



## **SQELT PROJECT**

### **SUSTAINABLE QUALITY ENHANCEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION LEARNING AND TEACHING. Integrative Core Dataset and Performance Data Analytics**



Key Action: **Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices**  
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### ***Intellectual Output 01:***

#### **Benchlearning Report on Project Partner HEIs' Performance Data**

#### **Management Models**

#### **The Case of Ghent University (UGent)**

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## List of acronyms and abbreviations

NVAO	Accreditation Organization of the Netherlands and Flanders
Ba	Bachelor
DOWA	Department of Educational Policy
OASIS	Educational Administration and Student Information System
EQCU	Educational Quality Control Unit
FCI	Faculty Committee for Internationalization
UGent	Ghent University
ERGO	Ghent University Conduct of Educational Quality Assurance
UGI/UIP	Ghent University Integrated Policy Information System
L&T	Learning and teaching
Ma	Master
ManaMa	Master after Master, a Master program following a Master-after-Bachelor program
PI	Performance indicator
PDCA cycle	Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle
QA	Quality assurance
SMGE	Self-Management Ghent Educational Policy and Quality Assurance

## 1. Executive summary

Ghent University has recently implemented a system of self-managing educational policy and quality assurance (ERGO). Stakeholders at central, faculty and program level, including governors, teaching and assisting staff, administrative staff, students and external stakeholders share the focus on continuous quality improvement. The system is built on the PDCA cycle, which is implemented on all three levels. At each level visions and policy (PLAN) are determined, policy implementation (DO) is realized and the results are monitored (CHECK). A system of 360° monitoring provides core data and performance indicators (PIs) to perform the checks. A long lasting tradition in student evaluations of teachers and programs has yielded valuable policy and educational quality data. Surveys of alumni and focus groups as well as specific faculty surveys are initiated when needed. OASIS (Educational Administration and Student Information System) is a database which contains all essential information on study programs, courses, and students. The UGent Integrated Policy Information System (UGI/UIP) extracts data from various databases (OASIS, SAP-HR, local databases) and produces readily accessible reports for policy makers at all levels. Programs and faculties can perform their checks by using 'hard' (= obligatory), university wide and program specific quality indicators. The indicators can consist of core data, performance indicators, quality evaluation instruments or more qualitative assessments. Mapping the SQELT list of PIs on the UGent-performance shows that, in one way or another, most of the PIs are produced at UGent.

## SWOT Analysis

### Strengths:

- Ghent University has a long tradition of quality assurance (QA). External program evaluation (since 1991) and program accreditation (since 2005), in addition to the internal systems, created a long term know-how at all levels.
- Ghent University is characterized by significant participative governance. Faculties have large autonomy in organizing quality control, which allows them to choose appropriate methods and tools.
- The educational vision and the six strategic educational goals are widely supported, as the institutional review made clear. They emerged through a bottom-up process and were made explicit by means of an institution-wide reflection.
- Throughout the years students have demonstrated engagement and involvement in learning and teaching (L&T) and educational quality. Membership of representative boards and committees at all levels is a long-standing tradition.
- A quality culture is widely established and establishing through the past experiences and the current application of ERGO (Ghent University Conduct of Educational Quality Assurance).
- The lecturer survey and the participation in evaluation procedures show that the majority of the staff is strongly involved in QA and quality development.
- Sufficient resources were allocated for the implementation and sustainability of the ERGO model.
- Points of concern are clearly identified and will be met in the next (institutional) evaluation cycle.

### Weaknesses:

- The involvement/engagement of many different people at all levels (lecturers, assistant staff, governing and administrative staff, students, external stakeholders) needs to be consolidated. Participative governance is predominantly positive, but could also induce divergent positions.
- Assembling essential information on a program, using/interpreting quality indicators and defining appropriate actions is a task for the programs themselves. Although the internal

emphasis is merely on improvement their self-reporting on the matter can lead to some window dressing.

- Program steering committees play a crucial role in educational QA, but have no financial resources of their own. This limits their freedom and range of action.
- Due to software license restrictions (e.g. OASIS and UGI) and privacy concerns (teacher evaluations) data aren't available to the entire staff. Communication to the entire faculty community thus depends on the few people having access.

#### **Opportunities:**

- Involvement of external stakeholders can be optimized: While in some faculties external stakeholders are consulted rarely, other faculties show good practices which can be copied.
- The participative governance model supplies faculties and programs with enough autonomy to choose their own priorities. It's sufficiently flexible and dynamic.
- The UGent performance data management model in L&T is not fixed, but open for new ideas and topics by the various stakeholders.

#### **Threats:**

- Participative government is based on strong involvement of presidents of program committees, teachers and students through membership of a lot of committees. This may give rise to (bureaucratic) overload.
- Portfolios and their updates demand a lot of administration on top of the above mentioned involvement. This may lead to decreasing engagement of key persons.
- The quality indicators are rather new and numerous. Many, and probably too many indicators at different levels can make things very complicated. Continuous explanation and emphasis on the relevance of the quality indicators remains crucial.
- Evaluations by students play an important part in Ghent University's educational quality: it has a huge impact upon teaching practice. Students aren't always aware of it. Good communication on the follow-up actions related to the evaluation recommendations is crucial for students' motivation.

## **2. Introduction and principles of quality assurance in learning and teaching**

As a result of the Flemish amendment decree dated 19/06/2015 which suspends the external quality assessments and replaces them with the institutional review, Ghent University has developed a system of **self-managing educational policy and quality assurance**. In this system, existing structures and processes are supplemented with some new elements, namely peer learning visits, the Central Bureau of Educational Quality, the faculty and program portfolio and the educational quality manual.

The focus of self-management is still on the programs, as was the case with the external quality assessments. Central administration aims to get a clear picture of the quality of each of the institution's programs and curricula. In doing so, Ghent University will not restrict itself to the programs that have been accredited in the previous system, but will monitor the quality of all offered programs, including postgraduate, linking and preparatory programs. Moreover, self-management will also comprise programs that have been visited by an external accreditation body.

