

## EFFECTIVENESS OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS FOR EDUCATION IN THE LIGHT OF THE RESULTS OF PROGRAMME EVALUATIONS CONDUCTED BY THE POLISH ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE

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**Purpose:** This study aimed to assess the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance systems implemented at the Polish universities providing education in the field of management.

**Design/methodology/approach:** To achieve the aim of this study, the qualitative analysis of preexisting data was applied to examine the documents. The subject of this study included the reports on programme evaluations conducted between 2020 and 2023 by the evaluation teams of the Polish Accreditation Committee (PKA) at universities providing education in the field of management.

**Findings:** It was found that the internal educational quality assurance systems implemented at the evaluated HEIs are not fully effective (the evaluation teams formulated remarks related to inadequate operation of the systems in as many as 70% of the evaluated HEIs). The areas of the systems that should be given priority by the HEIs when implementing measures to improve their effectiveness include the process of reviewing and improving the curricula, the process of defining and verifying the assumed learning outcomes and the graduation process.

**Research limitations/implications:** The examination included the reports on educational quality assessments conducted in only one field of study (management). Therefore, the obtained results cannot be generalised so as to cover the entire population of higher education institutions in Poland.

**Practical implications:** The results of the examination may constitute an inspiration for the Polish universities (not only those providing education in the field of management) to determine and implement measures aimed to increase the effectiveness of the internal systems of educational quality assurance, and as a result improve the quality of provided educational services.

**Originality/value:** Identifying the weaknesses of the internal quality assurance systems implemented at HEIs providing management education and the elements of the systems that should be prioritised by HEIs when taking measures to improve their effectiveness.

**Keywords:** Quality of education, university, internal quality assurance system, higher education.

**Category of the paper:** Research paper.

## 1. Introduction

The implementation of the provisions of the Bologna Process obliges HEIs operating within the European Higher Education Area to implement measures aimed to ensure high quality education (Kraśniewski, 2009; Kujawa, 2021). The quality of education, along with the quality of research and the university's relations with the social and economic environment, is perceived as one of the key factors that determine the competitiveness of contemporary universities, and thus the competitiveness of national higher education systems. Poland, as a signatory of the Bologna Declaration, has accepted the obligation to respect and implement the provisions contained therein; hence, providing the highest quality of education has been recognised as one of the pillars of the mission of the Polish higher education and science system (Ustawa, 2018).

The quality of education can be defined as a set of characteristics of the educational service provided by the HEI, that satisfy the students' current and future requirements in terms of skill development and knowledge transfer (Malinowska, Wiśniewska, Grudowski, 2014), or, more broadly, the degree to which the requirements and expectations of a wide range of university stakeholders in the field of education are met, such as university authorities, academic staff, university administrative and technical staff, central and regional authorities, university external partners and employers, taking into account the internal and external conditions (Grudowski, Szczepańska, 2021; Grudowski, Lewandowski, 2012). The quality of education is related to the implementation of educational objectives, which include, among others, preparing students for civic activity and future professional work, ensuring their competitiveness on the labour market, supporting their personal development and providing broad knowledge at an advanced level (Machowska-Okrój, 2023; ESG, 2015). Thus, the quality of education is measured by the degree to which the students' competences are aligned with socio-economic life and in particular with the needs of the labour market (Hall, 2022).

High quality of education stems from appropriate mechanisms functioning at the university level and its organizational units, which form the internal educational quality assurance system (Kraśniewski, 2009). These systems form the basis for mechanisms aimed to achieve quality and develop the institutional quality culture, understood as responsibility for education, models of behaviour and actions related to the care for quality, shared by the entire academic community, teachers and students (Urbanikowa, 2023). A properly designed and effectively implemented system is a tool that can be used by the authorities in the university management process (Piasecka, 2017). For it enables the integration of activities aimed to ensure the quality of education within the overall activities related to the university management, as well as link the system to the university daily operations, its objectives and requirements of the university environment. It also enables the HEI to achieve its objectives in the area of teaching quality and to improve the results achieved in this area.

The reference document used by HEIs when designing and implementing their internal educational quality assurance system is the 'Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)'. This is a set of standards and guidelines related to areas that are crucial for the effective delivery of adequate quality and learning environment in higher education. According to these guidelines, each higher education institution should define its quality assurance policy, which is published and forms part of their strategic management. This policy should be implemented through appropriate structures and processes with the participation of external stakeholders. The university quality assurance policy, translated into practice through quality assurance processes, should constitute the main pillar of a coherent institutional internal quality assurance system based on continuous improvement, facilitating the development of a quality-based organisational culture where all internal stakeholders take responsibility for quality and are involved in quality assurance at all levels of the university (ESG, 2015).

