements of society, represents one of the essential objectives of university quality management.

Quality expresses the set of characteristics of a service that allow it to satisfy needs, both explicitly and implicitly. These characteristics include aspects regarding utility, safety, availability, economic and environmental aspects (ISO 9001, 2015).

In order to achieve quality in higher education institutions, they must identify those ways to maximize the synergy between academic excellence, the relevance on the labor market of a university specialization and student options.

Quality in the university field must not represent only an objective of the management of the educational institution, but those methods must be identified by which it can be proven and guaranteed in order to be recognized and gain the trust of students, partners and society, in the country and in abroad.

Universities have the role of designing specializations that will enable future students to accumulate knowledge on the basis of which they will have easy access to the labor market. Likewise, the development of the educational offer must take into account its continuous adaptation to economic and social realities.

2. Quality management in universities

The development and implementation of a Quality Management System is a strategic decision of the management of a university. Starting from the managerial definition of the strategic decision, it can be stated that the integration of quality management in the respective organization's strategy represents a major long-term objective of the universities. Therefore, the achievement of a high-performing strategic management at the university level leads to the obligation of a coherent policy in the field of quality, in the spirit of the standards in the field.

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In Romania, the national quality management system in higher education is based on three major components: the Ministry of Education, the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) and the universities (Căldăruș, Runcan, 2018).

A university is an organization in which several categories of educational and research activities are carried out, defined by a document called the University Charter and in accordance with the assumed mission.

The certification of the quality management system in accordance with the international standards ISO 9001:2015 and IWA 2:2009 gives greater confidence to clients that the processes carried out within the universities are kept under control and that these processes are continuously improved taking into account legal and regulatory requirements also imposed by the ARACIS evaluation criteria.

In order to define and correlate the quality management system with the activities carried out in higher education, it is necessary to carry out an analysis carried out by the management which highlights the input elements, the ongoing processes, the material, and human, financial and other resources and of the output elements.

Determining the quality of higher education is manifested by identifying different aspects of the quality management system. Looking at the quality in the system concept, it can be stated that there is a quality of the inputs, a quality of the process and a quality of the results. Starting from this statement, in the spirit of the quality management system, customers' requirements can be distinguished in order to satisfy them. In this sense, we can talk about the quality needs of students, of the university, of the discipline, of society (the labor market). To obtain quality, all these aspects must be taken into account.

2.1. Models of quality management in universities

Starting from the definition given by the SR EN ISO 9001:2015 standard, the process represents a "set of interconnected activities that transform inputs into outputs". The identification of input data, processes and output data leads to the establishment of all activities carried out in an organization.

At the level of a university, students can be considered as input data, the process is given by the educational process, and the output data are the graduates.



Figure no. 1 The structure of the process at the level of a university

Given this structure, several models of quality management application can be considered feasible. All these can be a starting point in the analysis and clarification of some aspects regarding the implementation of an efficient quality management in the higher education institutions.

1. Model oriented towards the quality of the system entries considers as a fundamental factor in obtaining quality graduates, the way of selecting future students. In this sense, several essential aspects intervene:

- image that the university has in society
- selection criteria imposed by the university

- the level of preparation of potential students

The correct and adequate selection of future students has the role of facilitating the development of the educational process and obtaining qualitative results.

2. Model oriented on the quality of the educational process focuses on the way of carrying out the educational process. The quality of the educational process determines the quality of the education system. Among the factors influencing the application of this model can be listed:

- training activity of students through courses, seminars, projects, application activities
- the way of evaluating the knowledge through verifications, colloquia, exams
- creation of discipline sheets adapted to domestic and international socio-economic requirements
- introduction of new courses
- improving study conditions

3. Model oriented towards the quality of exits from the system is based on the evaluation of the quality of the educational system based on the quality of the graduates. The quality of graduates can be assessed in two ways:

- acquiring the knowledge accumulated during the educational process, measured by the evaluation of the student / graduate
- adequacy to the requirements of the labor market, measured by integration into the labor market