The following principles are the basis of internal QA which Ghent University applies to monitor the quality of its programs. To a large extent, they reflect the basis on which educational QA has functioned in the past years. However, some significant new points of focus are developed as a consequence of the abolishment of external QA and Ghent University's development of complete self-management of educational QA. The principles are:

- ✓ QA as a **joint project**. QA is a shared responsibility between the departments, the faculty and central administration. The aim is to maximize cooperation between all parties concerned and create a balance between centralized and decentralized initiatives.
- ✓ Targeted improvement instead of assessment. The external assessment panels have almost always demonstrated that there was a basis of quality. Therefore, internal QA should primarily focus on the **continuous improvement of that existing quality**. In order to monitor improvement, a form of assessment remains necessary. Central administration will determine both the order and timing of this quality control, based on the information at its disposal.
- ✓ **Educational policy and quality assurance are inextricably linked**. The faculties and departments are expected to integratively implement the six strategic objectives set by Ghent University and the accompanying processes. Faculties and departments select which actions they will take and which policy they will pursue to best match the program's QA (sixth strategic objective) with multi-perspectivism, research-based education, focus on students' and lecturers' talents, the involvement of stakeholders, and internationalization (strategic objectives 1 to 5).
- ✓ Greater focus on **continuous quality assurance**.
- ✓ The externally induced assessment stress is replaced by a **permanent focus on improvement of the programs' quality**. The Study Program Committees and Educational Quality Control Units (EQCU) must – in their respective functions – apply the quality improvement cycle (PDCA cycle, see Section 2 below) to different processes on different levels, with particular attention to the final stage. The results of interventions are monitored and evaluated. The extent to which the committees and units contribute to permanent QA is monitored by central administration.
- ✓ **Involvement of external parties**. Each program must demonstrate that it requests feedback from the field of practice (fourth strategic objective). This feedback process is already taking place, but will be monitored more closely. At the new two central structures, which replace the external quality assessments, external experts are also involved in the assessment, namely the external content expert at peer learning visits, and the profit and non-profit external experts in the Central Bureau of Educational Quality.
- ✓ **Data driven**. Comparative tools are used to ensure that comparable data are generated over faculties and programs. Faculties and programs must be able to monitor and evaluate themselves, and central administration must be able to identify bottlenecks based on data, in order to monitor the programs in a targeted fashion. There will be open communication on the comparative program information the institution disposes of.
- ✓ **Large input from students**. Because of the participative management culture at Ghent University, much importance is given to the input of students in educational QA. Their input is guaranteed by both systematic surveys and active participation at every stage of QA.

### 3. The PDCA cycle on three levels

The Self-Management in Ghent Educational Policy and Quality Assurance (SMGE; ERGO in Dutch) maintains the existing models in which the PDCA (Plan, Do, Check, Act) cycle (Moen & Norman 2011) is implemented at Ghent University on three levels: (1) the program level, (2) the faculty level and (3) the institution/ central administration level. If new monitoring elements are necessary and desirable because of the abolishment of external quality assessments, these are added by SMGE (see Figure 1).

#### 3.1. The program level

On the educational level, **the Study Program Committee** remains the most important body for educational policy and QA. The tasks of the Study Program Committee and its chair are documented and described in the educational quality manual.

The Study Program Committee provides the **vision and policy (PLAN)** with regard to the strategic objectives. The sixth strategic objective “educational quality” has a central place for the Study Program Committee and is operationalized in (1) the vision and learning outcomes of the program (singularity/profiling, competency model, benchmarking, communication), (2) the curriculum and constructive alignment (competence matrix, modules, teaching methods, master’s thesis, internship), (3) testing (view and policy on testing, educational attainment) and final level, (4) the processes for continuous QA, and (5) communication and information.

The Study Program Committee is also responsible for **policy implementation (DO)** and ensures that the six strategic objectives are translated into processes and actions in the programs. For each strategic objective the central administration provided a number of processes on which the programs can focus their self-assessment. An example of such a process is: “The program pursues a transparent and efficient policy regarding master’s theses, in order to provide each student with the best chance to complete a high-quality master’s thesis and, in doing so, rely on adequate supervision (selection process, feedback, creativity, documents, criteria, evaluation, defence, level, possibility to publish, ...)” To implement these processes, the program can choose different actions to take. An overview of these processes and actions can be found in the educational quality manual, which can serve as a source of inspiration. The Study Program Committee makes a case for which actions are selected and which not, and takes the selected actions.

In order to determine whether these actions and processes also lead to the desired results, it is important **to continuously monitor results (CHECK)**. To carry out this monitoring process, the Study Program Committee has tools at its disposal, which provide 360° feedback on the educational quality of the program. For several years, centrally organized student evaluations have been carried out (teaching evaluations, curriculum evaluations, measuring of study time). In 2015, a lecturer survey was conducted, the results of which will be integrated in the next years in the lecturer portfolio. The consultations of the work field and the alumni surveys provide monitoring by external stakeholders. The programs can also take their own assessment initiatives, such as additional surveys or focus groups. Finally, an important source of information is the Educational Administration and Student Information System (OASIS). Programs can use OASIS to generate quantitative data about learning paths, efficiency, teaching methods, testing, etc. These data include results and quality indicators which can serve as a basis for policy choices, such as a study program revision. The use of OASIS for policy purposes is, however, technically complex. Moreover, there was a need to link OASIS data to other existing databases. These two factors have led to the creation of the Ghent University Integrated Policy Information System (UGI/UIP) in 2015. Because the system generates policy



information on three levels (program, faculty, and central), its importance as a monitoring tool for the programs will only be increasing in the coming years (see below).

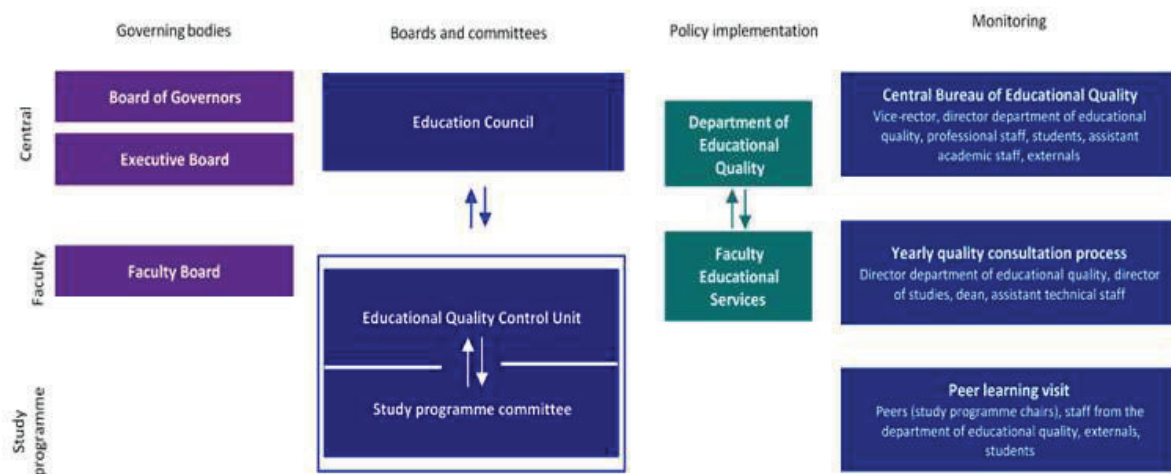


Figure 1. Policy-making and policy implementation and relation to QA systems at Ghent University

The data obtained from the monitoring systems are the visible results of the policy pursued within the programs. Therefore, they can be considered as **quality indicators**. Ghent University distinguishes three, partially overlapping types of such indicators. First, there are the **“hard” quality indicators** to be met by each program. An example is: ‘The program’s curriculum has a logical coherence’. These “hard” quality indicators have always taken a central place within the institution’s educational policy and QA, since they are closely related to the standards that were set by the Accreditation Organization of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) in external quality assessments.

