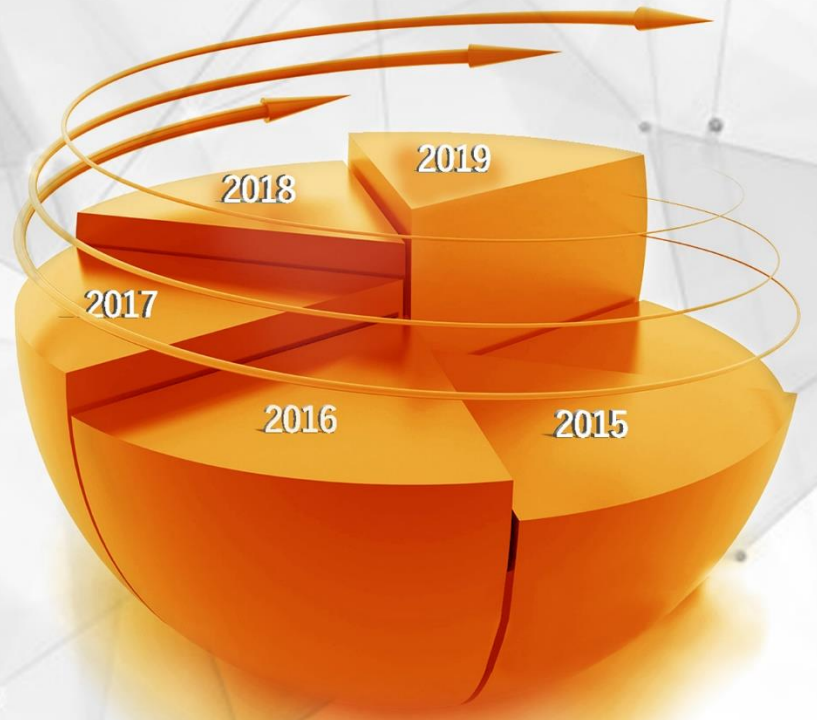




**Turkish Higher Education
Quality Council**



THEQC 2015-2019 REVIEW REPORT



TURKISH HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY
COUNCIL

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FOREWORD



Turkish Higher Education Quality Council (THEQC), which was required for many years and is independent in terms of administration and financing, was established in 2017 as a result of the efforts of the Council of Higher Education (CoHE). Our Council, which has completed its formation in a short time, increases its recognition at the national and international levels and continues its activities regarding full membership to various organizations, especially ENQA.

THEQC has three duties. The first is to support the structuring of the internal quality system, which focuses on the achievement of the missions and objectives of higher education institutions, and to conduct the external evaluation of this system. During the Institutional External Evaluation Program performed through on-site visits of the evaluation teams, the institutional self-evaluation reports (ISERs), which are prepared by the institutions annually, are taken as basis and the institutions' strengths and areas for further development are determined by considering how the institution takes measures and makes improvements with regard to its mission, objectives and strategies that are declared in line with the global developments and our country's goals. The most important concepts embraced by THEQC, a national organization in the evaluation of quality assurance systems of higher education institutions, include accountability, transparency, learning outcomes, evidence-based approach and innovation. So far, 160 higher education institutions have been evaluated and the external evaluation process of all higher education institutions with graduates has been completed. The results obtained in this context indicate that our institutions should make more efforts especially in monitoring and taking measures. For this purpose, THEQC guides higher education institutions to create and develop their own quality assurance systems.

The second duty of THEQC is to maintain the processes of authorization and recognition of national and international accreditation agencies. In order for agencies to be recognized and authorized by THEQC, their implementations and criteria regarding program accreditation must be in compliance with the national and international standards and must adopt an output-oriented accreditation approach. Within

this scope, THEQC has authorized 12 national accreditation agencies and recognized 3 international agencies operating in our country.

The third duty of our council is to disseminate the quality assurance culture in the higher education system. Within this scope, THEQC provides guidance services for higher education institutions, organizes events and performs various publishing activities. In addition, the Higher Education Quality Assurance Situation Report is prepared annually by THEQC in a way that it includes the recommendations for quality improvement by evaluating institutional feedback reports (IFRs) after the external evaluation process of the higher education institutions and is submitted for the information of relevant stakeholders.

This report has been prepared in consideration of all the situation reports published by THEQC so far.

THEQC continues its works to establish a system that focuses on the results of the efforts of universities, takes the conditions of our country into account and communicates with the world with the belief that institutional autonomy and leadership constitute the core of quality assurance systems. Furthermore, the matter regarding how to approach the innovations that have emerged in higher education and dramatically affected and changed education such as short/long term degree programs, digital credits, developments in technology, artificial intelligence and augmented reality will be considered as well.

Lastly, I would like to thank the CoHE President Prof. Dr. M.A. Yekta SARAÇ, who gave his support to higher education quality assurance endeavours, the Council members and employees who work devotedly, all team leaders and evaluators, higher education institutions and managers that provided contribution, and all program accreditation agencies that successfully perform program accreditation works. I hope that this review report, which examines the activities of THEQC between 2015 and 2019, will contribute to the development of the Turkish higher education system and improvement efforts made for that matter.

Prof. Dr. Muzaffer ELMAS
THEQC President

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAS	Accreditation Agencies System
CoHE	Council of Higher Education
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
IFR	Institutional Feedback Report
ISER	Institutional Self-Evaluation Report
PDCA	Plan-Do-Check-Act
QAMIS	Quality Assurance Management Information System
THEQC	Turkish Higher Education Quality Council

ECZAKDER	Evaluation and Accreditation Association for Programs in the Faculties of Pharmacy
EPDAD	Evaluation and Accreditation Association for Teaching Programs
FEDEK	Science, Literature, Faculty of Science and Letters, Faculty of Languages, History and Geography Curriculum Programs Assessments and Accreditation Association
HEPDAK	Association for Evaluation and Accreditation of Nursing Education Programs
İAA	Theological Studies Accreditation Agency
İLAD	Communication Research Association
MÜDEK	Association for Evaluation and Accreditation of Engineering Programs
SABAK	Association for Evaluation and Accreditation of Health Sciences Education Programs
TEPDAD	Association for Evaluation and Accreditation of Medical Education Programs
TPD	Turkish Psychological Association
TUADER	Tourism Education Evaluation and Accreditation Board
VEDEK	Association for Evaluation and Accreditation of Educational Institutions and Programs of Veterinary Medicine



1. INTRODUCTION

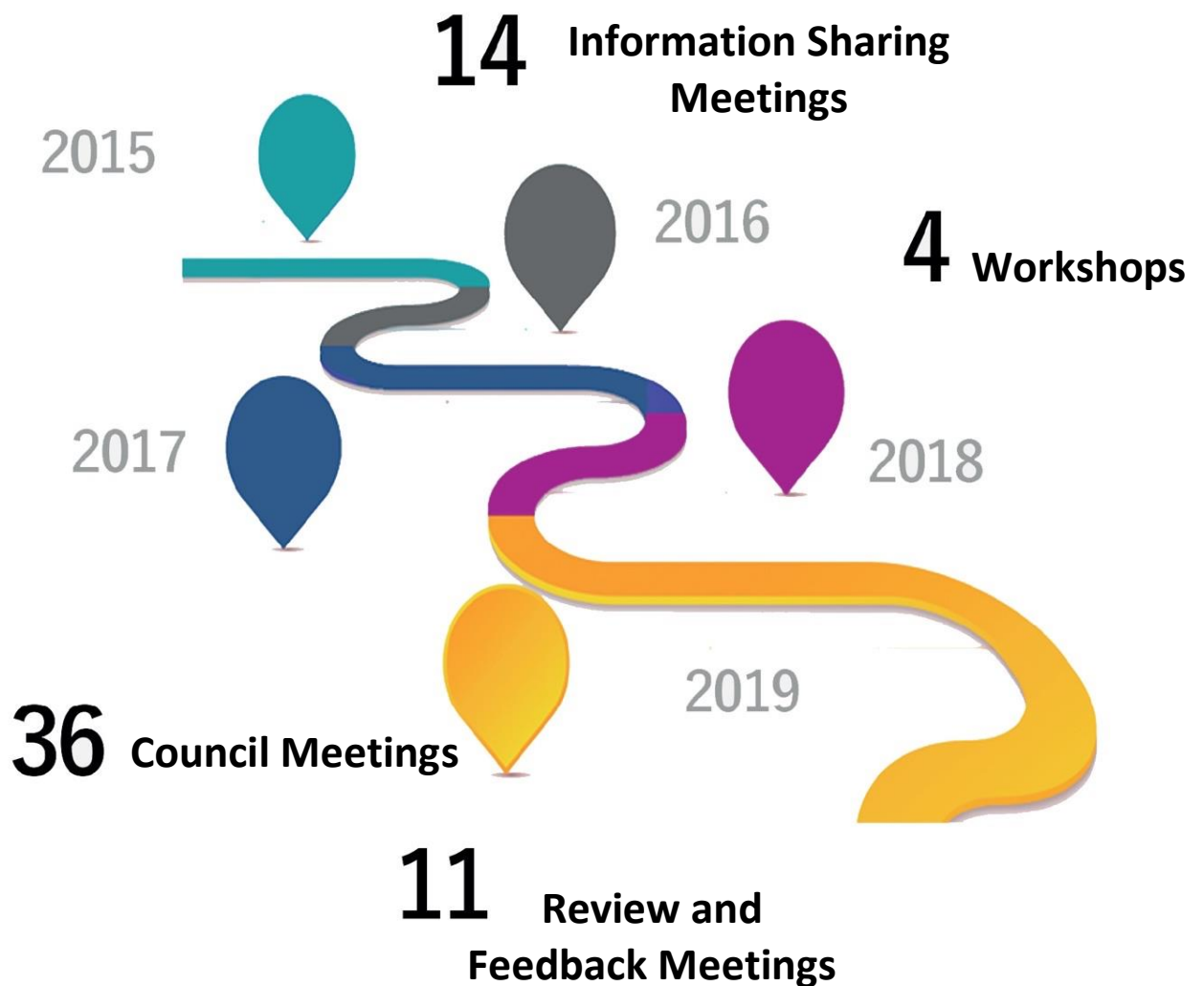
Currently, trends in higher education systems make competition prominent and bring institutions of even different higher education systems closer to each other. This necessitates higher education institutions to be more transparent, cooperative and quality-oriented. The Turkish higher education system, which is integrated with international higher education systems, is experiencing similar developments under the influence of these trends. At the national level, especially as of 2015, substantial developments have been experienced in the area of quality assurance in the Turkish higher education, which goes back to the early 2000s, to the Bologna Process implementations. One of the most important developments in this context has been the establishment of THEQC that regulates and guides the higher education system.

While trends in higher education feature competition, HEIs and different higher education systems get closer to each other.

The most important objectives of THEQC, which has been following and adopting the methods and models of international quality assurance systems in addition to national requirements and objectives since its establishment, are to be able to integrate quality assurance to learning and teaching processes, research and development activities, administrative structures and social contribution mechanisms, to reveal the areas for further development so that the qualifications of our national higher education system will increase and provide meaningful contributions to qualified human resources who are endowed with the skills required by the era and open to learning, development and cooperation. With this perspective, it carries out the internal and external quality assurance processes related to the abovementioned activities and performs the authorization and recognition of independent external evaluation agencies in the area of program accreditation.