The ESG standards, which accept the autonomy of higher education institutions and the specificity of educational areas, have been formulated in a very general way to enable their application to different HEIs and the development of countries within the European Higher Education Area to develop their own national educational quality assurance systems (Kwiecień-Miland, 2020; Próchnicka, Tutko, 2015; Schmuck, 2021). Therefore, they do not indicate practical solutions of an operational nature concerning internal educational quality assurance systems that should be implemented in HEIs. The solutions in this respect should be developed by the HEIs, adapting the systems to their organisational structures, implemented processes, size, as well as the environment in which they operate (Szkiel, 2018).

When designing the educational internal quality assurance system, the university should consider (ESG, 2015):

- developing and approving the curricula and their outcomes, and monitoring and reviewing them to meet the needs of students and society,
- assessing students and involving them in the educational process,
- ensuring the quality of teaching staff,
- providing educational resources and student support measures,
- information systems for the effective management of the study programmes offered and other activities,
- publishing information on the study programmes offered and their outcomes,
- making HEIs subject to the external quality assurance of education.

The Standards and guidelines for quality assurance for the European Higher Education Area have established the framework not only for the internal quality assurance systems for education, but also for the external quality assessment system for study programmes in the higher education institution and for accreditation. The external quality assurance systems (including accreditation) should primarily assess the internal (university) quality assurance

system performance (Chmielecka, 2015; Kraśniewski, 2009). The evaluation of educational quality aims to assess the compliance of the HEI performance and the educational service provided with the legal provisions on higher education, but also to support the HEI in quality improvement, effectiveness of the implemented internal quality assurance system and development of a quality culture (Chmielecka, 2015).

In the Polish system of external evaluation of the quality of education, the Polish Accreditation Committee (PKA) plays a key role. Pursuant to Article 241 of the Act on Higher Education and Science, PKA, an institution acting independently to improve the quality of education, conducts periodic evaluation of the quality of university education (Ustawa, 2018). The evaluation conducted by the PKA, their universality, inevitability and administrative consequences constitute important factors for increasing the university's commitment to the quality of education (Chmielecka, Żurawski, 2019).

The evaluation of the quality of education conducted by PKA may be conducted in the form of a programme evaluation or a comprehensive evaluation. The general criteria used by PKA during the programme evaluation, taking into account the international standards for educational quality assurance, are defined in the Regulation of the Minister of Higher Education of 12 September 2018 (Rozporządzenie..., 2018). According to the Regulation, the programme evaluation should include, among others, the methods used by the HEI to improve the quality of education and its effectiveness. Therefore, the evaluation should focus not only on the formal performance of the internal educational quality assurance system, but also on the assessment of the effects of actions taken by the HEIs as regards the quality of education (Brdulak, 2016).

The detailed criteria applied to assess the quality of education provided in a field of study is carried out are set out in Appendix 2 to the Statutes of the Polish Accreditation Committee. These criteria are grouped around ten areas, concerning (Statut PKA, 2019):

- 1) Structure of the study programme, including the concept, learning objectives and learning outcomes,
- 2) Implementation of the study programme, including curriculum content, timetable for the implementation of the study programme and forms and organisation of classes, teaching methods, professional practice, organisation of the teaching and learning process,
- 3) Admission, verification of students' learning outcomes achieved, completion of individual semesters and years and graduation,
- 4) Competence, experience, qualifications and number of the teaching staff, as well as the development and improvement of staff,
- 5) Infrastructure and educational resources used in the implementation of the study programme and their improvement,
- 6) Cooperation with the socio-economic environment in the construction, implementation and improvement of the study programme and its impact on the development of the faculty,

- 7) Conditions and ways of increasing the degree of internationalisation of the educational process in the faculty,
- 8) Support for students in their learning, social, scientific or professional development and entry into the labour market, and the development and improvement of forms of support,
- 9) Public access to information about the study programme, the conditions of its implementation and the results achieved,
- 10) Quality, design, approval, monitoring, review and improvement of the study programme policies.