Second, there are the **university-wide quality indicators**, in which Ghent University sets a global objective for itself across faculties and programs. An example is: ‘By 2020, 25% of the students must have international mobility’. The program can set its own target percentage and provide arguments for doing so. These university-wide quality indicators are relatively new: they were drafted in 2015 in mutual consultation with programs, faculties and central administration and set out the guidelines for the next five years.

Third, there are the **program-specific quality indicators**, related to the actions selected by the program which allow processes to run adequately. These indicators can be set and substantiated by the program itself. In doing so, the program predefines its own objectives.

All these results/quality indicators of the three types are diverse and numerous and each of them contributes to the (image of the) degree to which the policy, processes and actions lead to the desired result. The program selects which results will be targeted more or less strongly by selecting actions and quality indicators.

The monitoring of the results and the quality indicators (CHECK) happens both internally (by the program itself = self-assessment) and at central level (by the central administration). The program’s self-assessment or the internal CHECK is a continuous process. The Study Program Committee is constantly reflecting on the predefined objectives, sets these against the results from the various sources described above, and takes actions for improvement (see ACT phase). Until recently, this



process of self-assessment was reviewed under the system of the external quality assessments, which constituted the external quality CHECK. This external assessment is now, in SMGE, replaced by the peer learning visit. Peer learning visits can be regarded as internal quality assessments, or rather 'visits', in which a team of three chairs of Study Program Committees from other Ghent University Programs, along with an external content expert, a student, and a staff member of the Department of Educational Policy (DOWA, secretary) visit the program and give their opinion on the vision, policy, policy implementation, monitoring and improvement policy. Peer learning visits have a periodic character. The frequency of the visits will differ from program to program, but on average, peers will visit each program every six years. More detailed information can be found in Section 3.

Based on self-assessment and monitoring, the program makes **plans for the improvement policy (ACT)**. The ACT phase is essentially a phase of reflection, not only on deficiencies and malfunctions, but also on processes which run well and must be retained in the future. The program encourages the continuation of good practices and takes initiatives to remedy weak results. This improvement policy is nurtured by the evaluations of students, lecturers, alumni, the work field, internship mentors, and master's theses' supervisors. The Study Program Committee also builds on quantitative data from OASIS and UGI and on the peer learning visit reports and the Annual Quality Meeting (see below). This improvement policy is closely monitored and gives rise to re-evaluation, so that the effectiveness of the measures taken are quickly visible and, if required, additional actions can be taken.

As indicated above, an educational quality manual has been drafted, which in the first place offers programs a framework to select actions in function of the processes required within the strategic objectives. In addition, it provides a range of possibilities to attain the quality indicators. The Educational Council decided in 2015 on the use of a **program portfolio** for each program. This is the perfect tool for programs to closely monitor their processes, accompanying actions and quality indicators related to educational policy and QA, as well as to allow for central monitoring. This portfolio is available via the Ghent University platform Minerva, a digital learning (management) platform. It comprises all the program's processes, actions, procedures and practices related to the six strategic objectives, with a specific focus on the sixth objective "educational quality". In the portfolio, the program concretely illustrates how it deals with educational policy and continuous QA. Therefore, documents are not deleted or replaced, but new documents or sections are added to create an integrated entity which embodies the program's 'history'. The portfolio's folder structure very explicitly follows the PDCA cycle. This implies that in each section vision and policy (P), policy implementation (D), monitoring (C), and reflection and improvement policy (A) are expected to be specified. By systematically following the PDCA cycle, a continuous QA and quality culture can be attained.

### 3.2. The faculty level

At faculty level, the most important bodies for educational policy and QA remain the **Educational Quality Control Unit (EQCU)**, chaired by the Director of Studies, and the **Faculty Council**, chaired by the dean. The EQCU is usually composed of the chairs of the faculty's Study Program Committees, along with delegations from the other echelons, allowing education providers and education users to be united at faculty level in the EQCU. The Faculty Council is more widely composed, and does not only determine educational policy, but also the policy on research, staff, facilities, etc. The tasks of the EQCU and director of studies are documented in the quality manual.

The EQCU and Faculty Council determine the **vision and policy (PLAN)** with regard to the first five strategic objectives as far as these concern global processes across all the faculty's programs. In this matter, the EQCU is the Faculty Council's advisory body. This advice concerns faculty-wide processes, for example concerning scientific integrity, student counselling and learning track counselling, and the professionalization of lecturers. In addition, the EQCU also plays an important role in the sixth strategic objective, with regard to quality of the program. More specifically, the EQCU advises the Faculty Council about the generic processes related to testing policy, master's theses, benchmarking, continuous QA, communication and information. Specifically with regard to internationalization, each faculty has a Faculty Committee for Internationalization (FCI), which outlines the faculty's internationalization policy and gives recommendations in this matter to the Faculty Council.

Since 2015, faculties have been asked to write down both the pursued and envisaged policy in a **faculty educational policy plan**, which, in addition to the educational policy related to the six strategic objectives, also comprises the specific plans for the future. This faculty educational policy plan is the basis for the faculty integrated policy plan, which also includes research, services, and staff policy. In the context of the policy cycle, the Board of Governors uses the faculties' integrated policy plans as a basis to annually decide on the content of the plans and related resources.

**Policy implementation (DO)** at faculty level is situated at the Faculty Office of Education Services which has a facilitating and logistical function for faculty-specific and program-specific councils and committees involved in education. The faculty provides an adequate policy of the Faculty Office of Education Services, and sufficient staff for the efficient execution of tasks within the four clusters (student administration, QA, course availability, and monitoring service). At faculty level, the processes and actions are executed which are required to achieve the six strategic objectives. An example of such a process at faculty level is: 'When there are vacancies for professorial staff, the faculty pursues a policy in which the presence of educational competencies is sufficiently guaranteed (e.g. by teaching a trial session, vision statement education, program portfolio, taking account of experience and evaluations, ...). When evaluating the candidates, both these educational competences and the research competences are taken into consideration in the assessment.'

In order to determine whether these actions and processes at faculty level also lead to the desired results, various **sources of monitoring are used (CHECK)**. At faculty level, the most important elements are lecturer surveys, the own faculty-level assessment initiatives, the Policy Information System (UGI), and in some faculties, the wide advisory council with external stakeholders. Indeed, the Policy Information System also generates information at faculty level. These results of the pursued policy are, also at faculty level, set against the hard university-wide and faculty-specific quality indicators, similar to what happens at program level.