Since its first meeting on 23 December 2015, THEQC has held more than 60 meetings for these purposes. It has organized more than 10 training activities in areas such as providing, evaluating and reporting internal and external quality assurance. It has developed many guides, guidelines and forms. It has performed internal quality assurance works regularly with all universities in the Turkish higher education system and completed the institutional external evaluation of 160 higher education institutions (77.29% of all higher education institutions) in the first five years. Reports on evaluation processes were regularly published on the Council's website and based on these, situation reports describing the general situations of 2016, 2017,

2018 and 2019 were prepared and shared with the public on the web. Authorization of 12 national accreditation agencies and recognition of 3 international accreditation agencies have been completed. In order to ensure the quality assurance in higher education, information sharing meetings were held with various institutions serving in different countries and cooperation agreements were signed.



2. THEQC'S MISSION AND AREAS OF ACTIVITY

2.1 Mission, Vision and Strategic Objectives

MISSION

To contribute to the continuous development of higher education institutions in Turkey and the achievement of universal qualifications by individuals

VISION

To be an effective and internationally recognized institution in the field of higher education quality assurance



VALUES

- Objectivity
- Transparency
- Ethical behavior
- Independence
- Openness to collaboration
- Guidance
- Innovativeness
- Respect to Diversity

Strategic Objectives:

Strategic Objective 1. To construct and disseminate bureaucratic burden-reduced quality assurance systems in higher education with innovative applications and to ensure the continuous improvement of these systems.

Strategic Objective 2. To promote the development of quality assurance systems in higher education.

Strategic Objective 3. To encourage the dissemination of quality culture and establish cooperative relations between all stakeholders.

Strategic Objective 4. To become an independent, reliable, expert and institutionalized organization in the evaluation of quality assurance.

Strategic Objective 5. To heighten the recognition of the THEQC by increasing its internationalization level.

2.2. Activities

THEQC has four areas of activity to perform all its duties in line with its purpose of establishment.

These are:

1. Establishing internal and external quality assurance mechanisms in the higher education system and ensuring their effective functioning,
2. Performing evaluation according to national and international quality standards regarding quality levels of higher education institutions' learning and teaching, research and social contribution activities and administrative services,
3. Recognition and authorization of independent external evaluation and accreditation agencies,
4. Dissemination and consolidation of quality assurance culture in the higher education system.

In order to establish internal and external quality assurance mechanisms in the Turkish higher education system and to ensure their effective functioning, THEQC develops and supports the implementation of the National Quality Assurance System consisting of principles, quality indicators and related processes to be taken as reference in the internal quality assurance systems of higher education institutions. In addition, the ISERs prepared annually by higher education institutions ensure the evaluation of internal quality assurance systems of institutions. In this respect, another process performed by THEQC is the organization of training services on quality assurance needed by higher education institutions.

In accordance with Article 21 entitled "Institutional External Evaluation Program" of the Regulation on Higher Education Quality Assurance and the Higher Education Quality Council, THEQC's another area of

activity is the evaluation of learning and teaching, research and social contribution activities and administrative services of higher education institutions, which are subject to external evaluation process at least once every five years, according to national and international quality standards. For this purpose, THEQC performs the Institutional External Evaluation Program within the scope of the Institutional External Evaluation Criteria

(See:http://www.yokak.gov.tr/Common/Docs/Site_degerlendirme_prog_doc/kurumsal%20dis%20degerlendirme%20olcutleri.pdf).

In determining the external evaluation criteria of THEQC, compliance with standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance in Part 1 of the ESG (Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in European Higher Education Area) is considered. This relationship is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. THEQC evaluation criteria and their compliance with ESG

THEQC Evaluation Criteria		ESG Part 1
1. Quality Assurance System	1.1. Quality Policy 1.2. Duties, Responsibilities and Activities of Higher Education Quality Commissions 1.3. Stakeholder Participation	1.1. Policy for Quality Assurance 1.10. Cyclical External Quality Assurance
2. Learning and Teaching	2.1. Design and Approval of Programs 2.2. Continuous Monitoring and Updating of Programs 2.3. Student-Centred Learning, Teaching and Evaluation 2.4. Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification 2.5. Teaching Staff 2.6. Learning Resources, Accessibility and Supports	1.2. Design and Approval of Programmes 1.3. Student-Centred Learning, Teaching and Assessment 1.4. Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification 1.5. Teaching Staff 1.6. Learning Resources and Student Support 1.9. On-Going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes
3. Research, Development and Social Contribution	3.1. Institution's Research Strategy and Objectives 3.2. Institution's Research Resources 3.3. Institution's Research Staff	

	3.4. Monitoring and Improving Institution's Research Performance	
4. Governance System	4.1. Structure of Management and Administrative Units 4.2. Resource Management 4.3. Information Management System 4.4. Quality of Outsourced Services 4.5. Efficiency and Accountability of Management, Public Information	1.7. Information Management 1.8. Public Information

As shown in Table 1, THEQC evaluation criteria cover ESG Part 1 standards. However, while ESG Part 1 focuses more on the learning and teaching activities of higher education institutions and a group of other related activities, THEQC criteria also address research and development and social contribution aspects due to the structure and functioning of the Turkish higher education system.

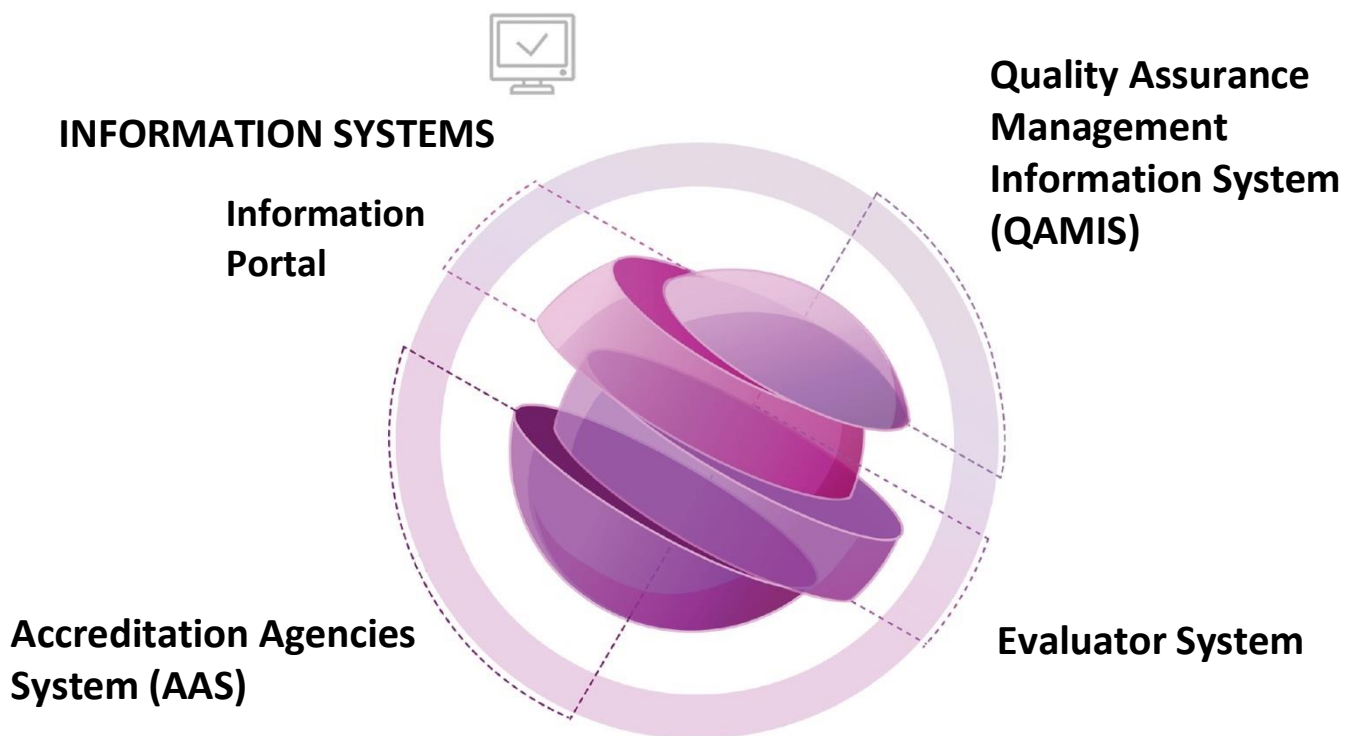
Table 2 shows the number of higher education institutions whose institutional external evaluation processes have been completed in the period of 2016-2019.

Table 2. Information on the number of institutions undergoing institutional external evaluation

EVALUATION YEAR	UNIVERSITY TYPE			NUMBER
	STATE	FOUNDATION	FOUNDATION VOCATIONAL SCHOOL	TOTAL
2016	13	7	0	20
2017	41	9	0	50
2018	24	20	1	45
2019	26	15	4	45
Total	104	51	5	160

When Table 2 is analyzed, it is seen that the external evaluation processes of 160 higher education institutions have been completed in the period of 2016-2019. Considering the fact that as of 2019 the number of higher education institutions in Turkey has reached 207 (See: <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/>), this figure corresponds to 77.29% of all higher education institutions. When it is evaluated in terms of the types of higher education institutions, it is understood that institutional external evaluation processes have been completed on the first five-year cycle basis in 104 (80.62%) of 129 state universities, 51 (69.86%) of 73 foundation universities, and all 5 foundation vocational schools of higher education (a higher education institution that was considered to be a foundation vocational school in 2016 has been included in the foundation university category in Table 2, since it has become a foundation university in the following years). The newly-established institutions with no graduates yet have not been included in the external evaluation process. In addition, self-evaluation processes have started by means of ISERs in the institutions that are not evaluated yet.

The external evaluation processes of higher education institutions within the scope of the "Mission Differentiation and Specialization Program in Higher Education Institutions" of CoHE are also performed by THEQC. Within the project carried out by CoHE, one of the main stakeholders of THEQC, there are 25 state universities; 10 of which are regional development-oriented and 15 are research-oriented. In addition to the standard quality assurance process, THEQC benefits from a number of sub-criteria and detailed performance indicators while performing external evaluations of the institutions within the scope of the project.



Institutional External Evaluation Program is maintained through Quality Assurance Management Information System (QAMIS) developed by the Council. This system renders the external evaluation process more active, efficient and productive. The benefits of QAMIS can be summarized as follows:

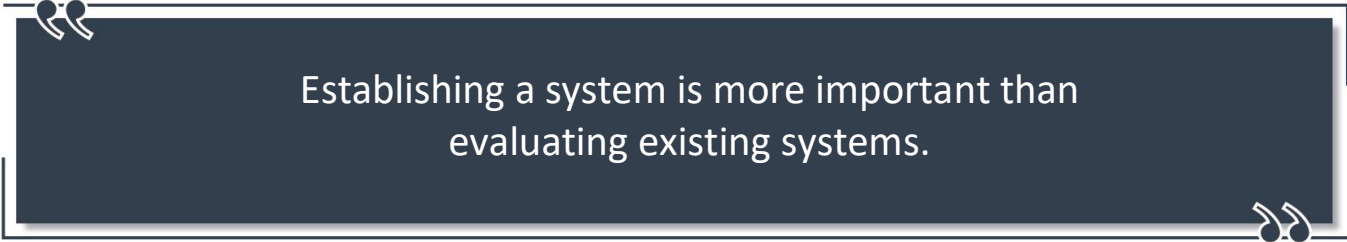
- ◇ Bureaucracy and paperwork have decreased.
- ◇ Workload of the administrative and academic staff in higher education institutions has decreased.
- ◇ Time-efficiency has been provided.
- ◇ Obtaining comparable results by years has become possible.
- ◇ Evidence-based evaluation implementations have increased.
- ◇ Information security and reliability have been ensured.
- ◇ Transparency and accountability have been ensured.

THEQC has also provided mentoring services to the higher education institutions to be evaluated within the scope of the 2018-2019 Institutional External Evaluation Program. The mentor assigned as part of these services has contributed to the establishment of the internal quality assurance system and the institution's preparation for the external evaluation process.