The requirements related to the internal system of educational quality assurance are defined in criterion 10. According to them, the principles for the design, approval and revision of the study programme should be formally adopted and applied in the higher education institution. The university should conduct systematic evaluation of the study programme, using the results of the analysis of reliable data and information, with the participation of internal (including students) and external stakeholders, aimed to improve the quality of education. In addition, the quality of education in the field of study should be subject to regular external evaluations, and the results of these evaluations should be publicly available and used in quality improvement (Statut PKA, 2019). It follows from the above criteria that the educational quality assurance systems implemented at universities should not only guarantee the quality of educational process, but also should be systematically developed and improved (Molenda, Hąbel, White, 2015). A valuable source of information for HEIs on the needs and directions for systems improvement are precisely the results of programme evaluations on educational quality conducted by PKA. Based on these results, HEIs can learn about the weaknesses of their systems and identify those areas that should be prioritised when taking measures to improve the effectiveness of the systems.

The issue of a systemic approach to educational quality assurance has been the subject of much research. For example, there are publications dedicated to the quality of education in the context of the massification of higher education and systemic transformation in Poland (Chmielecka, Żurawski, 2019; Godłów-Legiędź, 2016), the tasks of the Polish Accreditation Committee in supervising the quality of education (Brdulak, 2026; Kwiecień, 2020), and the role of the Bologna process in ensuring the quality of education (Kujawa, 2021; Nasalska, 2017) as well as guidelines and standards concerning internal educational quality assurance systems in the European Higher Education Area (Chmielecka, 2015; Schmuck, 2021; Skinder, 2021). These works also present the internal educational quality assurance systems implemented at the Polish universities (Zajadacz, Tobolska, 2020; Richert, Muzykiewicz, Łyp-Wrońska, 2015; Ligarski, 2015). An attempt was made to assess the compliance of the internal educational quality assurance system implemented in one Polish university with the criteria described in the CAF model for educational services (Wiśniewska, 2015), to assess the possibility of using the ISO 9001 standard requirements to build the internal educational quality assurance system (Przystupa, 2017; Schmuck, 2021), to assess the extent to which the elements

of the internal educational quality assurance systems functioning in Polish universities are used by the management of these universities' organizational units in the management process (Piasecka, 2017), and to assess the possibility of using internal audit as a method for diagnosing internal educational quality assurance systems (Molenda, Hąbel, Biały, 2015; Szkiel, 2018). Studies were also conducted to evaluate the functioning of the internal educational quality assurance systems implemented in Polish universities. For example, an attempt was made to identify problems related to the functioning of the systems and selected processes conducted within the systems (Próchnicka, Tutko, 2015; Dolański, Janiak-Jasińska, 2021), as well as to identify actions taken by universities to improve the systems and good practices in this area (Próchnicka, Tutko, 2015).

The novelty of the work stems from the identified research gap – there have not been any studies focused on a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of the internal educational quality assurance systems implemented at the Polish universities. The originality of the research results lies in identifying the weaknesses of these systems and the elements of the systems that should be prioritised by HEIs when taking measures to improve their effectiveness.

This paper aims to assess the effectiveness of the internal educational quality assurance systems implemented at the Polish universities providing education in the field of management. Based on such formulated objective, the hypothesis was proposed that the internal educational quality assurance systems functioning in universities, despite the extensive experience of the universities in maintaining them, are not fully effective, and the systemic solutions applied by the universities aimed at ensuring the quality of educational services provided need improvement. The research problem addressed in the work was to identify which areas of the internal educational quality assurance systems most significantly limit their effectiveness and, therefore, should be prioritized by universities when implementing improvement actions.

The article was prepared based on an analysis of national legal regulations concerning higher education, a review of the literature on the quality of higher education, and a systematic approach to ensuring the quality of education, as well as analysis of pre-existing data – the reports on programme evaluations conducted by the evaluation teams of the Polish Accreditation Committee at universities providing education in the field of management.

## **2. Methods**

This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of internal educational quality assurance systems implemented at the Polish universities providing education in the field of management. In order to achieve the aim of the study, the documents were examined using the method of a qualitative analysis of pre-existing data. The analysis included reports on the educational quality evaluations (study programme evaluations) conducted between 2020 and 2023 by the

PKA evaluation teams at the HEIs providing education in the field of management. The reports were downloaded from the database of evaluated HEIs, units and fields of study available on the PKA website (PKA, 2024). A total of 104 reports were evaluated (Table 1).