All processes, actions, procedures, and practices are commented on by the faculty in the **faculty portfolio**, which mainly focuses on the first five strategic objectives. In the faculty portfolio, the faculty concretely illustrates how educational policy and continuous QA are dealt with on faculty level. Again, the folder structure very explicitly follows the PDCA cycle, which guarantees a sufficient focus on all phases in the cycle. This implies that in each section the faculty specifies vision and policy (P), policy implementation (D), monitoring (C), and reflection and improvement policy (A). By systematically following the PDCA cycle, a continuous QA and quality culture can be attained.

Also at faculty level, there is a process of self-assessment, in which selected actions and processes and the consequent results are measured against the objectives set in the quality indicators. In addition to this self-assessment, an internal system of quality control by the central administration has existed since 2013: **the Annual Quality Meeting between the Department of Educational Policy**

**(DOWA) and each faculty.** The Quality Meeting was established by the Board of Governors on May 2012 as a first step in the reform of internal QA, in preparation of the institutional reviews. At that time, the abolishment of external quality assessments was not yet under discussion, and the Quality Meeting was intended to complement external quality assessments. Therefore, the Annual Quality Meeting has, already for some years, been an important part of Ghent University's quality model and has been the cornerstone of the internal QA in combination with the external quality assessments.

The Quality Meeting is attended by, on the one hand, the dean and the faculty director of studies, and, on the other hand, the director of educational policy, the head of office of educational QA and their direct executives. A few days in advance, there is a meeting between a delegation of students and the Department of Educational Policy (DOWA). The order of the Quality Meetings is fixed, spread out throughout the year, which allows faculties to know well in advance when to expect the Quality Meeting visit.

During the Quality Meeting, the manner in which the faculty and the programs embody the six strategic educational objectives is systematically verified. The results/quality indicators are checked on both levels. The information from the various sources of monitoring, from the faculty portfolio and the program portfolios, and from the faculty educational policy plans play an important role in this context.

In addition, the Quality Meeting considers the manner in which the faculty and the programs have responded to the recommendations of the periodic peer learning visits and of the previous Quality Meeting. This way, the faculty gets the opportunity to give an annual report of the efforts made by the programs during the period between the peer learning visits. Although the Annual Quality Meeting is situated at faculty level, it principally also takes all faculty programs in consideration. Based on the principle of differentiated monitoring, this will be done more systematically and more explicitly for some programs than for others.

The meeting takes place in an atmosphere of trust and mutual understanding, in order to allow a discussion of both the strengths and possible weaknesses of the program without any restraint. For programs which pursue a good quality policy, as evidenced by the portfolio and the peer learning visit report, the follow-up strategy implies a rather marginal testing. For some programs, the dean, the director of studies and the Department of Educational Policy will indicate the elements for which the program underperforms or continues to underperform, and whose quality could improve. For a limited number of programs, an even more pronounced intense counselling might be required and more frequent or additional quantitative or qualitative student or staff surveys could be conducted. The Quality Meeting report falls under the responsibility of the director of educational policy and is submitted to the Executive Board.

Based on the self-assessment in the faculty councils and committees (Educational Quality Control Unit (EQU) and Faculty Council) and based on the interview and report of the Annual Quality Meeting, the faculty makes plans for an improvement policy (ACT). This policy plan contains actions which will be taken to remedy weaker results at faculty level and in consultation with the programs. These improvement actions are also included in the faculty policy plans and are (possibly) linked to the provision of resources. The next Annual Quality Meeting will verify whether the faculty/program has adequately followed up these elements of improvement. Since the Quality Meeting is organized annually, this is the shortest feedback loop within self-management between central administration and the faculties/programs.

### 3.3. The central administration level

At central administration level, the **Educational Council**, chaired by the director of educational policy, is still the central administration's (Board of Governors, Executive Board) **official advisory body on education**. As such, the Council plays a crucial role in formulating educational policy and securing educational quality. **The Board of Governors** has the **final responsibility for strategic decisions**, while the **Executive Board** (with delegation of powers by the Board of Governors) has the final responsibility for **operational decisions**.

The Educational Council formulates the **vision and the policy (PLAN)** regarding education at Ghent University. The Council drafts vision texts, the central policy documents, the strategic educational objectives, the processes expected from faculties and programs, and the possible actions which can be taken to implement the educational objectives. Moreover, the Council stipulates the "hard" quality indicators, the university-wide quality indicators, and the possible faculty-specific and program-specific quality indicators. It also determines the form and content of the resources for monitoring and evaluation: the student and lecturer surveys, the alumni surveys, the thematic quality reports, and the education-related part of the policy information system. The Council's wide composition guarantees that its proposals are sufficiently supported before they are transferred for decision to the Board of Governors or the Executive Board.

The **policy implementation (DO)** at central administration level is mainly situated at the Department of Educational Policy (DOWA), which has already for many years played a central role in the implementation of policy actions, processes, practices and instruments. The four offices within DOWA (the Educational Quality Assurance Office, the Counselling Office, the Registrar's Office, and the International Relations Office) ensure the implementation of the processes which are fundamental to a structured and high-quality functioning of educational matters at Ghent University. Besides DOWA, the other seven Ghent University Departments also, to a higher or lesser extent, contribute to the implementation of educational policy and the assurance of educational quality: the Department of Student Facilities, the Department of Information and Communication Technology, the Department of Infrastructure and Facility Management, the Research Department, the Department of Administrative Affairs, the Department of Personnel and Organization, the Financial Department, as well as the transversal director of Internationalization.

More than with the faculties and programs, **the monitoring and evaluation (CHECK)** at central level includes several layers. The sources of information are also at this level largely the same: the student and lecturer surveys, the alumni surveys, the thematic quality reports, the own evaluations of faculties and programs and the UGent Integrated Policy Information System (UGI).

First, there is the self-assessment, or the CHECK which happens within the Educational Council. The various sources of information are continuously applied to evaluate policy and policy implementation. These results may show that actions are required for the entire university: adjustment of key objectives, a clearer vision, improved communication, better support, a different deployment of resources or more resources, a refinement of regulations, etc.

Second, central administration self-manages the evaluation of the implementation of educational policy and QA in the entire institution. A first means to this end is the Annual Quality Meeting specifically aimed at faculties and their programs. This was already discussed above and has been operational for several years. In 2015, two new, additional bodies were created because of the abolishment of the external quality assessments: the peer learning visits or the visits of the programs as already mentioned above, and a new central body of educational QA: the Central Bureau of Educational Quality. The Central Bureau of Educational Quality is a specialized body which

systematically processes the collected information with regard to educational QA (including the peer learning visit reports and the Annual Quality Meeting). This information is converted to a review of the quality of each program and possibly in remedial actions or in proposals to raise concern about programs or to abolish them (see below for a more detailed discussion).