Another activity of THEQC within the scope of quality assurance in the period of 2016-2019 was the English Preparatory Schools External Evaluation Pilot Program. The English preparatory schools selected for the

pilot program upon the request of CoHE were evaluated in line with a set of criteria and guidelines developed. The evaluation process carried out within this program included the aspects regarding learning and teaching and was based on peer evaluation and volunteering. Within the external evaluation process, THEQC also carries out activities such as selection, assignment, training and performance evaluation of external evaluators.

In the Turkish higher education system, the focus of external quality assurance processes is on higher education institutions and educational programs. External quality assurance implementations carried out at the institutional level are performed by THEQC through the Institutional External Evaluation Program, while external quality assurance implementations at the program level are performed by the accreditation agencies authorized or recognized by THEQC. The authorization processes of national accreditation agencies and the recognition processes of international accreditation agencies are performed within the scope of the "Guide for the Authorization, Recognition and Monitoring of External Evaluation and Accreditation Agencies". As of October 2019, there are 12 authorized national accreditation agencies and 3 recognized accreditation agencies.



Establishing a system is more important than
evaluating existing systems.

Aiming to disseminate and consolidate the quality assurance culture in the higher education system, THEQC provides guidance services for higher education institutions, organizes activities and carries out various publishing activities for this purpose. Training, workshop and meeting presentations, e-newsletters and other documents are available on the official website of the Council. Higher Education Quality Assurance Situation Report, which includes recommendations for quality improvement that are determined by evaluating IFRs, is annually published by THEQC following the external evaluation process of higher education institutions and submitted for the relevant stakeholders' information, CoHE being in the first place. THEQC's other activities include the representation of Turkey in international organizations in terms of quality assurance and the collaborations with various institutions, councils and organizations such as CoHE, Turkish Qualifications Framework Board, international quality assurance agencies and higher education institutions on matters regarding quality assurance in higher education.

The activities and meetings held in 2015-2019 by THEQC for accreditation agencies, quality commissions of higher education institutions and other stakeholders within the scope of the Institutional External

Evaluation Program, authorization/recognition of accreditation agencies and dissemination of the quality assurance culture are listed in Table 3.



Table 3. THEQC's activities between 23 December 2015-11 October 2019

 <p>2015</p>	<p>First Council Meeting</p>
 <p>2016</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Council Meetings (13 times) - Information Meeting on Institutional External Evaluation Process - External Evaluator Training - Team Leaders Meeting - Information Meeting for Higher Education Institutions to be Evaluated
 <p>2017</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Council Meetings (4 times) - Information Meetings on Quality Assurance and THEQC's Activities upon HEIs' Invitations (15 times) - External Evaluator Training - Team Leaders Meeting - Institutional External Evaluation Program Review Meeting
 <p>2018</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Council Meetings (10 times) - 2017 Institutional External Evaluation Program Review Meeting - Information Meeting on Self-Evaluation and External Evaluation Processes of HEIs - Institutional Internal Quality Assurance System and Institutional Self-Evaluation Report Workshops (4 times) - Meeting with the Executives of HEIs Included in the Institutional External Evaluation Program of 2018 - Meetings on Integrated Quality Management Implementations (2 times) - External Evaluator Training - Student Evaluator Training - Team Leaders Meetings (2 times) - External Evaluator Training for English Preparatory Schools External Evaluation Program - Student Evaluator Training for English Preparatory Schools External Evaluation Program - Meeting on Internal QA System in HEIs and QA in Education
 <p>2019 (as of 11 October 2019)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Council Meetings (8 times) - 2018 Institutional External Evaluation Program Review Meetings (2 times) - 2019 Institutional External Evaluation Program Information Meetings (2 times) - External Evaluator Training - Information Meetings for Collaboration with International Quality Agencies such as QAA (England), EKKA (Estonia), HCÉRES (France), NCPA (Russia) (4 times) - Team Leaders Meeting - 2019 Institutional External Evaluation Program Review Meetings (2 times) - Information and Review Meeting with Representatives of 12 Accreditation Agencies Authorized by THEQC

A total of 72 meetings have been held by THEQC between 23 December 2015 and 11 October 2019. 36 of these are Council meetings (50%), 16 are information sharing meetings addressing higher education institutions (22%), 11 are review and feedback meetings (15%) [6 of them were held with institution executives and 5 with team leaders], 4 are workshops (6%) and 5 (7%) are external evaluator training.



In addition to the meetings and training activities, the other activities carried out between 2016 and 2019 are summarized below:

2016:

Following its first meeting held on 23 December 2015, the Council determined its working procedures and principles and completed its work on organizational structure. In this structure, the responsibility of managing the institutional external evaluation process is entrusted to the Institutional External Evaluation Commission and the responsibility of managing the registration process of independent external evaluation and accreditation agencies is assigned to the Commission on Registration of Quality Assurance Agencies. In addition, the Commission on Dissemination of Quality Assurance Culture was established to ensure the dissemination and internalization of the quality assurance approach in higher education.

The Institutional External Evaluation Directive was published within the scope of the legislative works. In addition, some explanatory additional documents (Institutional External Evaluation Criteria, Institutional Self-Evaluation Report Writing Guide and the Council's internal documents defining how the Institutional External Evaluation Program would be performed) were penned to describe the details of the processes.

Subsequently, the Guide for the Authorization and Recognition of External Evaluation and Accreditation Agencies was published.

2017:

In 2017, the registration applications of 7 accreditation agencies were reviewed, 4 of which applied for the first time and 3 applied for the renewal of their registration. However, since the organizational structure of the Council could not be completed by the end of 2017, the applications for the authorization of accreditation agencies were put on the agenda of the Council and the decision process was completed in 2018.

Information on accredited programs, which was included in the Higher Education Programs and Quota Guide published by the Measuring, Selection and Placement Center (ÖSYM) for the first time in 2016, was also included in the Guide of 2017.

2018:

Within the scope of the Additional Article No. 35 of the Law on Higher Education (THEQC Establishment Law) numbered 2547, "The Regulation on Higher Education Quality Assurance and the Higher Education Quality Council", which includes the working procedures and principles of THEQC and the establishment of quality assurance systems in higher education institutions, self-evaluation and external evaluation processes, quality commissions to be established in higher education institutions, obtaining the quality evaluation registration certificate, working procedures and principles of the General Secretariat, the duties of the units to be formed within the General Secretariat and other issues regarding their implementation, was published in the Official Gazette dated 23.11.2018 and numbered 30604.

The Council President, Vice President and members have made various presentations on issues related to quality assurance in higher education and THEQC's activities in the meetings they attended upon the invitations of various institutions and organizations.

The registration applications of 9 accreditation agencies, 5 of which were new and 4 were to be renewed, were reviewed by the Council.

The accredited program information logged by higher education institutions into the Higher Education Information System (YÖKSİS) was reviewed by THEQC and the final list of accredited programs deemed appropriate for the Higher Education Programs and Quota Guide was conveyed to the CoHE.

In October 2018, "Institutional External Evaluation Program Evaluator Training Report" was published by the Council. The report presented detailed information regarding the Institutional External Evaluator Training Program, which was updated in line with the feedback received from the institutional external

evaluator trainings carried out in 2016 and 2017, and was updated with an innovative perspective and carried out with the participation of 464 evaluators and 61 student evaluator candidates in 2018.

In October 2018, the Council started working for its strategic plan covering the years 2019-2023 to strengthen its institutional structure and proceed confidentially to the future. The strategic plan was completed with the highest level of participation of all internal and external stakeholders. In November 2018, the Council published the "2017 Higher Education Evaluation and Quality Assurance Annual Situation Report", which was prepared on the basis of the ISERs, the IFRs, the reports written in the evaluation process of 4 regional development-oriented universities and 11 research-oriented universities, the stakeholder opinions regarding the process and the activities of the present accreditation agencies for the relevant year.

Again in November 2018, a thematic review program was conducted for English preparatory schools. As part of the program, the English preparatory schools of 10 higher education institutions were externally evaluated within the framework of "Minimum Evaluation Criteria for English Preparatory Schools" prepared in 2018.

In addition, the members and consultants of the Council provided mentoring services to the institutions (45 universities) to be included in the Institutional External Evaluation Program regarding the preparation of ISERs, establishment of the internal quality assurance systems and the scope of the Program. During the information meetings held at different times between August and October 2018, higher education institutions were informed about the quality and accreditation processes and provided with guidance in terms of performance of learning and teaching, research and development and governance activities in accordance with quality processes.

Periodic meetings were held with experts who are experienced in quality in higher education at home or abroad. In these meetings, information was shared especially in terms of the external evaluation processes of universities, the reliability of the evaluation processes and the internal quality assurance systems.

2019:

Within the scope of continuous improvement works, the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (ISER) Writing Guide was updated in line with the feedback received from higher education institutions and evaluators (Version 1.4).

As per the Article 27 entitled "Process of recognition and authorization of accreditation agencies" of the Regulation on Higher Education Quality Assurance and the Higher Education Quality Council published in the Official Gazette dated 23/11/2018 and numbered 30604, the Guide for the Authorization and

Recognition of External Evaluation and Accreditation Agencies (Version 1.0) was published and updated (Version 1.1). In the current version, in addition to the "authorization and recognition process" included in the first version, the "monitoring system" for accreditation agencies is included.

THEQC President Prof. Dr. Muzaffer ELMAS and President of High Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (HCERES) Prof. Dr. Michael COSNARD signed a protocol to improve cooperation in the field of higher education quality assurance and evaluation between the two organizations.

In accordance with the second paragraph of the Article 5 of the Regulation on Higher Education Quality Assurance and the Higher Education Quality Council, the "Procedures and Principles for the Election of Student Member of THEQC" was written and approved by the Council. Berk ER, who is currently studying at the Computer Engineering Department of Ankara University, was elected as the student member of THEQC among the student member candidates requested from the higher education institutions in Turkey in accordance with these principles.

The first three issues of THEQC E-Newsletter, which aims to share the activities carried out by the Council with the public, were published.

The THEQC's ENQA membership application was accepted by the ENQA Board on 21 February 2019.



Besides, THEQC granted "National Accreditation Agencies Quality Evaluation Registration Certificate" to 12 accreditation agencies.

The Agency for Quality Assurance (AQAS), the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) and the Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation (FIBAA), who applied to THEQC within the scope of the recognition of international external evaluation and accreditation agencies performing accreditation activities in our country, were recognized by our Council for a period of five years.

THEQC 2019-2023 Strategic Plan, THEQC Higher Education Evaluation and Quality Assurance Annual Situation Report for 2018 and Quality Assurance Situation Report for 2018-2019 were published.

THEQC President Prof. Dr. Muzaffer ELMAS and Director of Russia's National Centre for Public Accreditation Prof Dr. Vladimir NAVODNOV signed a cooperation protocol in the field of higher education quality assurance and evaluation.

Within THEQC, the Internationalization Commission was established to coordinate and develop the internationalization works of THEQC, while the THEQC Student Commission was established to improve student participation and activity in quality assurance processes.

3. THE REVIEW OF INSTITUTIONAL SELF-EVALUATION REPORTS

In higher education institutions, self-evaluation corresponds to the institution's evaluation of its own employees and institutional processes and practices. Unlike external evaluation implementations, self-evaluation is low-cost and not difficult. In addition, the involvement of employees in self-evaluation processes ensures the internalization and dissemination of quality assurance implementations. The self-evaluation processes of higher education institutions in Turkey are performed within the scope of the procedures and principles specified by THEQC. In accordance with the second paragraph of the Article 19 entitled "Institutional self-evaluation process and schedule" of the Regulation on Higher Education Quality Assurance and the Higher Education Quality Council, higher education institutions submit their ISERs to THEQC every year in January-March. ISERs are annually published on the website of THEQC (See: <http://yokak.gov.tr/raporlar/kurum-ici-degerlendirme-raporlari>).