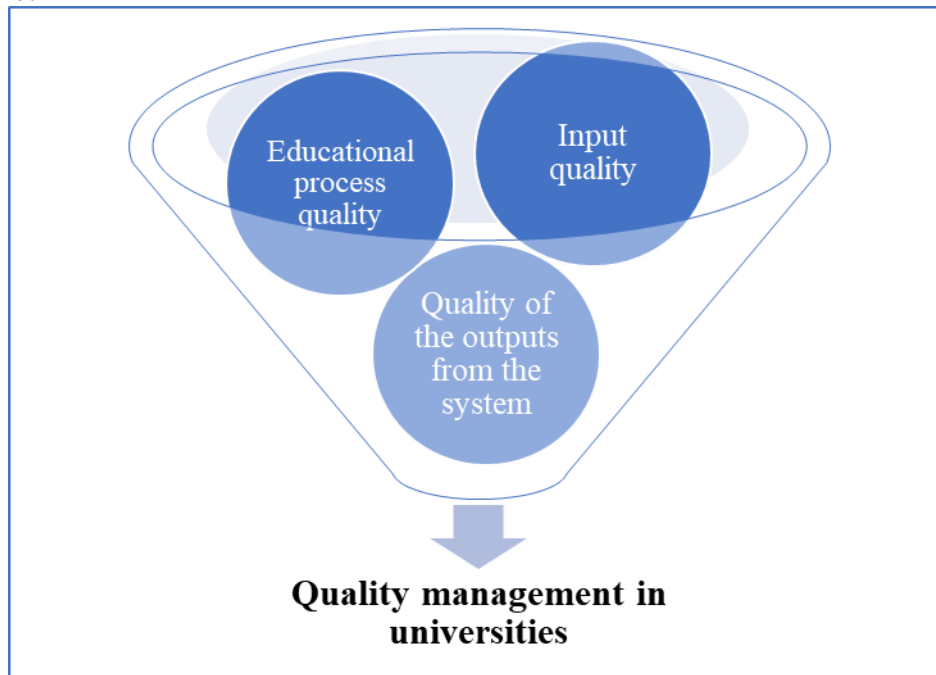


Figure no. 2 Synergy of quality management models in universities

The integrated application of the three concepts regarding the quality management models put into practice in universities, can represent one of the strengths of the management of the higher education system.

3. Optimizing the integration of graduates on the labor market

In order to optimize the insertion of graduates on the labor market and to correlate the educational offer with the market requirements, universities should be able to achieve a synergy of specific models of quality management.

Starting from the identification of future students, based on the quality criteria imposed by each university, going through a qualitative educational process and finally having

graduates who meet the quality requirements, universities should be able to correlate their educational offer with labor market requirements.

Globally, in Europe, but also nationally, the labor market is experiencing a rapid pace of development and change. The emergence of new products, processes and technologies generates new occupations that require training in the field (Mocanu, 2020).

Solving these problems can be viewed from several perspectives, such as:

- development of an educational system, especially the university one, which manages to adapt to the requirements of the labor market
- providing facilities to employers who hire young graduates
- adapting the legislation in order to facilitate the employment of graduates
- conducting studies and research to anticipate the evolution of labor market demand

When it is observed that graduates face difficulties in finding a job in the graduate field, it is necessary to work together with all stakeholders in order to identify solutions. For this, it is considered appropriate to maintain a close link between universities and the business environment, holding regular meetings, public consultations, in order to identify existing problems and solutions for the future.

Universities can contribute to obtaining a job by the graduate according to his training, by establishing relationships with companies in the field. The realization of internships, during the years of studies, can generate the opportunity to know the companies by the students but also of the future graduates by the potential employers. Also, in order to optimize the insertion of graduates on the labor market, it is necessary to develop and promote partnerships between academia and economic agents, to facilitate the integration of students, graduates into working life and a faster adaptation to societal requirements.

Another way in which graduates can get in touch with the requirements of employers is the initiation of career guidance and career counseling sessions, conducted in partnership by universities with representatives of economic agents. Through these types of events, students, master students can know, directly from the source, the requirements of employers and can find the most suitable career opportunities.

The optimization of the insertion of graduates on the labor market can also be achieved through the activity carried out, at the level of universities, by the career counseling centers. Career counseling involves an extensive process by which specialists in the field come to the aid of students so that they set their educational or professional goals and also identify the strategies needed to achieve them. In order for this activity to be completed successfully, it is opportune to apply the principles underlying career management. According to them, young people need to be prepared to be able to manage their careers when they move from student to graduate. For this they are advised to participate in formal and non-formal activities during their student years. The vast majority of employers have begun to appreciate, more and more, the experience gained by young people following education based on volunteer activities in projects.

Beyond what universities can undertake, directly at national level, according to the National Employment Strategy (SNOFM) 2021-2027, it is desired to ensure rapid and quality transition conditions for graduates, as well as to increase the absorption capacity. of all available labor resources.