**Table 1.**  
*Characteristics of the study sample*

Type of university		n	N
Profile of studies	Practical	68	104
	Academic	36	
University status	Public	38	104
	Non-public	66	

Source: own elaboration.

Each report was evaluated by analysing:

- 1) The final outcome of the programme evaluation,
- 2) The degree of fulfilling criterion 10 of the programme evaluation related to the internal educational quality assurance system, including the quality policy, the principles of designing, approving, monitoring, reviewing and improving the study programme,
- 3) Comments of the PKA evaluation team related to the effectiveness of the internal educational quality assurance system implemented at the evaluated HEI, including:
  - description of the results of the factual analysis and evaluation of the criterion fulfilment,
  - justification of the evaluation of the degree of the criterion fulfilment,
  - good practices within the internal system of ensuring the education quality, which could constitute grounds for awarding the university a certificate of education excellence,
  - recommendations for improvement of the internal system of ensuring education quality.

The obtained results were grouped, taking into consideration the areas of the internal educational quality system, indicated in the remarks specified by the PKA evaluation teams.

### 3. Results and discussion

The analysis of each report began with checking to what extent, in the opinion of the PKA evaluation team, the evaluated HEI fulfils the requirements specified in criterion 10 of the programme evaluation, concerning the internal education quality system. The result of the evaluation is presented on a three-level scale: criterion fulfilled, partially fulfilled and not fulfilled (Statut PKA, 2019). The results obtained are presented in table 2.

**Table 2.**  
*General results of assessing the fulfilment of criterion 10*

		Assessment of fulfilment degree of criterion 10			
		Fulfilled	Partially fulfilled	Not fulfilled	Total
Overall result of programme	Positive evaluation	51	14	-	65
	Positive evaluation with a term reduced to 2 years	5	25	3	33
	Negative evaluation	-	2	4	6
	Total	56	41	7	

Source: own elaboration.

Slightly more than half of the evaluated HEIs (56) fully fulfilled the criterion concerning the internal educational quality assurance system, while 41 fulfilled this criterion to a partial degree. In the case of 7 of the evaluated HEIs, the evaluation teams found that the criterion was not fulfilled.

In the next stage of the report examination, it was checked whether, in the description of criterion 10 fulfilment, the evaluation teams indicated comments concerning the performance of the internal system of educational quality assurance and the recommendations for improvement of the system effectiveness, as well as good practices, which could constitute grounds for awarding the university a certificate of excellence (table 3).

**Table 3.**  
*Number of programme evaluation reports, indicating the remarks and recommendations and good practices related to the fulfilment of criterion 10*

Evaluation of the fulfilment degree of criterion 10	The types of evaluation findings formulated in the evaluation report relative to the fulfilment of criterion 10	
	Remarks in the description of the fulfilment degree of criterion	Good practices
Fulfilled	25	5
Partially fulfilled	41	-
Not fulfilled	7	-
Total	73	5

Source: own elaboration.

The PKA evaluation teams formulated remarks related to the internal educational quality assurance system implemented at the evaluated HEIs in the majority, i.e. 73 reports.

The area of internal educational quality assurance systems implemented at the evaluated HEIs, which received the largest number of remarks from the evaluation teams (58 reports), was the process of reviewing and improving the study programme. In evaluating this area, the teams found the following deficiencies:

- lack of formally adopted procedures defining the rules for designing, approving, reviewing, updating and withdrawing the study programme,
- lack of a systematic approach to study programme reviews and the incidental and informal nature of the review,
- limited scope of the review, not covering all the elements of the programme relevant to ensuring the quality of education, e.g. learning outcomes, ECTS system, course

sequence, curriculum content, forms of teaching, learning methods, methods of verifying learning outcomes, course charters, graduation process, professional practice, academic achievements and competences of the academic staff, fortunes of graduates,

- superficial and summary scope of analyses within the framework of the study programme review,
- inadequate and too general documentation of the results of the study programme review and actions taken as a result of the review related to the modification of the programme.

The evaluation teams also pointed to the ineffectiveness of the programme reviews conducted by the universities under evaluation, as they do not provide reliable information to enable the universities to identify risks related to programme non-compliance and to detect errors and incompatibilities in the programme. According to the evaluation teams, the HEIs also do not draw the right conclusions from the study programme review, as these conclusions are not useful in terms of identifying the needs for programme changes and do not lead to the implementation of programme improvement activities. A weakness of the study programme review process also refers to the limited effectiveness of actions taken by the evaluated HEIs as a result of the review, as they do not lead to the elimination of errors and incompatibilities concerning individual elements of the programme.