Universities are responsible for their own quality.

With the introduction of QAMIS in 2018, higher education institutions uploaded their ISERs for 2017 to QAMIS for the first time. With QAMIS, more active and efficient performance of self-evaluation and external evaluation processes is aimed. The usage of QAMIS in evaluation also provides the adoption of evidence-based evaluation approach and the evaluation of aspects that are strong and open to improvement with the performance indicators of the higher education institutions in following years. Thus, the mechanisms regarding establishment, improvement and sustainability of quality assurance systems in

the field of higher education can be monitored in an objective and rapid manner and it becomes possible to plan support mechanisms for the requirements quickly.

THEQC supports all the QA activities with information systems:

- ◇ Quality Assurance Management Information System (QAMIS)
- ◇ Evaluator System
- ◇ Accreditation Agencies System (AAS)
- ◇ Information Portal
- ◇ Evaluator Training Program

After the establishment of THEQC, qualitative and quantitative evaluations were made in the ISERs of 2015 and 2016 within the scope of fitness for purpose and compliance with the ISER Writing Guide by taking the following issues into account:

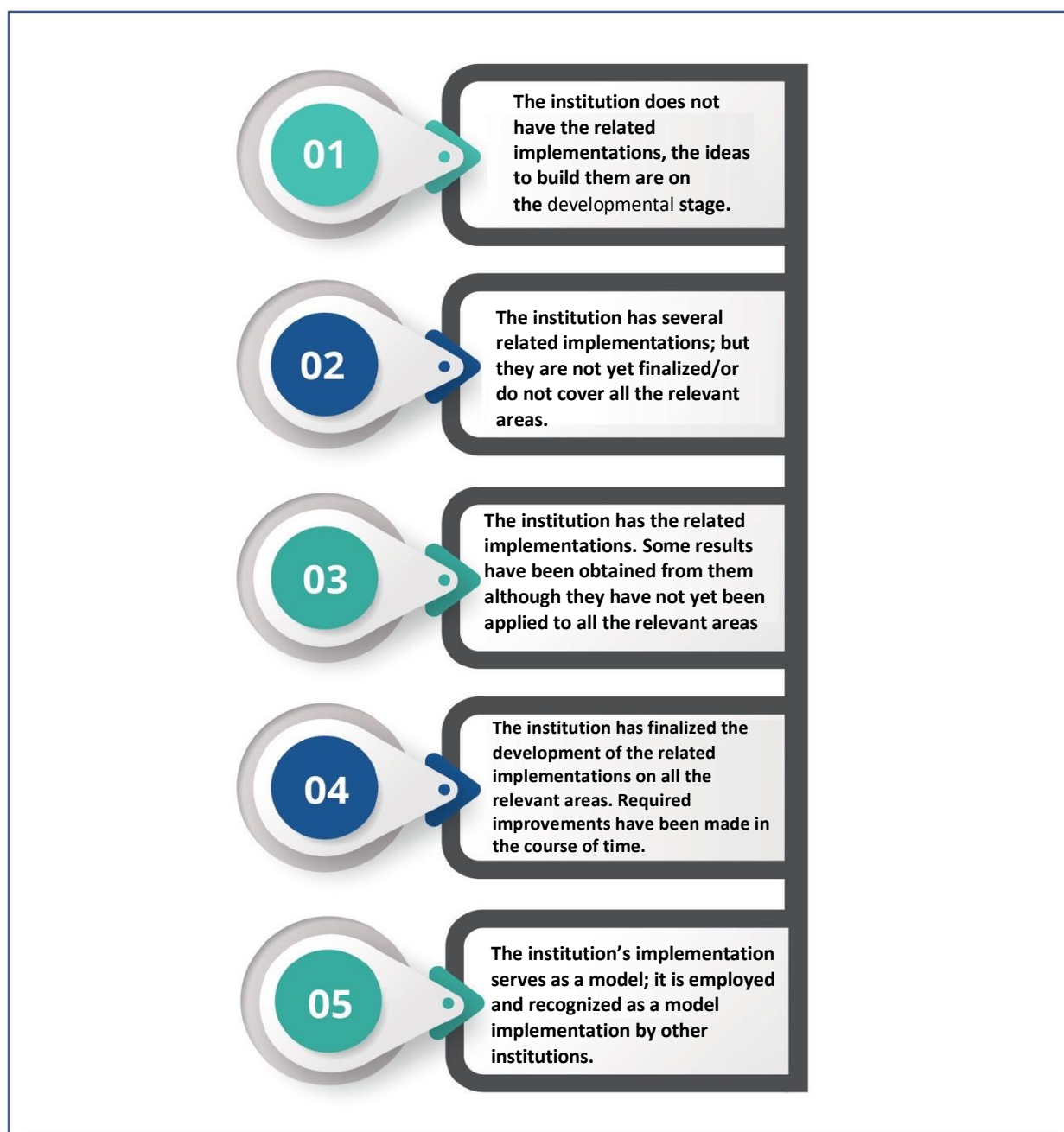
- ◇ Clear understanding of ISER writing process
- ◇ Availability of adequate explanation in the ISER on how the processes (quality assurance, learning and teaching, research and development, governance) are operated in the institution
- ◇ Preparation of the ISER in accordance with the institutional external evaluation criteria
- ◇ Presentation of necessary evidence through the ISER annex or citing online sources
- ◇ Preparation of the ISER in accordance with the ISER Writing Guide (language, format and number of pages)
- ◇ Inner consistency of the ISER
- ◇ Publication of the ISER on the website of the institution in an easily accessible manner

With the activation of QAMIS, ISERs for 2017 and 2018 were prepared and submitted to THEQC through this system. Thus, making healthy comparisons has become possible. Therefore, this report includes a two-year comparison of ISERs. ISERs are prepared by higher education institutions on the basis of the ISER Writing Guide. There are five main titles in the Guide:

- ◇ Information on institution
- ◇ Quality assurance system
- ◇ Learning and teaching
- ◇ Research, development and social contribution
- ◇ Governance system

The 18 criteria under these main titles are reported separately through QAMIS and the evidence that the relevant criteria are met is uploaded to this system. Higher education institutions can also perform self-evaluations of their maturity levels related to relevant criteria within the scope of ISER by giving grades on a 5-point Likert scale (Table 4).

Table 4. Maturity level self-evaluation scale



In 2017, 175 higher education institutions and in 2018, 184 higher education institutions prepared their ISERs and completed their entries into QAMIS. 45 of these institutions were evaluated in 2018 and 45 in

2019 within the scope of the Institutional External Evaluation Program. In the review of the ISERs, in addition to the ISER contents, self-evaluation grades given by higher education institutions were also taken into consideration.

3.1. Quality Assurance System

Under the title Quality Assurance System, there are three criteria: "quality policy", "stakeholder participation" and "duties, responsibilities and activities of higher education quality commissions". In the ISERs, 128 institutions in 2017 and 129 institutions in 2018 have given self-evaluation points to the maturity level of the "quality policy" criterion, 112 institutions in 2017 and 125 institutions in 2018 have given self-evaluation points to the maturity level of the "stakeholder participation" criterion, 115 institutions in 2017 and 125 institutions in 2017 have given self-evaluation points to the maturity level of the "duties, responsibilities and activities of higher education quality commissions" criterion.

When the ISERs of higher education institutions in 2017 and 2018 are examined, it is observed that the mechanisms related to the quality assurance system have started to be structured but are not yet implemented in all learning and teaching, research and development and governance processes. It is pleasing that a quality policy has been prepared and announced in most of the institutions. In addition, quality commissions were established in all institutions and their duties, responsibilities and activities were defined. The Regulation on Higher Education Quality Assurance and the Higher Education Quality Council provided a framework for the duties and responsibilities of quality commissions and thus played an encouraging role. However, as observed in the good practice examples, further efforts are needed in the matters of diversifying the working procedures and principles and administrative structure of the commissions in line with the specific needs of the institution and expanding the commission work to include all stakeholders.

According to the ISERs of 2017 and 2018 submitted within the Institutional External Evaluation Program, the progress of the quality assurance system maturity levels in the institutions is presented in Figure 1.

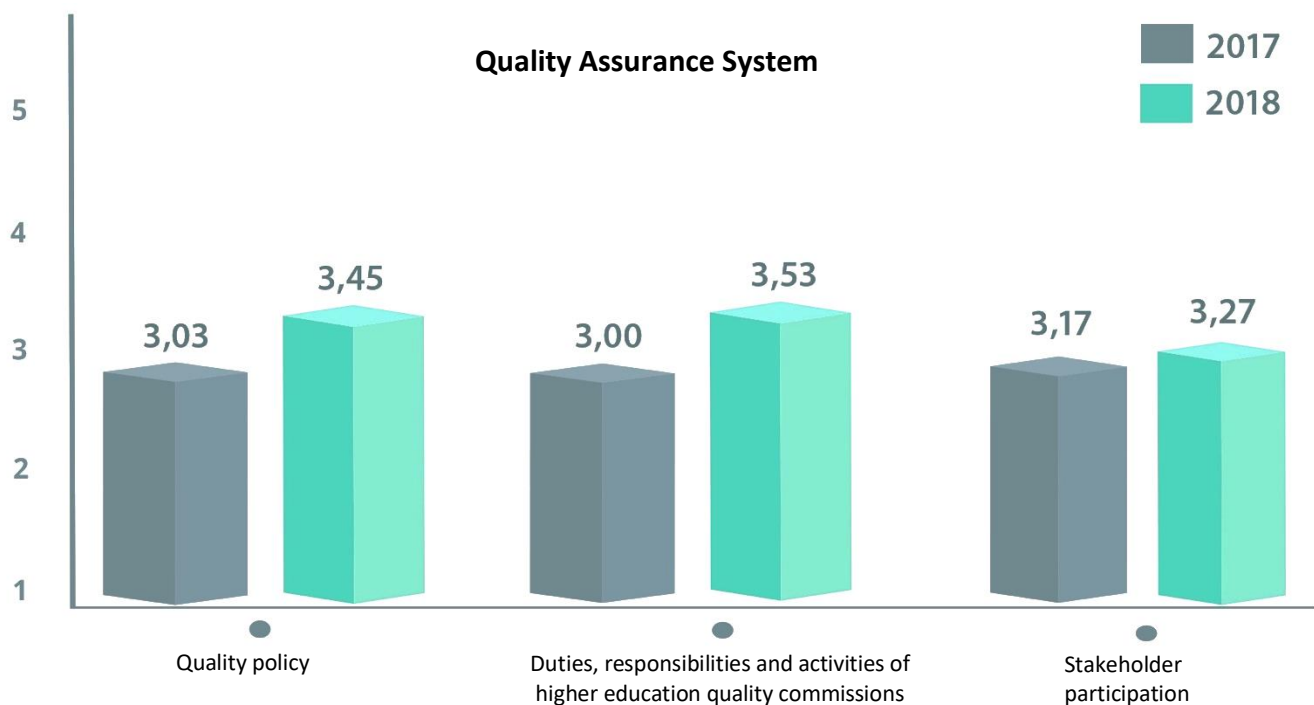


Figure 1. Maturity levels of quality assurance system criteria (ISER, 2017 -2018)

Stakeholders should be included in the learning and teaching, research and development, social contribution and internationalization processes, and the results should be evaluated with stakeholders.

When Figure 1 is examined, it is seen that improvement efforts in implementations are ongoing, awareness has been improving and quality assurance culture is getting more widespread compared to the previous year for all three criteria under the title of Quality Assurance System.