Based on the CHECK within the Educational Council and based on the Annual Quality Meeting, the peer learning visits and the review of the Central Bureau of Educational Quality, **proposals are made for the improvement policy (ACT)**. This improvement policy can be very specific (remediation trajectory of a lecturer) or very comprehensive (change of flexibilization regulations for the entire university), and may have direct implications at various levels, such as for students (elimination of correction for guessing at multiple choice examinations), staff (functional career path), resources (21 additional professorial staff members for education), course availability (English-spoken master programs), etc.

### 3.4. The connection between the three levels

The three levels: program, faculty and central administration, are interconnected. The lecturers in the programs, or a representative delegation of them, are represented in the Study Program Committee. The chairs of the Study Program Committees are part of the Faculty Educational Quality Control Unit, which is led by the faculty director of studies. The eleven directors of studies are, on an institutional level, *ex officio* members of the Educational Council, chaired by the director of educational policy. Besides the Educational Council, the Central Bureau of Educational Quality also operates at institutional level. While the Educational Council mainly formulates the educational policy – which also indirectly affects QA – it is mainly the Central Bureau of Educational Quality which ensures the internal “accreditation” of the programs. Finally, also the Board of Governors and the Executive Board play, as the highest governing bodies of the university, an important role within the PDCA cycle. They get information and advice from the Educational Council and the Central Bureau of Educational Quality for further monitoring and decision-making.

## 4. Monitoring educational quality

The use of a 360° window in monitoring quality engages various stakeholders and uses several instruments.

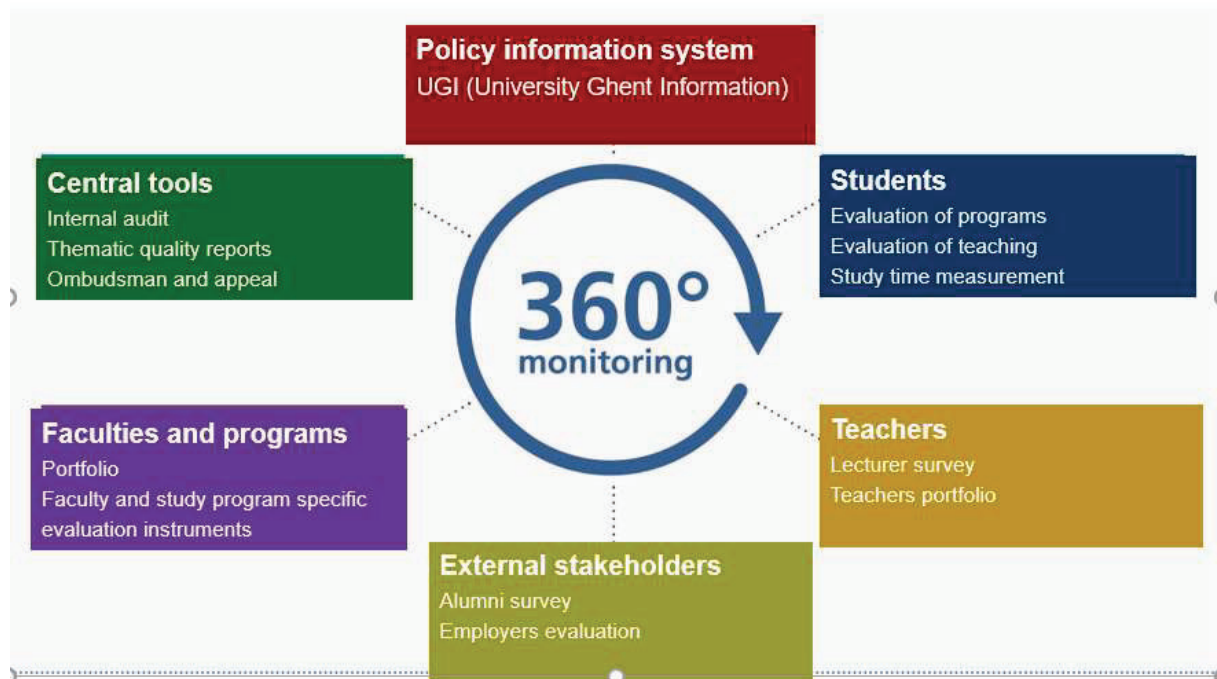


Figure 2: Sources of 360° monitoring of educational policy and quality at Ghent University

### 4.1. Evaluation and monitoring instruments generating quality indicators

Over the last thirty years, Ghent university has developed a lot of evaluation and monitoring instruments. In this regard data and databases at central, faculty, program and office level were used. A first integration of information resources has been realized in 2010 when **OASIS** (OnderwijsAdministratie- en StudentenInformatieSysteem; Educational Administration and Student Information System) was born. OASIS contains all essential information on study programs and their courses, learning outcomes (at UGent: 'competences'), full

curricula, teaching assignments, individual examination marks, full scores, success rates and study careers of students. For central government, faculties and programs OASIS could be a source of quantitative data, but extracting usable policy information from OASIS is quite elaborate. The limited user-friendliness and the need to link OASIS-data to other databases (e.g. personnel and finance) urged UGent to take a further step.

In 2014 the UGent management decided to structurally invest in Business Intelligence. UGI, the **UGent Integrated Policy Information System (UIP)** was created to identify, extract and analyze corporate data and generate quantitative reports. The integrated policy information UGI makes available, is extracted from several databases: OASIS, SAP-HR, smaller, local databases (e.g. on teacher training, on international exchanges, ...).



At the moment UGI provides readily accessible reports for study program directors, faculties and the central administration. More information on indicators can be found in the tables below.

In engaging students as important stakeholders, instruments such as teaching evaluations, study program evaluations and study time measurement are used. **Teaching evaluations** are organized on course level. The majority of the questions used in the questionnaire add up to six dimensions, namely learning effect, structure, teaching style, approachability, evaluation and course material. Those dimensions are used as quality indicators. Access to the results is limited: only the Educational Quality Assurance Office (DOWA), the Educational Quality Control Unit of each faculty and a delegation of students are granted access through OASIS.

**Study program evaluations** are organized every two years. Students who are at the end of the program (Bachelor, Master) are invited to fill out the questionnaire. Results of program evaluations are available through UGI.

Monitoring teachers is organized via a **lecturer survey**. This is a self-reporting questionnaire with open-ended questions. The items involved focus on the teaching practice related to the six strategic educational goals. They are used as input for quality indicators at the faculty and program level. The first lecturer survey was organized at the end of 2015.