The second most numerous group of remarks indicated by the evaluation teams in their evaluation reports (55 reports) referred to the formulation of the assumed learning outcomes and the system used by universities for the verification of learning outcomes achieved by students. The evaluation teams pointed to improperly formulated learning outcomes, including the lack of their cohesion with the characteristics of the Polish Qualifications Framework, level and profile of studies, educational objectives and curricula, as well as the lack of university evaluation of the learning outcomes in terms of their correct formulation and compliance with the characteristics of the Polish Qualifications Framework. Whereas irregularities regarding the verification of learning outcomes achieved by students concerned:

- inappropriately adopted and applied methods for the learning outcomes verification,
- inconsistencies between the methods of verification of the learning outcomes defined in the subject charters and the methods used in practice,
- lack of university evaluation of the correctness of identifying, selecting and using the methods for the learning outcomes verification,
- lack of systematic evaluation of the learning outcomes achieved by students and lack of documentation confirming the achieved learning outcomes,
- failure to analyse documentation containing information related to the learning outcomes achieved by students.

The evaluation teams also pointed out the ineffectiveness of the systemic solutions applied by the evaluated HEIs with regard to periodic reviews of the correctness of identifying and verifying the learning outcomes. In the opinion of the teams, these reviews do not lead to

identifying any inconsistencies in the formulation and means of verification of the learning outcomes. They also do not enable the formulation of reliable conclusions and recommendations concerning actions to be taken in order to remove the inconsistencies and do not lead to the implementation of actions improving the system.

In 40 reports, the evaluation teams identified incompatibilities concerning the diploma process. According to the teams, the evaluated HEIs have not implemented systemic solutions related to the supervision of the quality of diploma theses at each stage of the diploma process, or the implemented solutions are not effective, as they result in low quality of the diploma theses. The evaluation teams found that the procedures developed by the HEIs defining the rules of graduation are too general and imprecise; moreover, they are not applied in practice. The evaluated HEIs also failed to develop procedures for systematic assessment of the quality of diploma theses as part of their internal educational quality assurance system, which means that this assessment is not performed and fails to provide information that constitutes grounds for the evaluation of study programme. The evaluation teams also indicated that the systemic solutions adopted by the HEIs related to the evaluation of the quality of diploma theses are ineffective, as they fail to identify the shortcomings related to:

- low quality theses,
- inadequate reviews of diploma theses,
- overstatement of marks for diploma theses and discrepancies in the assessment of theses by supervisors and reviewers.

The evaluation teams also found that the universities do not use the results of the thesis quality analysis in the evaluation of the study programme. The thesis quality assessment conducted by the universities fails to result in drawing appropriate conclusions from the assessment, identifying corrective actions and needs for improvement of the graduation process. Among the factors limiting the effectiveness of thesis quality assessment, the evaluation teams pointed to:

- in the thesis quality assessment, the universities only use quantitative indicators, which fail to ensure the correctness of thesis quality assessment and its compliance with the requirements, level and profile of studies,
- limiting the assessment of the quality of diploma theses only to assessing the fulfilment of formal requirements resulting from the diploma procedure.

Another area of the internal educational quality assurance system for with inconsistencies detected by the evaluation teams (formulated in 24 reports) is the ECTS system. The irregularities in this area referred to the failure to include in the assessment of study programme the correct allocation of ECTS points to subjects and programme content and their consistency with student workload. In the opinion of the evaluation teams, reviews of the ECTS system are not conducted in a systematic manner but are ad hoc and incidental in their nature and are not documented. In addition, the procedures developed by the HEIs for the review of

the ECTS system are not sufficiently transparent, which results in ineffectiveness of the reviews conducted, as they do not enable the identification of deficiencies.