3.2. Learning and Teaching

The title of Learning and Teaching comprises six criteria: "Design and Approval of Programs", "Continuous Monitoring and Updating of Programs", "Student-Centred Learning, Teaching and Evaluation", "Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification", "Teaching Staff" and "Learning Resources, Accessibility and Supports". In the ISERs, 121 institutions in 2017 and 122 institutions in 2018 have given self-evaluation points to the maturity level of the "Design and Approval of Programs" criterion, 118 institutions in 2017 and 122 institutions in 2018 have given self-evaluation points to the maturity level of the "Continuous Monitoring and Updating of Programs" criterion, 119 institutions in 2017 and 119 institutions in 2018 have given self-evaluation points to the maturity level of the "Student-Centred

Learning, Teaching and Evaluation" criterion, 118 institutions in 2017 and 117 institutions in 2018 have given self-evaluation points to the maturity level of the "Teaching Staff" criterion, 112 institutions in 2017 and 119 institutions in 2018 have given self-evaluation points to the maturity level of the "Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification" criterion, 118 institutions in 2017 and 119 institutions in 2018 have given self-evaluation points to the maturity level of the "Learning Resources, Accessibility and Supports" criterion. Although the implementations related to the defined processes are observed within the scope of learning and teaching, it is seen that the level of maturity to cover all fields has not been reached. The defined processes carried out during the design and approval processes of programs are not at a sufficient maturity level in the monitoring and updating of the programs process. There is a need to review and improve the learning and teaching processes in order to complete the PDCA cycles. In ISER reviews, good practice examples have been observed within the scope of "Student-Centred Learning, Teaching and Evaluation" criterion and "Learning Resources, Accessibility and Support" criterion. There are defined processes regarding employment, appointment, promotion and class assignment of teaching staff in institutions, but the training of instructors, maintenance of their professional development and the improvement of their teaching skills should be supported more. The comparison values for 2017 and 2018 regarding the "Learning and Teaching" title are presented in Figure 2.

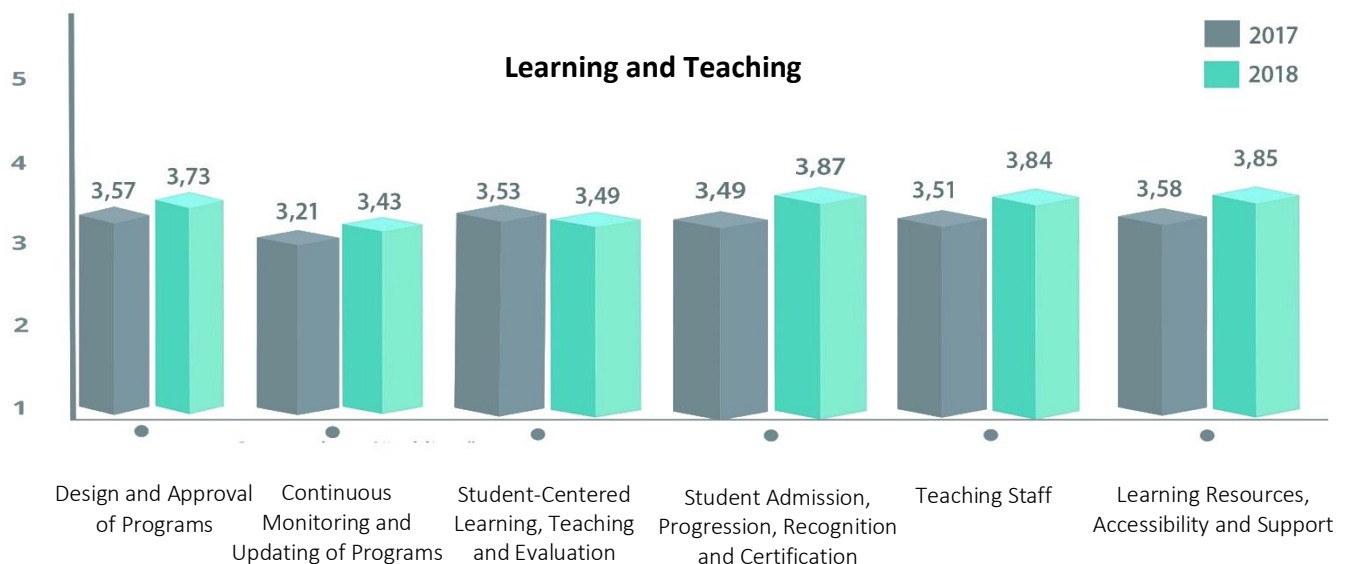


Figure 2. Maturity levels of learning and teaching criteria (ISER, 2017- 2018)

When Figure 2 is examined, it is seen that the maturity levels in all the criteria under learning and teaching have increased compared to the previous year. Nevertheless, it is observed that in the self-evaluations of the institutions, no progress has been made and there is even a slight decrease in the "Student-Centred Learning, Teaching and Evaluation" criterion.

3.3. Research and Development

Under the title of research and development, there are four criteria: "Institution's Research Strategy and Objectives", "Institution's Research Resources", "Institution's Research Staff" and "Monitoring and Improving Institution's Research Performance". In ISERs, 116 institutions in 2017 and 121 institutions in 2018 have given self-evaluation points to the maturity level of the "Institution's Research Strategy and Objectives" criterion, 114 institutions in 2017 and 114 institutions in 2018 have given self-evaluation points to the maturity level of the "Institution's Research Resources" criterion, 111 institutions in 2017 and 115 institutions in 2018 have given self-evaluation points to the maturity level of the "Institution's Research Staff" criterion, 110 institutions in 2017 and 113 institutions in 2018 have given self-evaluation points to the maturity level of the "Monitoring and Improving Institution's Research Performance" criterion. Similar to the title of "Learning and Teaching", it has been observed that there are certain implementations for "Research and Development", yet they do not cover all areas whereas some aspects are in need of improvement in terms of closing the PDCA cycle. Generally, there are defined processes related to research strategy and objectives in higher education institutions. However, the maturity level of the defined processes in terms of how the research and development performance is monitored, evaluated and improved is quite low. There are defined processes in employment, appointment and promotion of the research staff. However, some aspects are in need of improvement in monitoring and evaluating the competencies of the research staff. In the ISERs of 2017 and 2018, the change in the average grades of relevant institutions' self-evaluations related to the research and development criteria is presented in Figure 3.

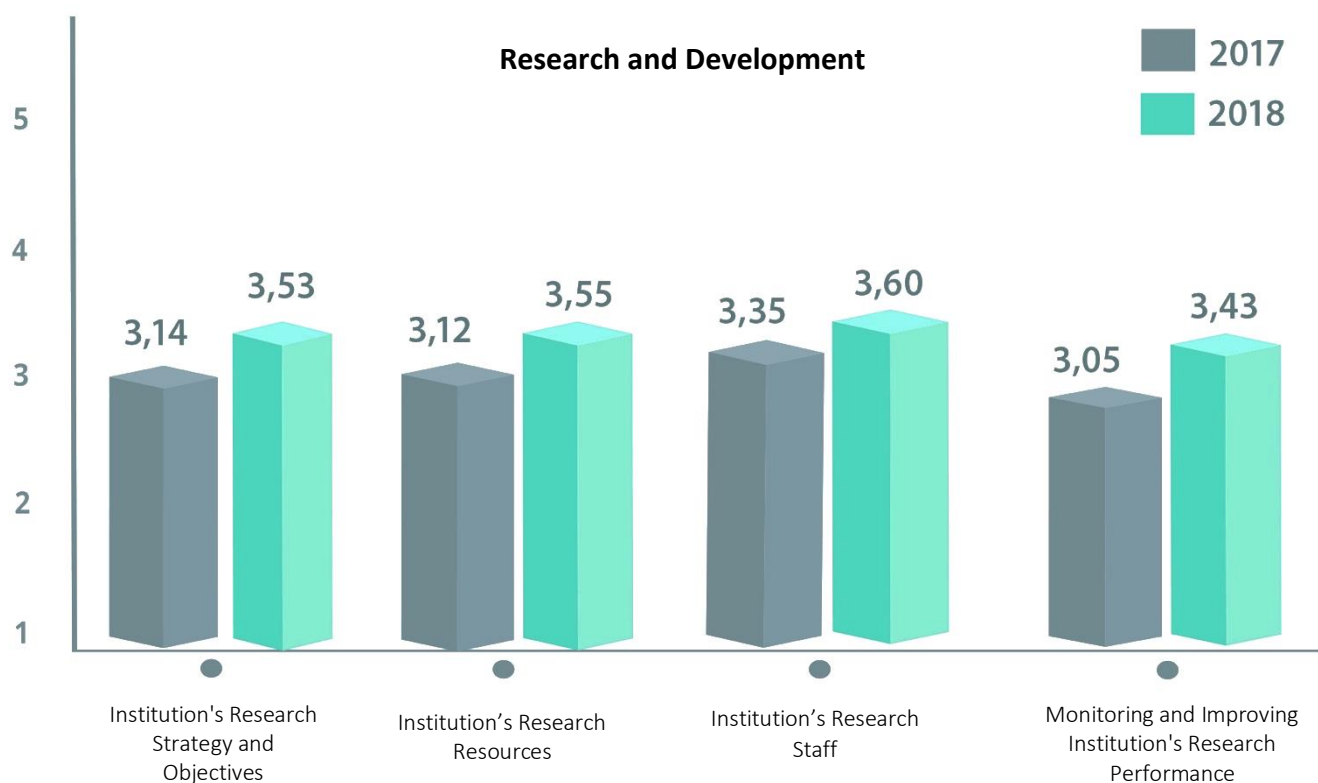


Figure 3. Maturity levels of research and development criteria (ISER, 2017-2018)

When Figure 3 is examined, it is observed that all the criteria under the title of research and development have improved in terms of maturity.

3.4. Governance System

The title of "Governance System" consists of five criteria: "Structure of Management and Administrative Units", "Resource Management", "Information Management System", "Quality of Outsourced Services" and "Efficiency and Accountability of Management, Public Information". In ISERs, a total of 117 institutions in 2017 and 121 institutions in 2018 have given self-evaluation points to the maturity level of the "Structure of Management and Administrative Units" criterion, 116 institutions in 2017 and 114 institutions in 2018 have given self-evaluation points to the maturity level of the "Resource Management" criterion, 116 institutions in 2017 and 112 institutions in 2018 have given self-evaluation points to the maturity level of the "Information Management System" criterion, 115 institutions in 2017 and 112 institutions in 2018 have given self-evaluation points to the maturity level of the "Quality of Outsourced Services" criterion, and 115 institutions in 2017 and 112 institutions in 2018 have given self-evaluation point to the maturity level of the "Efficiency and Accountability of Management, Public Information" criterion. Among the main titles, the one with the highest maturity level is "Governance System". Within the scope of this title, there are quality assurance implementations, but they do not cover all fields yet.

Although there are defined processes in higher education institutions regarding the structure of management and administrative units, there is a need for improvement in order to perform these processes in accordance with their definition. The establishment of integrated information management systems in higher education institutions will ensure the continuity and evaluation of all processes in institutions more actively and effectively. The level of awareness in higher education institutions regarding integrated information management systems has increased compared to previous years. In this context, efforts to establish integrated management systems have been accelerated. In addition, the current legislation is considered to increase the maturity level in outsourced services. The self-evaluation grades of the governance system for 2017 and 2018 are presented in Figure 4.