All these approaches have the role of making the students, the future graduates, aware that by accumulating knowledge, skills, information, and with the support of the academic environment, they will find the way to the desired career.

4. Integration on the labor market and achieving the correspondence between skills and jobs – Case study Petrol-Gaze University of Ploiesti

Accomplishing the integration of higher education graduates on the labor market and ensuring the transition from student life to that of an active participant, through employment,

to economic and social life, is a complex activity that requires the collaboration of all interested parties.

To illustrate these aspects, the example of good practices offered by the Petrol-Gaze University of Ploiesti can be considered as a case study. The interest given by the entire academic community in the university, respectively from the 5 component faculties, to optimize the insertion on the labor market of the graduates, works in close connection with the principles of quality management implemented in the university.

As an integral part of quality management, several procedures have been developed and implemented at the university level aimed at monitoring the graduates. As examples, the operational procedures "Assessing the satisfaction of students and other interested parties", "Monitoring the integration of graduates on the labor market and the continuation of studies at the master's cycle" can be mentioned.

Through the application of these procedures, it is aimed to achieve several objectives, such as:

- definition of target groups
- defining indicators for evaluating customer satisfaction
- creating the means of data collection
- data collection and processing
- evaluating the satisfaction of students and other stakeholders
- interpretation of the results

Improvement proposals resulting from the application of the appropriate procedures are included in the project of improvement measures, respectively in the improvement plan. Based on the results obtained, the procedures can also be reviewed, according to the rules provided in the Quality Manual.

4.1. Career Counseling and Guidance Center - role, activity, and results

In order to support students in defining their own learning path, the Career Counseling and Guidance Center (CCOC) was established and operates in the university.

Through this center, UPG Ploiești has developed mechanisms for periodic polling of students' opinion regarding their satisfaction with the educational process, student services and infrastructure offered by the university (ARACIS, 2020).

CCOC specific objectives:

- psycho-pedagogical and career counseling of UPG students
- informing final year students about the dynamics of the labor market at national and international level - offering consultancy and counseling in the career decision-making plan of students in their final years of high school in Prahova county
- working meetings with partners from the socio-educational and economic environment in order to increase the degree of visibility of the CCOC at the local/regional level, as well as in order to increase the degree of integration on the labor market
- organizing and conducting scientific events on career counseling topics
- administration of tools for monitoring the placement of graduates on the labor market
- evaluation of the degree of satisfaction of the students regarding the academic environment
- analysis and interpretation of data regarding the monitoring of graduates.

From the last published activity report, the following results can be deduced:

- in the academic year 2020-2021, counseling and career guidance groups were organized in order to increase the degree of integration of students on the labor market
- during the counseling process, other needs for the development of the students' capacity were identified, so thematic sessions were organized, such as: "Time management", "Conflict management" and "The importance of non-verbal communication"

- in the conditions generated by the SARS-CoV2 pandemic, the online counseling activity was developed through the <http://devin.masterprof.ro> platform, a platform created within the UEFISCDI project – AG/176/SGU/NC/II, project of type ROSE-SGU
- under the conditions of the transfer of educational activities to the online system, the information activities on the issue of developing the employment portfolio and the dynamics of the labor market were carried out through workshops held on the google.meet platform
- Questionnaires were administered to students of all master's programs within UPG, graduate students of bachelor's programs within the university, by means of those responsible for monitoring insertion on the labor market.

The activity of the CCOC can be positively appreciated especially due to the adaptation and continuation of the activity also in online format, when sanitary conditions have imposed this. The following can be mentioned as critical aspects:

- the insufficiently exploited potential regarding the counseling and career guidance activities of students, both through the Counseling Center and the year tutors
- insufficiently promoted activity at the level of the Career Counseling and Guidance Center
- The rather low interest shown by students/graduates in completing the questionnaires.

At the UPG Ploiești level, a graduate monitoring commission was appointed and is functioning, made up of representatives of each faculty. Starting with the 2015-2016 promotion, the questionnaire was created and administered regarding the insertion on the labor market in written format. Based on it, the data are analyzed and reports are drawn up to monitor the insertion of graduates. Starting with the 2017-2018 promotion, an electronic questionnaire was developed, which is administered to graduates according to the procedure “Monitoring the integration of graduates on the labor market and the continuation of studies at the master's cycle”. Since not all graduates answer the questionnaire or fill in the form when issuing the study documents, the statistical situations are made by sampling.