In 22 reports, the evaluation teams identified incompatibilities in the area of apprenticeships. The identified inconsistencies referred to the lack of systematic solutions for comprehensive and systematic assessment of apprenticeship programmes, including the assumed learning outcomes assigned to apprenticeships and methods for verification of their achievement by students, and in solutions for periodic quality assessment of the organisation and implementation of apprenticeships. The evaluation teams indicated that the scope of monitoring the apprenticeships was too narrow and that supervision of apprenticeships at each stage of the process was ineffective; moreover, they found the scope of apprenticeship evaluation limited and insufficient to identify irregularities related to the implementation of the process. In addition, the evaluation teams indicated as weakness of this area of the internal system of educational quality assurance, in the evaluated HEIs, the following:

- lack of using the internship assessment to comprehensively evaluate the study programme and implement effective improvement measures,
- lack of practical implementation of procedures defining the rules for the implementation of internships or their ineffective implementation.

The evaluation teams also formulated comments related to the universities' assurance regarding the participation of internal stakeholders (employees and students) and external stakeholders (employers, graduates of the field of study) in the improvement of the study programme. Discrepancies in this respect were formulated in 20 audit reports. The evaluation teams indicate:

- lack of consultation of the study programme with stakeholders,
- limited (formal rather than substantive) participation of stakeholders in the review of the programme and the educational process, and the limited extent in which stakeholders evaluate the programme, which results in a limited influence of their opinions on programme modifications,
- inadequately constructed tools (survey questionnaires) addressed to stakeholders used in the programme review process, resulting in limited usefulness of the information collected on the needs for programme changes.

Furthermore, according to the evaluation teams, the process of reporting changes to the study programme by stakeholders is not formalised and is based on ad hoc activities. The solutions applied by the HEIs related to monitoring the cooperation with the economic environment are also ineffective.

In 20 reports, the evaluation teams identified shortcomings related to the solutions within the internal educational quality assurance systems aimed to ensure adequate quality of academic staff. The identified inconsistencies concerned the failure of HEIs to design systemic solutions for systematic staff assessment and review, the failure to implement in practice the procedures related to staff assessment and review, and too narrow scope of assessment and review.

The universities were also found to be failing to monitor the compliance of academic teachers' qualifications and academic achievements with the requirements of individual courses.

The evaluation teams also found that the HEIs do not analyse the results of staff assessments and reviews and do not maintain the related documentation. A weakness of the academic staff management processes applied in the evaluated HEIs is their low effectiveness, as these processes fail to identify staff shortage problems, and inadequacies related to improper achievements and qualifications of academic staff. In addition, periodic reviews of academic staff are not effective as they fail to implement effective corrective actions.

The remarks and observations concerning system solutions related to studying the fortunes of graduates were included in 18 reports. The evaluation teams indicated that the evaluated HEIs fail to monitor the fortunes of graduates and do not use the results of the national system monitoring the fortunes of graduates (ELA) in their analyses. Moreover, the tools used in the process of studying the fortunes of graduates used by HEIs are inappropriately designed, which results in a too narrow scope of the study. Another weakness of studying the fortunes of graduates at the evaluated universities refers to a low returnability of the survey questionnaires. The evaluation teams also found that the HEIs do not evaluate the results of studying the fortunes of graduates, do not use the results of studying in the process of improving the quality of education, to implement effective corrective measures and to introduce changes to the study programme.

Within the internal educational quality assurance system, the university should establish rules to take actions to ensure the correct preparation and timeliness of the subject charters. The remarks in this regard were made in 16 reports. The evaluation teams stated that the monitoring, review and updating of the subject charters are not performed or these activities are incidental. Moreover, in the opinion of the teams, the review process conducted by the evaluated HEIs is ineffective, as it makes it impossible to identify irregularities related to the preparation of the charters, e.g. lack of subject learning outcomes, inadequacy of selecting the methods for verifying the learning outcomes with the subject learning outcomes and the form of classes, generality of information on educational contents, lack of detailed information on the methods of verifying the learning outcomes, lack of description of methods and forms of verifying the learning outcomes, lack of information on the teaching tools applied. Higher education institutions also fail to maintain documentation of the results of reviews and updates of the subject charters.

An important element of the internal educational quality assurance systems developed by universities is the system for collecting students' opinions on the teaching process and the work of academic staff. Irregularities in this area were formulated in 15 reports. Among the shortcomings identified, the evaluation teams indicated:

- lack of evaluation surveys conducted,
- low student participation in evaluation surveys and low return rate of survey questionnaires,

- improperly constructed research tools (assessment survey questionnaires),
- inappropriate frequency and scope of surveys conducted,
- ineffective flow of information at the university related to the results of assessment questionnaires,
- failure to provide students with access to survey results,
- lack of analysis of assessment questionnaire results,
- lack of use of assessment questionnaire results to undertake activities improving the quality of education.