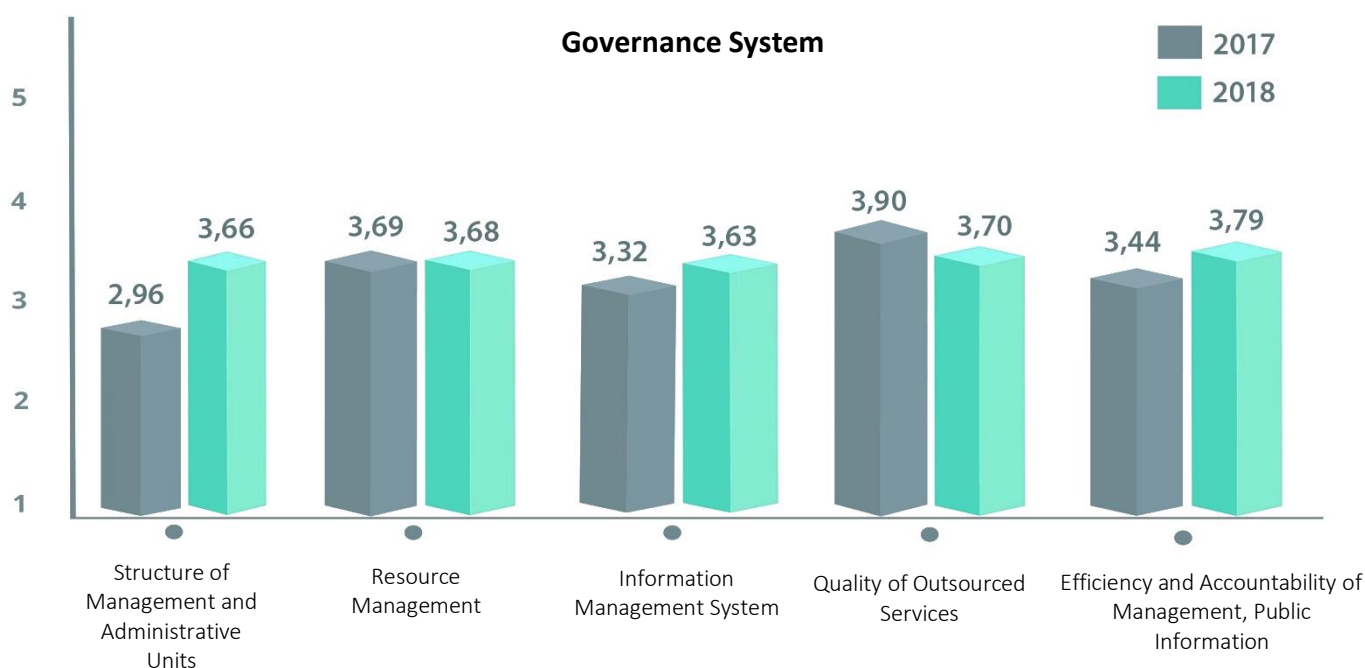


Figure 4. Maturity levels of governance system criteria (ISER, 2017-2018)

When Figure 4 is analyzed, under the title of governance system, improvements in maturity levels of the "Structure of Management and Administrative Units", "Information Management System", "Efficiency and Accountability of Management" criteria have been observed and a slight decrease has been observed in maturity levels of the "Resource Management" and "Quality of Outsourced Services" criteria. Higher education institutions are primarily responsible for quality assurance systems in higher education themselves. Therefore, internal quality assurance efforts carried out in higher education institutions should be internalized. At this point, the adoption of internal quality assurance activities by administrators and a wide coverage of the human element by the institution will be very beneficial for the dissemination of the quality assurance culture. It is the duty of the quality commission to coordinate internal quality assurance processes in higher education institutions. Quality commissions are responsible not only for the preparation of ISERs but also for all quality processes in the institution.

4. THE REVIEW OF INSTITUTIONAL FEEDBACK REPORTS

Higher education institutions annually submit their ISERs, which comprise the institution's improvement and monitoring works and the measures taken regarding the mission and policies determined in line with the global developments and national objectives, whereas the external evaluation process reveals universities' strengths and areas for further development.

Between 2016 and 2019, 160 higher education institutions have been included in the Institutional External Evaluation Program and the Institutional Feedback Reports (IFRs) of the institutions have been sent to THEQC by the team leaders through the evaluator system. These documents are published on the official website of the Council. (See <https://www.yokak.gov.tr/raporlar/kurumsal-geri-bildirim-raporlari>). In addition, the IFRs of the institutions evaluated so far have been individually reviewed under the main titles of "Quality Assurance System", "Learning and Teaching", "Research and Development" and "Governance System". Maturity levels of the criteria under the main titles have been taken into consideration in the evaluation of IFRs.

160 HEIs have been evaluated



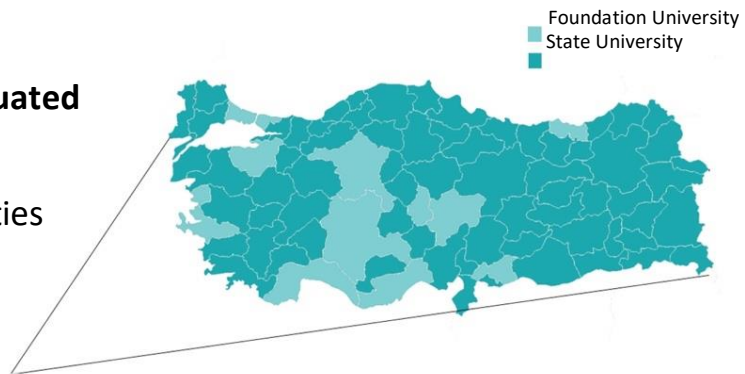
104 State Universities



51 Foundation Universities



5 Foundation Vocational Schools



77% of the universities in Turkey completed the external evaluation process.

Institutional external evaluation processes of 160 universities have been completed.

4.1. Quality Assurance System

It is only possible to make a change in the institution by establishing a simple, transparent and accountable system.

The results of the external evaluation regarding the institutions' maturity levels of "Quality Policy", "Duties, Responsibilities and Activities of Higher Education Quality Commissions" and "Stakeholder Participation"

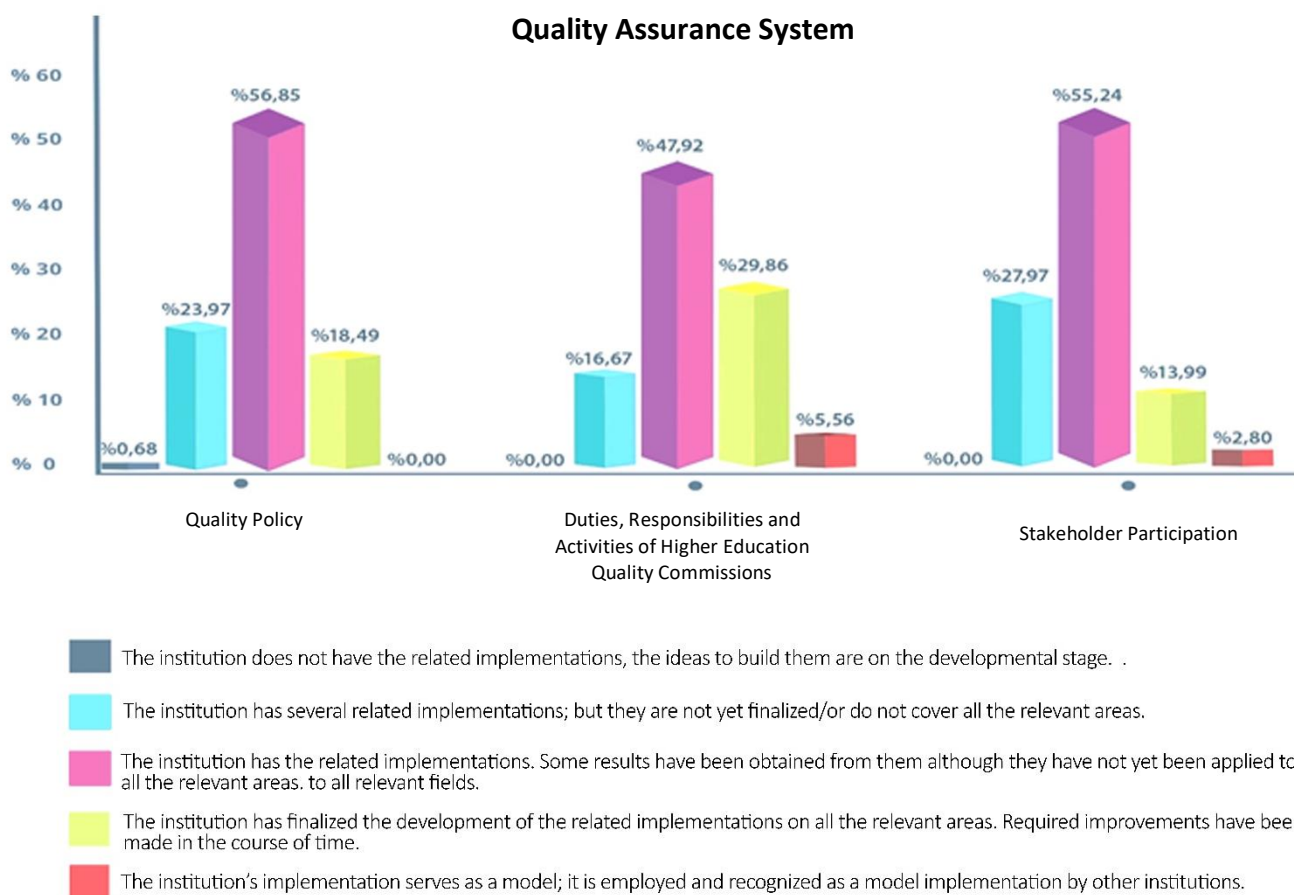


Figure 5. Maturity levels of quality assurance system criteria within the scope of external evaluation

Internal quality assurance systems in higher education institutions cover the adoption of continuous learning and improvement by means of measuring and monitoring methods, determining the future plans of the institution, using the existing resources and competencies in line with these targets, and managing all processes in compliance with institutional values. The initial step of the system is to create policies

regarding fundamental functions of the institutions and share them with the public. The Institutional External Evaluation Program is performed on the basis of the policies, strategies and targets determined by the institution itself.

There is a high level of awareness regarding the quality assurance system in the higher education institutions evaluated. Higher education institutions should especially focus on monitoring and improvement processes.

It has been observed that all the institutions evaluated between 2016 and 2019 have defined quality policies, policy-related implementations reached maturity in 18% of them and the defined processes within the scope of the policies became widespread in learning and teaching, research-development and governance processes. Although 56% of the evaluated institutions do not have quality policies that cover all fields yet, they have certain implementations and some results can be obtained from them. In addition, the implementations regarding quality policy in 23% of the institutions have not reached the expected maturity levels yet. Although the adoption of quality policy implementations in institutions is satisfactory, exemplary implementations are needed in this field.

Within the scope of the legislation, quality commissions should be established in order to perform quality processes in higher education institutions. The structure of this commission can be diversified to provide support, guidance and motivation according to the needs of the institution. Among the criteria under the title of “Quality Assurance System”, it is seen that the higher one is the “Duties, Responsibilities and Activities of Higher Education Quality Commissions” (See: Figure 5). It is pleasing to observe that some of the evaluated institutions have matured implementations supporting the legislation (approximately 30%) and need-oriented good practice examples (5%). In addition to the requirements of the legislation, exemplary implementations such as the structuring of units that will provide administrative support to commission works, establishment of advisory boards and quality-oriented structures at the unit level are expected to be disseminated in all higher education institutions.

In a well-structured quality assurance system, institutions should identify strategic stakeholders and share them with the public.

In a well-structured quality assurance system, institutions should list their internal and external stakeholders, identify their strategic stakeholders and share them with the public. Stakeholders can be the ones that interact with or get influenced by all inputs, processes and outputs of higher education institutions such as state institutions, employers, teaching staff, students, parents; in other words, they can be the entire society. Figure 6 summarizes stakeholder engagement in quality assurance system.