External stakeholders like alumni are reached through surveys (quantitative) and/or meetings (qualitative). In both situations specific questions on employment, competences and programs are discussed.

Furthermore, instruments like internal audits, thematic quality reports (masters' thesis, group work, teaching quality in the first Bachelor year) are also used. Information from the ombudsman and appeals make sure that problems in several processes are identified and lead to adaptations in regulation and practices.

## 4.2. Overview of core data and performance indicators at Ghent University

The performance indicators and their respective information/data sources are depicted in the tables below:

### 4.2.1. Learning and teaching environment

Performance types	Performance indicators	Source
Quality of incoming students	Specific type of secondary education, grades (only through program specific surveys), scores on entrance tests	OASIS; specific surveys by programs; entrance tests: SIMON (UGent): interest and chance of success, ijkingstoets, (Flanders): chance of success
Learning resources	Number of book titles, periodical & website subscriptions held in library	Library database(s): Aleph, SFX, ...
Teaching resources	Numbers and specifications of teaching staff; incl. having PhD	OASIS + SAP-HR
	Ratios of student to teaching staff	OASIS



	Proportion of teaching staff participating in professional development	UGI + local database
Facilities and equipment	IT-expenditure, number of accessible computer terminals, internet bandwidth per user	ICT-department
	Expenditure on laboratory resources	Department of Infrastructure & Facility Management
Financial management	Total operating expenditure for students (other than accommodation & student allowance)	Financial Department;
	Proportion of total operating funds (other than accommodation & student allowance) allocated to provision of student services	Financial Department; Department of Student Facilities
Student composition, administration and support services	Characteristics of students (gender, social origin, nationality, full or part time, ...)	OASIS and UGI
	Student assessment of counselling	Faculty specific surveys; Teaching evaluation
	Student assessment of student services	Department specific surveys
	Minority student support	Central and faculty diversity teams
	Special access provision	Special status for students' service: facilities for students having functional impairment, foreign-language speaker, ...
Staff composition	International staff, guest staff (industry, ...)	SAP-HR, OASIS
Social context	Opportunities for students to engage with networks	Central: Gentse Studentenraad (Student Council) + faculty and program specific student organizations; UGent orchestra, UGent choir
	Opportunities for students to contact teachers	Present in every program: teachers are approachable, with or without appointment
	Opportunities for linking to community/collaborating with business and industry	Internships in a lot of programs Gentpreneur/Durf ondernemen: workshops and facilities for students/entrepreneurs
Stakeholders' participation	Facilities & spaces for stakeholders participation in curriculum development	Program committee memberships (students and external stakeholders): Program Committee-reports

	Facilities & spaces for stakeholders participation in decision-making bodies	Membership in central Board of Governors; at several faculties: Strategic Advisory Board, composed of external stakeholders
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#### 4.2.2. Teaching Process

Performance types	Performance indicators	Source
Quality of staff	Staff recruitment	Faculty, SAP-HR
Teaching staff workload	Teacher assessment of workload	Lecturer survey, faculty surveys
Competence in subject matter and methodology	Student assessment	Teaching evaluation
	Research output	Research Department
General education skills	Activities, teacher engagement with students	Teaching evaluation, program evaluation, program portfolio
Experience of teaching staff	Teacher self-assessment	Lecturer survey
Course quality	Student assessment of course quality and teaching quality, teacher sensitivity to class level	Teaching evaluation, focus groups (program initiatives)
	Teacher assessment of teaching quality	Lecturer survey
	Peer review or participating observation	Specific initiatives per program; Peer learning visits
Teaching diversity	Student assessment of teaching diversity	Teaching evaluation

#### 4.2.3. Learning Process

Performance types	Performance indicators	Source
Student workload	Student assessment of student workload	Study time measurement, teaching evaluation, specific focus groups; teaching evaluation
	Teacher assessment of student workload	Lecturer survey
Quality learning	Students' assessment of learning; development of self-learning, students' knowledge of learning models	Teaching evaluation, program evaluation
	Teachers' knowledge of learning models	Lecturer survey; teacher training
Learning diversity	Students' and teachers' assessment of learning; diversity	Teaching evaluation, program evaluation; Lecturer survey

#### 4.2.4. Learning outcomes and their assessment

Performance types	Performance indicators	Source
Student success rates	Completion rates in different programs	OASIS and UGI
Student & alumni satisfaction	Freshman and senior satisfactions	Teaching evaluation, program evaluation
	Alumni satisfaction	Alumni surveys
Employability	Graduates: employment, further study,	Alumni surveys
	Employer satisfaction	Strategic Advisory Board, Specific faculty 'career days, meetings with employers, ...
Achievability of high level L&T goals	Student assessment	Program evaluation
	Teacher assessment	Deliberations/ Examinations/graduation
Problem solving	Documentation of problem solving	Teacher training (central and at faculty level)
	Observation of students	Specific initiatives
Research	Observation of students	Assessment during laboratory work
ICT	Observation of students using ICT	Assessment during computer work
Applied knowledge	Observation of students applying knowledge in practice (transdisciplinarity)	Assessment at internships and exercises, ...
Social and self-competences	Observation of students, motivation for lifelong learning	Particular initiatives (per program)
	Fostering sustainability values	Sustainability is an important goal for UGent and is present in a lot of courses; assessment through program evaluation
Assessment of learning outcomes	Engaging assessment formats	Faculty assessment/evaluation commissions
	Grades	Program and examination committee
	Student self-assessment	In a few programs (student) peer evaluation occurs.
Assessment of assessments	Student assessment of assessment forms/ of assessments	Program evaluation; focus groups
	Teacher assessment of assessment forms/analysis of assessment protocols	Examination Board
	External assessment of assessment forms	Seldom, is included in peer learning visits

#### 4.2.5. Performance overall

At first glance matching the preliminary set of PIs identified by the SQELT project team to UGent-performance seemed quite a job. **Eventually the UGent quality model and the broadly implemented PDCA cycle prove to map most of the indicators.** This can be credited to three major accomplishments. At first, the long lasting tradition of evaluation by students (since the early nineties) has provided a lot of information on students’ views on teachers, courses, teaching and assessment methods. In the second place the implementation of UGI, the UGent Policy Information System, made a lot of data/information from OASIS readily accessible for policy makers at central and faculty level and for program committee presidents. Thus, this information was discussed in the respective committees and led to policy decisions on the different levels. Thirdly, ERGO (Ghent University Conduct of Educational Quality Assurance), set up in 2015, transformed the thinking about and practice of educational quality. In the newly created portfolios for faculties and programs every chapter contains its own PDCA cycle. In order the CHECK their own PLANS and the realization of the DO’s (per chapter), faculties and programs have to use the “hard”, the university-wide and the program-specific quality indicators.