The internal educational quality assurance systems should enable HEIs to provide education in accordance with higher education legislation. The remarks in this respect were formulated in 15 reports. The evaluation teams indicated a lack of adjusting the operations of the evaluated HEIs to the legal regulations concerning the organisation and delivery of education and a lack of compliance of the study programme with the applicable regulations. The teams also stated that the solutions adopted by the HEIs within the internal system of educational quality assurance fail to consider the principles of monitoring the legal, regulatory requirements and standards related to the educational process and fail to ensure a fast reaction of the HEIs to changes in the regulations. In addition, the developed procedures concerning the design and approval of the study programme do not ensure that the programmes are adjusted to all requirements resulting from the legislation. Moreover, the compliance of study programmes with regulations is not considered during the periodic reviews of programmes.

The evaluation teams also found inadequacies concerning the organisational structure defined within the internal educational quality assurance system and the allocation of responsibilities and authority for the performance of tasks related to the system maintenance and improvement. The remarks in this respect were formulated in 12 reports. In evaluating this area, the evaluation teams indicated the following:

- lack of appointment of persons responsible for ensuring, evaluating and improving the quality of education,
- inadequate composition of the team responsible for ensuring, evaluation and improvement of the quality of education,
- lack of formal approval of documents describing the responsibilities and authorities related to ensuring, evaluation and improvement of the quality of education, lack of periodic review and updating of these documents,
- composition of the team responsible for ensuring, evaluation and improvement of education quality inconsistent with the internal regulations and documentation of the internal educational quality assurance system, inconsistency of the structure of internal educational quality assurance system described in the system documentation with the structure in practice,

- lack of clear and detailed definition of the competences and responsibilities for evaluation and improvement of the educational quality, duplication of these competences.

In 9 reports, the evaluation teams indicated their remarks concerning the rules established by HEIs related to conducting class observations. In the opinion of the evaluation teams, class observations conducted at the evaluated universities are not systematic - they are either not conducted or are conducted only if there are signals concerning improper quality of teaching. The teams also indicated the lack of system-based solutions related to the selection of classes for observation, limited scope of class observations (not covering all teaching courses). Moreover, the evaluated universities fail to analyse the results of class observations and do not use the results of class observations to implement corrective measures, improving the educational process and the study programme.

Incompatibilities concerning system-based solutions in the area of university recruitment were indicated in 9 reports. The remarks of the evaluation teams concerned the lack of definition or improperly and imprecisely defined recruitment requirements for candidates (including foreigners), as well as the lack of formally defined recruitment rules.

The least numerous group of remarks included in the evaluation reports (7 reports) concerned providing the university's stakeholders with access to information on the internal educational quality assurance system, the study programme and the assumed learning outcomes. The evaluation teams stated that the evaluated HEIs on their websites fail to provide stakeholders with access to all documents related to the study programme, documents describing the internal educational quality assurance system implemented at the HEI, as well as information about the organisational structure within the system. It was also found that documents describing the internal educational quality assurance system made available on the HEIs' websites are outdated. In the opinion of the evaluation teams, the system-based solutions applied by HEIs to evaluate the provision of public access to information are ineffective, as they do not enable the identification of all irregularities in this respect and the evaluation results are not used to implement effective corrective measures.

In addition to inadequacies related to individual areas of the internal educational quality assurance systems, the evaluation teams also identified good practices applied by the evaluated HEIs within the system. Good practices were identified only in the case of the evaluated 5 HEIs. Good practices were included:

- developing comprehensive formal grounds for the system operation and the implementation of measures and tools supporting the improvement of education quality,
- structural and competence solutions within the internal educational quality assurance system, comprehensive definition of responsibilities and competences of persons and bodies involved in education quality assurance,
- procedural solutions concerning periodical reviews of areas related to education, including the study programme, teaching staff, research and didactic infrastructure,

student support, effects of cooperation with the socio-economic environment and the degree of internationalisation of education,