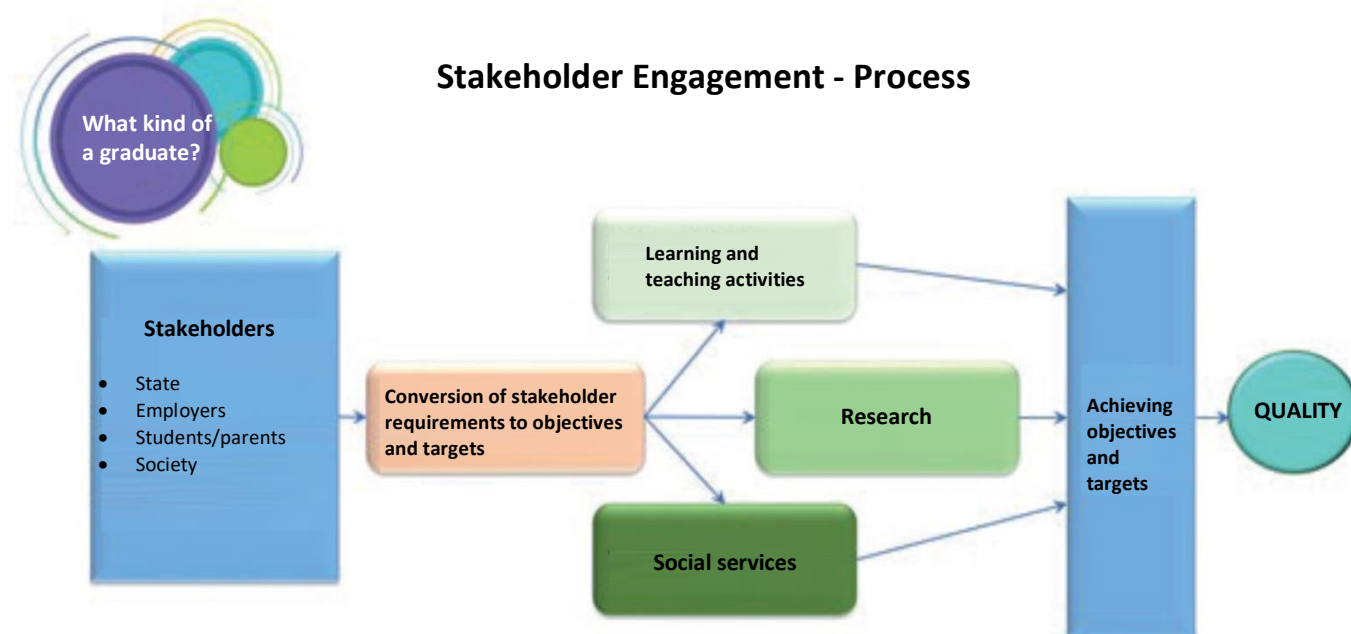


Figure 6. Stakeholder engagement in quality assurance system

(Source: The Inter-University Council for East Africa 2010. A road map to quality, Handbook for quality assurance in higher education, 2: Guidelines to external assessment at program level)

According to the external evaluation results, stakeholder participation is the criterion with the lowest maturity level in the quality assurance systems of the higher education institutions (See: Figure 5). It has been observed that most of the higher education institutions do not have matured practices regarding this criterion. Although there are good practice examples such as involving stakeholder analysis studies and providing stakeholder participation in decision-making processes in a limited number of institutions, it is seen that there is a need to develop mechanisms for increasing the participation of stakeholders in the quality assurance systems.

What is THEQC according to stakeholders? *



* Results of stakeholder opinion analysis.

4.2. Learning and Teaching

In the Institutional External Evaluation Program, learning and teaching processes are evaluated in view of six criteria: "Design and Approval of Programs", "Continuous Monitoring and Updating of Programs", "Student-Centred Learning, Teaching and Evaluation", "Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification", "Teaching Staff" and "Learning Resources, Accessibility and Supports".

In the processes regarding the design and approval of programs, higher education institutions should define their approach and ensure the participation of their stakeholders in every stage of the process. During the design of the program, the outcomes should be relevant to NQF-HETR, be in compliance with the missions and targets of the institution, other national and international criteria should be considered if there is any, and the targeted qualification-based programs and course outcomes should be shared with the public.

The main objective in learning and teaching processes is to produce graduates with high knowledge, skills and competencies who can adapt to the global context.

In 160 higher education institutions evaluated between 2016 and 2019, it is seen that the defined processes regarding the program design and approval criterion have been completed excluding a small number of institutions (8%) (See Figure 7). The adaptation works to the Bologna process in the field of higher education as of 2003, increasing national and international accreditation activities, projects at the national level such as TURQUAS project and various trainings and workshops organized by THEQC are believed to play an important role in qualification-based program design efforts. However, the available evidence also

shows that such works are not sufficiently internalized. Good practice examples have not yet become widespread due to several problems such as the limited external stakeholder participation in program design and the lack of dissemination of objective methods for calculating actual student workload in student workload-based credit implementations.

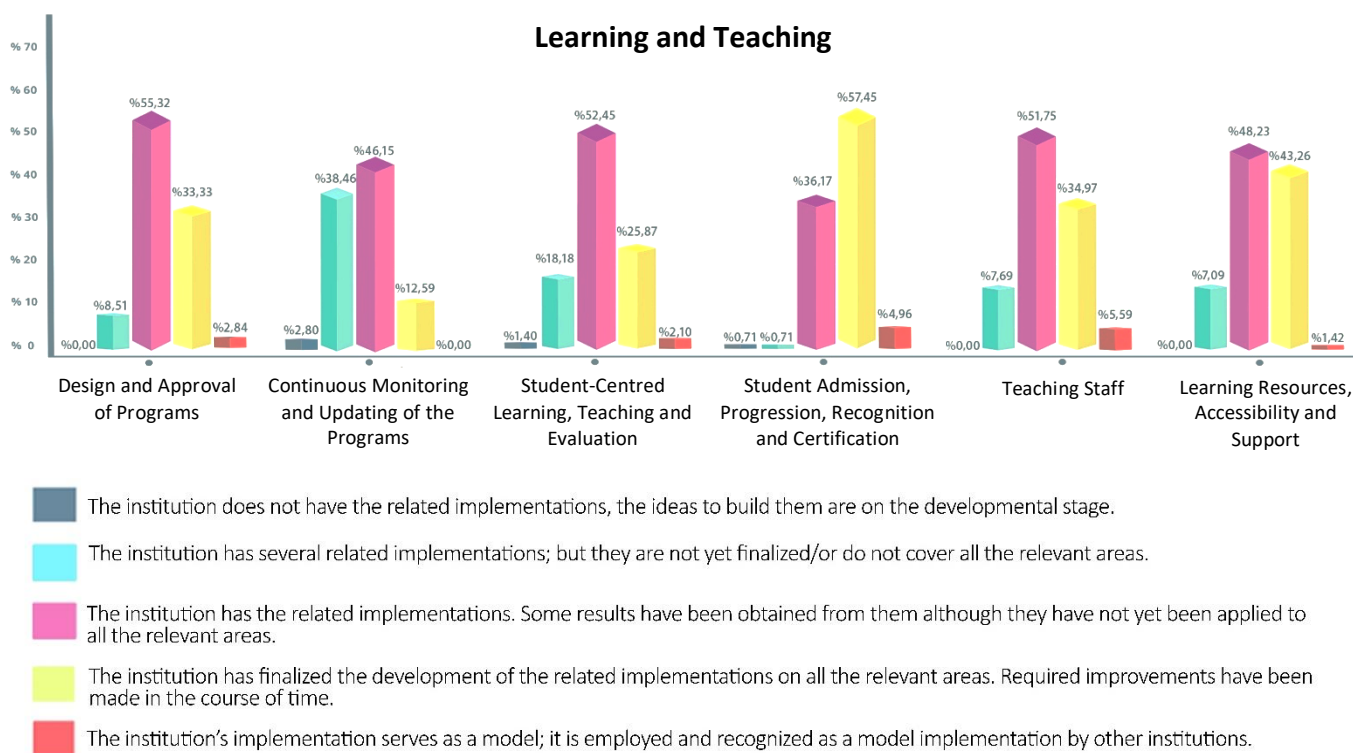




Figure 7. Maturity levels of learning and teaching criteria within the scope of external evaluation

Turkish higher education system has achieved a significant growth in terms of numbers of units, programs and students in recent years and is ranked 2nd in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in the statistics of access to higher education. As of 2019, there are 207 higher education institutions including 129 state universities, 73 foundation universities and 5 foundation vocational schools. The total number of students enrolled in more than 40.000 programs in these institutions is 7.740.502. 7.134.674 of these students study in state and 605.828 study in foundation universities, whereas 2.829.430 are in associate degree, 4.420.699 in undergraduate degree, 394.174 in master's and 96.199 in doctoral programs. (See <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/>). The most important aspect of the quality assurance system is ensuring that students enrolled in higher education programs achieve the targeted qualifications. For this reason, periodic review of all programs offered by higher education institutions, evaluation of results by relevant units and making necessary updates are the prioritized concepts in internal and external quality assurance systems.

In a higher education institution, internal quality assurance system in learning and teaching processes includes mechanisms such as the implementation, monitoring and continuous improvement of the curriculum designed in line with the institution's education policies, mission and strategic objectives in consideration of the active participation of stakeholders and national and international criteria. These mechanisms require an organizational structure that enables monitoring and evaluation in the unit coordinating the program, the determination of persons in charge, the internalization of quality assurance culture by individuals, the supporting of teaching staff's knowledge, skills and competencies regarding program review and student-centred learning and teaching approaches, the definition of process and performance indicators, and an information management system that would facilitate stakeholder participation and data management.



Quality assurance systems should focus on students' achieving the targeted competencies, instructors' being qualified to make students achieve these competencies, the compliance of learning environments with the targets and employment opportunities of graduates.



It is found that the continuous monitoring and updating of programs criterion in 160 higher education institutions evaluated has been the leading area in need of improvement in all learning and teaching processes, and that some institutions do not yet have any implementation of program monitoring processes. It is observed that 38% of the institutions do not have matured implementations yet, and 46% do not have implementations that are widespread enough to include all the monitoring and updating components. It is noteworthy that there are approaches that reflect the quality assurance culture such as program accreditation and institutional excellence model in the institutions that have implementations with higher maturity levels in program monitoring, albeit in a limited number (12%). In qualification-based study programs, teaching methods and techniques and evaluation processes should be structured and implemented with an approach that focuses on the student. The institution should run its programs in a way that encourages students to take an active role in learning processes. Measuring and evaluating students' achievements should also reflect this approach. The most important aspect to be considered in student-centred learning and teaching processes is the realization of outputs/outcomes. In this process, which can be named as output/outcome based learning and teaching, the study programs are designed in a student-centred and workload-based system that pays heed to the individual differences of students. In this context, determination of workload-based credits, formation of learning outcomes/outputs, learning

and teaching approaches, methods and techniques, and measurement and evaluation methods are inseparable elements.

The approaches that reflect the institution's maturity level in terms of student-centred learning and teaching include the policy adopted by the institution in learning and teaching processes, the implementation level of this policy in academic units, efforts to improve the competencies of the teaching staff in student-centred education, the method of determining student workload-based credit values, the availability of the courses that involve 21st century skills and give students an opportunity to get to know other disciplines, the mechanisms that guide students while electing courses, advisory system, and defined processes used in measuring and evaluating student success.

When the IFRs are examined, it is observed that the implementations regarding student-centred approaches in learning and teaching processes are not yet mature in most of the institutions (18%) or that they are not sufficiently inclusive in terms of various approaches (52%) except for a few institutions (2%) where good practice examples are observed. (See Figure 7).