As a result of the interpretation of the results of the applied questionnaires, at the University level, in the 2020-2021 university years, the percentage of bachelor's degree graduates who enrolled in master's studies is 59.17%. Compared to previous years, there is a significant increase in the number of bachelor's graduates who enrolled in the master's program, which demonstrates the increased interest in university master's studies. This could be explained by the diversification of master's fields combined with the demands of the labor market, so as to cover the demands of employers in the fields for which the University trains specialists.

4.2. Activities developed to anticipate trends on the labor market

At the level of all faculties within UPG Ploiești, working meetings are held with partners from the socio-educational and economic environment. These activities can be considered as a synergistic effect of two important objectives:

- promoting the image of the university on a national and international level, in the socio-economic environment and the development of university cooperation
- major objective of quality management in UPG Ploiesti
- increase the degree of visibility at the local/regional level, in order to optimize the degree of integration on the labor market
- specific objective of the Career Counseling and Guidance Center.

As a concrete example, in order to achieve these objectives, for the academic year 2020-2021 the Faculty of Economic Sciences has established the following aspects:

1. Activity: Organization of meetings with representatives of companies or institutions, potential employers of University graduates.
2. Planned performance indicator: 3 meetings
3. Degree of achievement: The Faculty of Economic Sciences regularly organizes meetings with representatives of the business environment from Prahova County, to debate the correlation

between the demand and supply of specialized work, the integration of certain disciplines into the education plans, which ensure a better preparation of graduates in the economic field, ensuring specialized practice as well as including in the taught subjects some topics that develop specific skills, such as: communication and negotiation, teamwork, leadership.

In recent years, a series of activities have taken place in order to achieve these objectives.

They can be mentioned:

- The event Optimizing the insertion of graduates on the labor market organized by the Faculty of Economic Sciences, the Student Entrepreneurial Society of the Petrol-Gas University of Ploiești in partnership with the Agency for Small and Medium Enterprises, Investment Attraction and Export Promotion Ploiești, the Patronage of Small and Medium Enterprises Prahova and the Ministry of National Education.

- Implementation of the project POSDRU/60/2.1/S/41750 Graduates and the Labor Market - national project that follows the link between completed studies and professional activity. The chosen approach allowed the identification of problems or performances at the level of each study program of a university

- The establishment of the UPG Alumni Association, which aims to contribute to the realization and consolidation of relations between UPG graduates from all promotions and all forms of education, promoting collaborative relations between UPG and its graduates, promoting the image of UPG and its graduates; the continuous improvement of the education system and the rapid adaptation of the training of engineers, economists and philologists to market requirements, the promotion of scientific research and the support of UPG graduates' activities in this sense.

5. Conclusions

Quality is the essential condition for trust, relevance, mobility, compatibility and attractiveness in the international, European but also national field of higher education. Quality management allows a university to self-evaluate, to increase its performance, to intervene with changes where necessary and to interact effectively with other institutions. In order to achieve the stated objectives, missions and policies, universities must commit themselves to the adoption, implementation and continuous improvement of their own quality management system.

Implementation, maintenance, continuous improvement of this system, allows universities to focus their entire activity on meeting the requirements of customers, direct and indirect beneficiaries, all stakeholders.

Achieving the objectives established by the documentation of the quality management system, is pursued and managed at the organizational level.

Quality in the university field must be integrated in the management system of the educational institution. To this end, it is necessary to identify the methods by which it can be proven and guaranteed in order to be recognized and gain the trust of students, partners and society, in the country and abroad.

The approached case study wanted to present an example of good practices in the field of optimizing the integration of graduates on the labor market. The following conclusions can be drawn from the aspects presented: - at the UPG Ploiesti level, there is a strategic decision at the management level to consider the integration of graduates on the labor market, as one of the major objectives of the quality management system - structures are established whose main activity is to monitor the labor market integration of graduates - questionnaires are created to monitor the insertion of graduates It can also be stated that it is recommended to emphasize the promotion of the Counseling Center, as well as to identify methods by which students and graduates become aware of the need to compete the questionnaires they have at their disposal.

Optimizing the integration of graduates on the labor market is, at the level of all universities, one of the main objectives of quality management. In this sense, universities must develop procedures related to the monitoring of graduates on the labor market, this fact having the main consequence the possibility to measure customer satisfaction, to demonstrate the skills acquired in the university. Based on the international standards specific to the field, the graduation by students of a higher education specialization must become from a goal in itself, a chance of integration in the active professional life.

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