In conclusion, it can be said that Ghent University is producing and using lot of data and quality indicators, most of them explicit, some of them implicit. Matching them with the preliminary SQELT set of PIs provided a first clarification of the UGent quality indicators’ system, that does not seem to known to all potential users.

#### 4.3. Internal quality assurance systems, evaluating indicators

In addition to existing instruments, self-management at Ghent University comprises the integration of some new elements in the already long-standing system of educational policy and QA. Figure 3 provides an overview of the manner in which Ghent University has given an answer to the abolishment of external quality assessments. Two recent initiatives, the peer learning visits at program level and the Central Bureau of Educational Quality at the central level will be commented below.

External quality assessments	After the external quality assessments
Visit of external assessment panel	Internal peer learning visit
Framework of the ‘Accreditation Organization of the Netherlands and Flanders’	Educational quality manual
Program’s self-assessment report	Program portfolio Faculty portfolio
External accreditation (‘Accreditation Organization of the Netherlands and Flanders’)	Internal accreditation (Central Bureau of Educational Quality)

Figure 3: Mapping external and new internal assessments

##### 4.3.1. Peer learning visits

As mentioned, the peer learning visits can be situated in the CHECK phase at program level. Peer learning visits can be seen as instruments to monitor internal quality, some kind of one-day visits, whereby a team of three Study Program Committee chairs from other Ghent University programs visits the program in question and reviews the vision, policy, policy implementation, monitoring, and

improvement policy, based on the six strategic objectives. This team of three is complemented with an external content expert, a student, and a staff member of the Department of Educational Policy (DOWA, secretary). Within the context of continuous QA and quality culture, each program keeps a program portfolio and optimizes this portfolio based on the quality manual. This program portfolio, along with the faculty portfolio, serves as a basis for the peer learning visit. It is developed within the reliable and protected digital learning management platform (Minerva). By using wikis, the authors and visitors can quickly navigate through the different sections, can easily connect documents and wiki-pages with each other, can work together on documents, and can quickly make overviews (e.g. of all ACT phases) by using the labels.

The assessment framework (see appendix) consists of ten dimensions, which is the operationalization of the six strategic objectives. For each dimension, the peer learning visit team selects one of three assessment options: 'point of concern', 'satisfactory' or 'exemplary'. 'Point of concern' means that it *'does not meet the minimum assessment criteria. Actions of improvement are required in the short term; if not, coercive measures will be imposed.'* 'Satisfactory' implies that the issue *'largely meets the assessment criteria. The implementation measures/initiatives taken by the program are considered to be sufficient.'* 'Exemplary' states that *'the measures taken by the program are considered excellent in all respects and can serve as an example.'* These ten assessment dimensions are set against the quality features of Flanders' Quality Code 2015-2017 published/authored by NVAO.

In using the system of peer learning visits, Ghent University retains some important aspects of the previous system.

First of all, a thorough assessment of educational QA at program level persists. Secondly, the critical constructive view of a team of experts remains important. In addition, the assessment of both the content of the program and the educational basis, which cannot be separated from the processes of continuous QA, remains valuable. Moreover, the frequency, i.e. on average every six years is also retained. This period is long enough to guarantee the feasibility of the peer learning visit system with the available resources, and short enough to ensure quality monitoring (in combination with the Annual Quality Meeting).

However, there are some points at which the peer learning visits differ from the former external quality assessments.

(1) Peer learning visits largely comprise colleagues who are working in similar circumstances and can therefore be considered as peers, which is extremely beneficial for understanding the context and framework in which they operate. However, a potential threat is possible here. The visits may in fact be interpreted as cosy get-togethers with colleagues, disabling critical comments with regard to QA.

(2) The visits are interpreted as 'learning' visits, which shifts the focus from 'evaluating' to 'mutual learning and improving'. They also aim to strengthen the cohesion between programs across faculties, and to share each other's good practices. Herein also lies a possible threat. A visiting team may, following the example of the external quality assessments, act as a mere evaluation body and thus make an open discussion difficult or impossible.

(3) Another difference (with the external quality assessments) is that the peer learning visits not only focus on educational quality, but also on the implementation of the institution's educational policy. This enables a more direct and integrated monitoring of the strategic objectives within the programs.

(4) The burden of planning, which was traditionally associated with an external quality assessment/ accreditation, will be reduced over time. This reduction is the result of the use of the program portfolio, which is linked to the faculty portfolio. The program portfolio is used by the programs as an instrument of continuous QA. In preparation of a peer learning visit, the programs are no longer required to draft a self-assessment report, but can submit their program portfolio.

(5) Another difference concerns the number of external members in a peer learning visit team. Now, there is only one external member, namely the content expert with relation to the visited program. If two or more external members were included, these peer learning visits would soon again evolve into external quality assessments rather than 'peer visits'. However, the question is whether one external member will prove to be sufficient to evaluate the content of the entire program and whether this will not lead to a unilateral perspective.

The concrete methodology of the peer learning visits is set out in a scenario drafted by DOWA. The peer learning visit provides feedback on the program to the Central Bureau of Educational Quality.

#### **4.3.2. The Central Bureau of Educational Quality**

The Central Bureau of Educational Quality is charged with the monitoring of QA at Ghent University and with the development of practical proposals. This commission has sufficient operational authority to take QA decisions without prior submission to the Educational Council, the Board of Governors, or the Executive Board. The Central Bureau of Educational Quality is chaired by the (vice-)rector and comprises the director of Educational Policy, four professorial staff members, one assistant academic staff member, and two external experts in the respective fields (one profit and one non-profit). The Educational Quality Assurance Office provides administration services. The members are primarily selected for their expertise or for their commitment to educational issues. They do not act as representatives of their division or faculty, but rather as monitoring and guiding body of the institution as a whole.

The Central Bureau of Educational Quality is a specialized commission which systematically processes the collected information with regard to educational QA (including the peer learning visits and the Annual Quality Meeting). This information is converted into reviews of programs and remedial actions. Also proposals to raise concern about programs or to abolish them completely can be discussed. With the establishment of the Central Bureau of Educational Quality, the institution has created a body which closes the cycle of quality improvement top-down. It is the body which supervises peer learning visits and the Quality Meeting and to which the reports of the peer learning visits and the Quality Meeting are transferred for further action. The tasks of the Central Bureau of Educational Quality include:

- ✓ The (cyclic) discussion of the actual quality level of the faculties and/or programs and the extent to which programs and/or faculties take the necessary steps to ensure the quality.
- ✓ Giving recommendations and taking possibly coercive measures in order to guarantee QA.
- ✓ Development of a framework to raise concern about programs, the development of intensive adjustment trajectories. The creation of procedures for informing central administration of concerned cases. The implementation of corrective procedures and of procedures for advising the Board of Governors to amend programs or to abolish them.
- ✓ Imposing conditions to programs in order to prevent concern (if the available information results in such a trend).
- ✓ Drafting a schedule, which indicates the regularity of peer learning visits.