- comprehensive documentation of the results of the system effectiveness evaluation and the quality of didactic process, as well as indication of recommendations for improving the educational concept,
- evaluation of teaching activities through questionnaire surveys addressed to academic teachers, aimed to identify problems related to the achievement of learning outcomes, which constitute grounds for activities improving the quality of education,
- implementation of a procedure of periodical assessment of the quality of diploma theses, ensuring systematic improvement of the methodological and content-related level of theses,
- multifaceted care for the quality of education subject to external evaluation.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The implementation of internal educational quality assurance systems is not a new responsibility for the Polish HEIs, as it was already set out in the legislation on higher education in 2007 (Rozporządzenie, 2007). Thus, HEIs should already have a lot of experience in maintaining the systems and systematic assessment of their effectiveness, as well as in improving the applied system-based solutions aimed to ensure the quality of the education provided. Based on the analysis of programme evaluation reports conducted by PKA evaluation teams for the faculty of management, it can be concluded that the internal educational quality assurance systems implemented at the evaluated HEIs are not fully effective - remarks related to inadequate system operation were indicated in as many as 70% of the evaluation reports. Therefore, the on-going development of the systems should be the matter of concern at all levels of the HEI - the management, persons who have been assigned responsibility for ensuring, evaluating and improving the quality of education, the academic staff, as well as the administrative staff of the HEI.

The areas of internal educational quality assurance systems that should be prioritised by HEIs when implementing measures to improve the effectiveness of the systems include the process of reviewing and improving the study programme, the process of defining and verifying the assumed learning outcomes and the graduation process. However, other areas of the systems that reduce their effectiveness also need to be improved, such as the ECTS system, the work placement process, ensuring stakeholder participation in the improvement of the study programme or ensuring the quality of academic staff. The main problems limiting the effective system operation highlighted by the evaluation teams include:

- lack of development and formalisation of system-based solutions in those areas that have an impact on ensuring the quality of education,
- lack of effective implementation in practice of the procedures defining the principles of system operation,
- ineffective activities related to evaluating the individual elements of the system, making it impossible to draw proper conclusions, identify inconsistencies detected, and implement appropriate improvement actions,
- lack of using the results of evaluations conducted as part of the system to determine and implement improvement actions,
- lack of effectiveness of improvement actions for individual elements of the system, as they fail to lead to the elimination of inconsistencies.

The results of the evaluations conducted by PKA are a valuable source of information for HEIs on the weaknesses of their internal educational quality assurance systems and the needs for improvement. However, in their evaluation reports, the PKA evaluation teams indicate only the areas of the systems which require improvement, and it is up to the evaluated HEIs to use this information to the extent to which they use it to eliminate the reasons for the indicated inconsistencies and implement effective measures to prevent the same inconsistencies from occurring in the future.

In summary, based on the results of the conducted study, the following conclusions can be formulated:

1. The internal educational quality assurance systems implemented at the evaluated HEIs are not fully effective and need to be improved.
2. Actions aimed at improving the internal educational quality assurance systems should focus primarily on developing and formalisation of system-based solutions in areas such as the review and improvement of the study program, the process of defining and verifying the assumed learning outcomes and the graduation process.
3. The internal educational quality assurance systems will only be improved if universities conduct systematic and comprehensive evaluations of their effectiveness and use the results of these evaluations to implement effective improvement actions.

The obtained results have theoretical significance as they complement the knowledge about the functioning of the internal educational quality assurance systems and the challenges faced by universities related to their maintenance and development. The results may also have practical applications – they can be used by universities, not only those offering management programs, to identify and implement actions aimed at increasing the effectiveness of internal quality assurance systems for education, processes conducted within these systems, and, consequently, improving the quality of services provided. Improving internal quality assurance systems for education, which are an integral part of the university management system, can contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of university management processes and the results achieved in various areas of activity – not only related to the quality of education but

also scientific research and collaboration with the economic environment. This should be seen as an opportunity to increase the competitiveness of Polish universities and, as a result, the national higher education system.

When analysing the obtained research results, it is important to be aware of the associated limitations. These limitations are due to the fact that the examination included the reports on educational quality assessments conducted in only one field of study (management) and only in Polish universities. Therefore, the obtained results cannot be generalised so as to cover the entire population of higher education institutions in Poland and be applied to the effectiveness of systems implemented in foreign universities. Therefore, further research in this area is justified. Attention should also be paid to certain limitations resulting from the analysed data and the research method used. The evaluation of the internal quality assurance systems' effectiveness was based on an analysis of quality assessment reports conducted by various PKA evaluation teams, which could have influenced the opinions and comments formulated in the reports. Moreover, the study used existing data, without utilizing primary data related to the functioning of the internal quality assurance systems in universities.

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