- ✓ Composition of the teams that execute the peer learning visits and the selection of its chair.
- ✓ Advising central administration on full external visits for certain programs (as far as these are situated outside the context of external quality assessments).
- ✓ Advising – on self-initiative or at explicit request – the Board of Directors and the Executive Board on matters concerning educational QA. These advisory powers do not affect the advisory powers of other internal bodies regarding QA (e.g. the Educational Council).

When assessing the programs, the Central Bureau of Educational Quality uses the information derived from the various sources (e.g. hard indicators). Important additional sources of information are the peer learning visits and the program and faculty portfolios.

The advisory and decision-making powers of the Central Bureau of Educational Quality are limited to educational QA. The Bureau is essentially an operational body, which must be able to quickly and efficiently answer the requirements of contemporary QA. Therefore, the Central Bureau of Educational Quality gathers once a month. The Bureau must be sufficiently embedded in the educational scene to be able to properly perform its duties. Thus, it informs the Educational Council on decisions and appeals to the existing educational expertise in the Educational Council of faculties and programs in carrying out its duties. The Central Bureau of Educational Quality is under the usual administrative supervision of the Board of Governors and the Executive Board, to whom it regularly reports on matters of educational QA. In these matters, it has extensive and independent advisory powers. For example, after a peer learning visit or a Quality Meeting, the recommendation could be to submit a deficient program to an external quality assessment. *In extremis*, the Central Bureau of Educational Quality can recommend to freeze or cancel a program. The Central Bureau of Educational Quality's review is transferred to the concerned program and/or faculty. This review may contain points of improvement together with a timeline to realize these improvements. The Central Bureau of Educational Quality's recommendations are also the basis for public reporting on the programs, as required by the NVAO's Quality Code. Figure 1 helps to clarify things a bit more visually.

## 5. SWOT-analysis

### Strengths:

- Ghent University has a long tradition of QA. External program evaluation (since 1991) and program accreditation (since 2005), in addition to the internal systems, created a long term know-how at all levels.
- Ghent University is characterized by significant participative governance. Faculties have large autonomy in organizing quality control, which allows them to choose appropriate methods and tools.
- The educational vision and the six strategic educational goals are widely supported, as the institutional review made clear. They emerged through a bottom-up process and were made explicit by means of an institution-wide reflection.
- Throughout the years students have demonstrated engagement and involvement in L&T and educational quality. Membership of representative boards and committees at all levels is a long-standing tradition.
- A quality culture is widely established and establishing through the past experiences and the current application of ERGO (Ghent University Conduct of Educational Quality Assurance).
- The lecturer survey and the participation in evaluation procedures shows that the majority of the staff is strongly involved in QA and quality development.

- Sufficient resources were allocated for the implementation and sustainability of the ERGO model.
- Points of concern are clearly identified and will be met in the next (institutional) evaluation cycle.

#### **Weaknesses:**

- The involvement/engagement of many different people at all levels (lecturers, assistant staff, governing and administrative staff, students, external stakeholders) needs to be consolidated. Participative governance is predominantly positive but could also induce divergent positions.
- Assembling essential information on a program, using/interpreting quality indicators and defining appropriate actions is a task for the programs themselves. Although the internal emphasis is merely on improvement their self-reporting on the matter can lead to some window dressing.
- Program steering committees play a crucial role in educational QA, but have no financial resources of their own. This limits their freedom and range of action.
- Due to software license restrictions (e.g. OASIS and UGI) and privacy concerns (teacher evaluations) data aren't available to all of the staff. Communication to the entire faculty community thus depends on the few people having access.

#### **Opportunities:**

- Involvement of external stakeholders can be optimized: While in some faculties external stakeholders are consulted rarely, other faculties show good practices which can be copied.
- The participative governance model supplies faculties and programs with enough autonomy to choose their own priorities. It's sufficiently flexible and dynamic.
- The UGent performance data management model in L&T is not fixed, but open for new ideas and topics by the various stakeholders.

#### **Threats:**

- Participative government is based on strong involvement of presidents of program committees, teachers and students through membership of a lot of committees. This may give rise to (bureaucratic) overload.
- Portfolios and their updates demand a lot of administration on top of the above-mentioned involvement. This may lead to decreasing engagement of key persons.
- The quality indicators are rather new and numerous. Many, and probably too many indicators at different levels can make things very complicated. Continuous explanation and emphasis on the relevance of the quality indicators remains crucial.
- Evaluations by students play an important part in Ghent University's educational quality: it has a huge impact upon teaching practice. Students aren't always aware of it. Good communication on the follow-up actions related to the evaluation recommendations is crucial for students' motivation.

**Appendix:** Quality education at Ghent University: 10 evaluation dimensions: 6 strategic objectives + specification of educational quality

	<b>Point of concern</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Exemplary</b>	<b>NVAO Code</b> *
<b>1. Dare to think &amp; Multiperspectivism</b> Critical sense, change of perspective, openness, pluralism and tolerance for dissenting views are central to education.				2
				5
<b>2. Education based on excellent research</b> Education is based on excellent research and recent scientific findings in the field.				1
				2
<b>3. Talent development of students and lecturers</b> Education gives students and lecturers the chance to maximally develop their talents and provides optimal information, guidance and challenges to this end				3
				4
				5
				7
<b>4. Involvement of stakeholders</b> Students, lecturers, alumni and the field are actively involved in education, and participate in policy and assessment.				2
				4
<b>5. Internationalisation</b> Education provides students with maximum opportunities to acquire international/ intercultural competences. To this end, efforts are directed towards internationalisation projects, optimal student and staff mobility, internationalisation@Home, and virtual mobility.				1
				2
<b>6. Educational quality:</b>				
<b>6.1. Vision and learning outcomes</b> The programme has a clear vision and learning outcomes which are nationally and internationally relevant and reviewed, and meet the requirements of level, content and orientation.				1
				2
<b>6.2. Curriculum and Constructive alignment</b> The programme has a logically structured curriculum, and a good coordination between learning outcomes, curriculum, and teaching methods.				5
<b>6.3. Testing and final level</b> The programme has a testing vision and testing policy, in line with the learning outcomes and the learning process.				6
<b>6.4. Processes for continuous quality assurance</b> The programmes has a culture of continuous quality assurance and quality improvement.				
<b>6.5. Communication and information</b> The programme optimally shares information and communicates with all concerned parties.				7
				8

Code\*: Measuring 10 evaluation dimensions against the quality features of Flanders' Quality Code 2016-2017, NVAO .

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