Recognition of prior learning in Turkish higher education institutions is performed for vertical, lateral and internal transfers within the scope of the "Regulation for Student Transfer Between Associate Degree and Bachelor's Degree Programs, Double Major and Minor Programs and Course Credit Transfers Between Institutions of Higher Education" set out by the CoHE. In the quality assurance system, institutions should define the criteria implemented in admission of the students other than centrally-placed ones, the monitoring mechanisms established to monitor academic and career development of the student, the criteria implemented for recognition of prior formal learning and if any, the processes performed for recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning in a clear and detailed manner and should announce them to the stakeholders. In this context, it is observed in the evaluated institutions that the maturity level of the student admission, progression, recognition and certification criterion is in compliance with the requirements of the legislation. However, except for the institutions providing formal education, the recognition process of non-formal certificate or experience-based (informal and non-formal) learning is still in its initial stage and only a few examples of practice are encountered. (See Figure 7).

Having adequate number of teaching staff in higher education institutions and ensuring their continuous improvement are among the quality assurance requirements. In the Institutional External Evaluation Program, the maturity level of the teaching staff criterion is related to the availability of mechanisms such as the determination of the criteria regarding appointments of the academic staff, the establishment of a tool or mechanism for the evaluation of the annual performance of academic staff, ensuring continuous professional improvement of academic staff, and the determination of the criteria for adjunct faculty.

Leading areas for further development include monitoring, updating and improvement mechanisms regarding program outcomes and student-centred learning, teaching and evaluation approaches.

In the institutions included in the external evaluation program between 2016 and 2019, the maturity level of the teaching staff criterion is considered to be relatively high. Apart from a small number of institutions (7%), it is seen that relevant mechanisms have been established (51%), the implementations have matured in many institutions (34%) and good practice examples (5%) have been observed (See Figure 7).

Learning resources-environments are physical or virtual spaces and environments in which students perform learning activities or activities that are supportive and complementary to learning. These environments can be categorized as intra-institutional, extra-institutional and online learning environments. In state universities, resources are allocated from the budget. The critical aspect at this point is the importance and place of learning resources among the priorities of the university and the amount of resources that can be allocated by the governments. In foundation universities, resource allocation is provided by the joint efforts of the Rectorate and the Board of Trustees. It is important that institutions have specific learning resources, but more importantly, their resources should respond adequately to the learning demands; in other words, they should have sufficient capacity and the resources should be accessible to each student. On the other hand, insufficient utilization of the available capacity means loss and poor management of resources. In addition to learning resources, different structures and units can be established within the university in order to support learning. As examples to these, teaching-learning centres, student counselling centres, student societies, disabled students units, units regarding arts, sports and cultural activities and career centres can be listed. In the 160 institutions evaluated, practices with high maturity levels in the quality assurance system of learning and teaching processes were seen in the fields of learning resources, accessibility and supports (Figure 7).

4.3. Research and Development

Higher education institutions should have a research policy for the development and implementation of research strategies in order to establish a quality assurance system in research and development processes. The policy document to be prepared in this regard should be in compliance with the strategic plan of the institution and emphasize the principles and values of the institution. Furthermore, within the framework

of this policy, institutions should implement the PDCA cycle in all their research and development processes.

Mechanisms should be established to develop relationships between research processes and learning and teaching activities.

Within the framework of the THEQC Institutional External Evaluation Criteria, the research and development processes performed in higher education institutions are expected to have activities with added value and social benefits that are in compliance with the academic priorities set out in the strategic plans of the institutions. In this scope, based on the IFRs of the institutions evaluated between 2016 and 2019, the results regarding the "Institution's Research Strategy and Objectives", "Institution's Research Resources", "Institution's Research Staff" and "Monitoring and Improving Institution's Research Performance" criteria below the main title of "Research and Development" are portrayed in Figure 8.

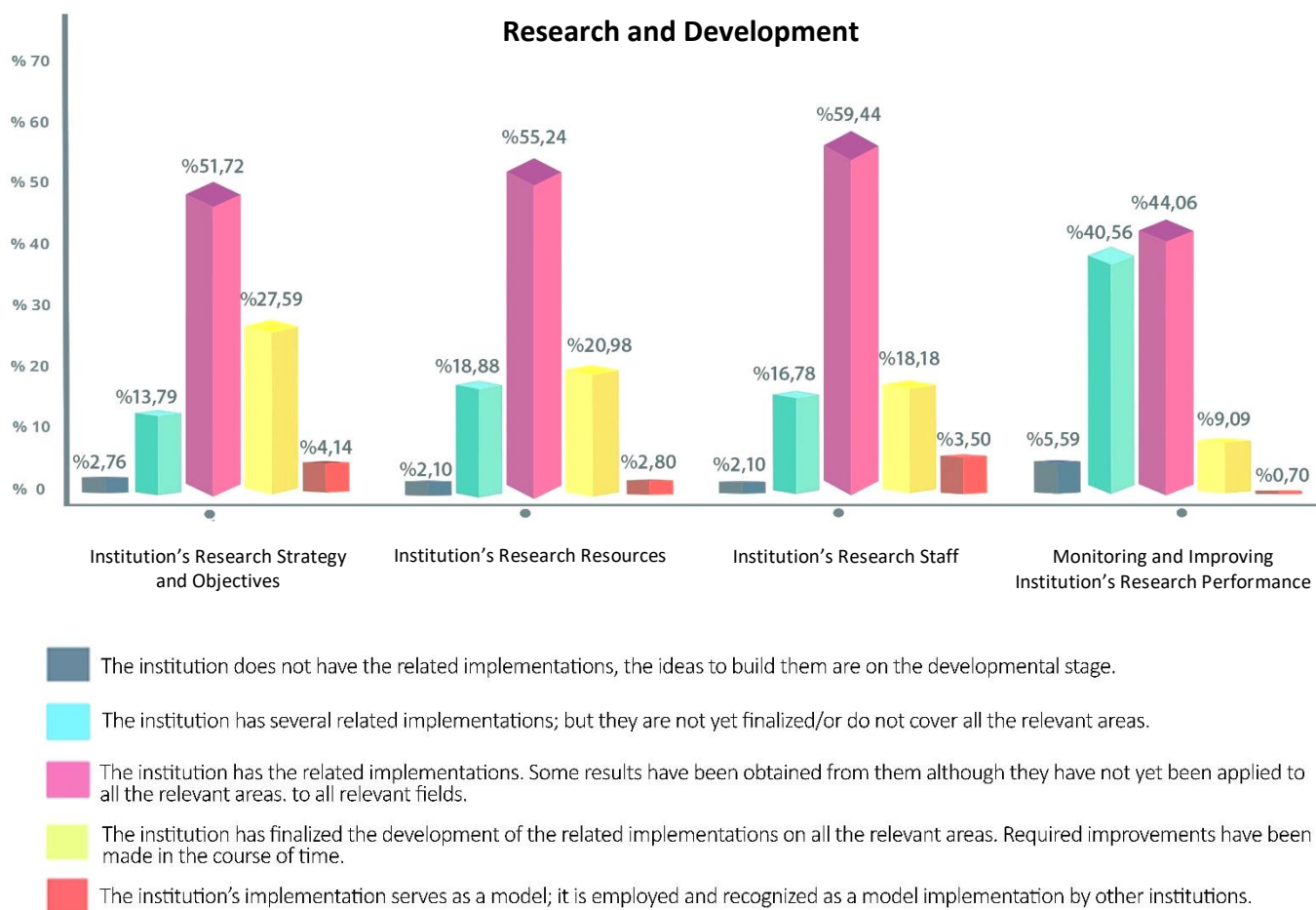



Figure 8. Maturity levels of research and development criteria within the scope of external evaluation

The research strategy of the institution is an action plan consisting of the objectives and targets that reflect the institutional choices and methods that will enable the institution to accomplish its vision for research. Research objectives should be determined to ensure the implementation of the institution's research strategy. In this context, research objectives should be formed on the basis of the research strategy.


It is seen in the IFRs that the maturity level regarding the institution's research strategy and objectives criterion is at a moderate level. In general, the institutions have determined their research strategies and objectives and performed various implementations in this regard (78%). However, there is a need to increase the maturity level in these institutions. Works as part of the research strategy and objectives have not yet been initiated in some of the institutions, although they are less in number (2%).

Higher education institutions should develop their resources with a sustainable understanding and ensure the efficient use of the resources in order to perform research and development activities effectively. Particular attention should be paid to the planning of research infrastructures to support prioritized research fields while alignment, collaboration and coordination between the infrastructures should be ensured.

When the institution's research resources criterion is analysed, it is seen that in most of the evaluated institutions (55%), studies have been conducted and outputs have been obtained for the research infrastructure, financial resources and their effective use in certain fields. However, these implementations should be extended to all fields. On the other hand, implementations with lower maturity levels are also encountered (18%). The fact that the number of institutions in which research studies are not yet implemented is low and that some institutions have exemplary implementations demonstrates that the institution's research resources criterion is considered to be an important one in the evaluated institutions.



Rather than numerical values of research and development processes, their effectiveness, local, national and international contributions should be focused on.



The competence of the academic staff in the field of research and development is directly related to the outputs of the institution in this field. For this reason, the employment, appointment and promotion of academic staff engaged in education and research activities should be well-defined, fair and clear. The academic staff needs of the institution should be determined in parallel with the research policy, strategy and objectives. The research policy, strategy and objectives should ensure a clear and consistent relationship between the appointment and promotion of faculty members. Research and development performance of the academic staff should be monitored and differences between units should be considered while monitoring. Incentive mechanisms should be developed to increase research and development performance, the use of national and international networks should be supported, the academic staff should be trained on necessary subjects and their competence regarding research and development processes should be improved.

It is seen in the IFRs of the evaluated institutions that within the institution's research staff criterion, the institutions have completed their structuring in terms of research staff and have been conducting works for the improvement of the staff. The maturity levels of this criterion are very similar to the criterion regarding research resources.

For this reason, it is estimated that research and development processes will be improved with the efficient use of resources and the improvement of academic staff in higher education institutions.

As stated above, higher education institutions should also ensure quality assurance in the field of research and development by utilizing the PDCA cycle. Institutions should monitor and evaluate research and

development activities in a knowledge-based way, share their results with the public and perform improvement works that include stakeholder opinions. In so doing, the PDCA cycle would be completed and the research and development activities of the institution would be taken one step further.

Institutions should define performance indicators in line with their research objectives, and make effective monitoring and improvement through knowledge-based information management systems.

As the IFRs are examined, it is seen that under the main title of research and development, the criterion of monitoring and improving institution's research performance has the lowest implementation levels. The institutions that perform monitoring and improvement activities and obtain results from them although the implementations do not cover all fields (44%) and the institutions that have conducted limited number of implementations (40%) are proportionally close to each other, whereas 5% of the institutions have not yet initiated such activities (5%). For this reason, monitoring and improvement works should be kicked off in a quick manner and existing implementations should be matured and extended to all fields in the relevant institutions.

Institutions should define performance indicators in line with their research strategy and objectives, perform knowledge-based monitoring through existing indicators and increase the effectiveness of monitoring activities by activating information management systems in this field. The data obtained as a result of monitoring should be evaluated, the areas that need to be improved should be identified and related works should be conducted.

4.4. Governance System

The Governance System consists of five criteria: "Structure of Management and Administrative Units", "Resource Management", "Information Management System", "Quality of Outsourced Services" and "Efficiency and Accountability of Management, Public Information". The evaluation regarding the maturity levels of the relevant criteria is presented in Figure 9.

Leadership at all levels, reducing the bureaucratic burden of employees and using knowledge-based management systems in a way that ensures continuous development in universities are important factors.

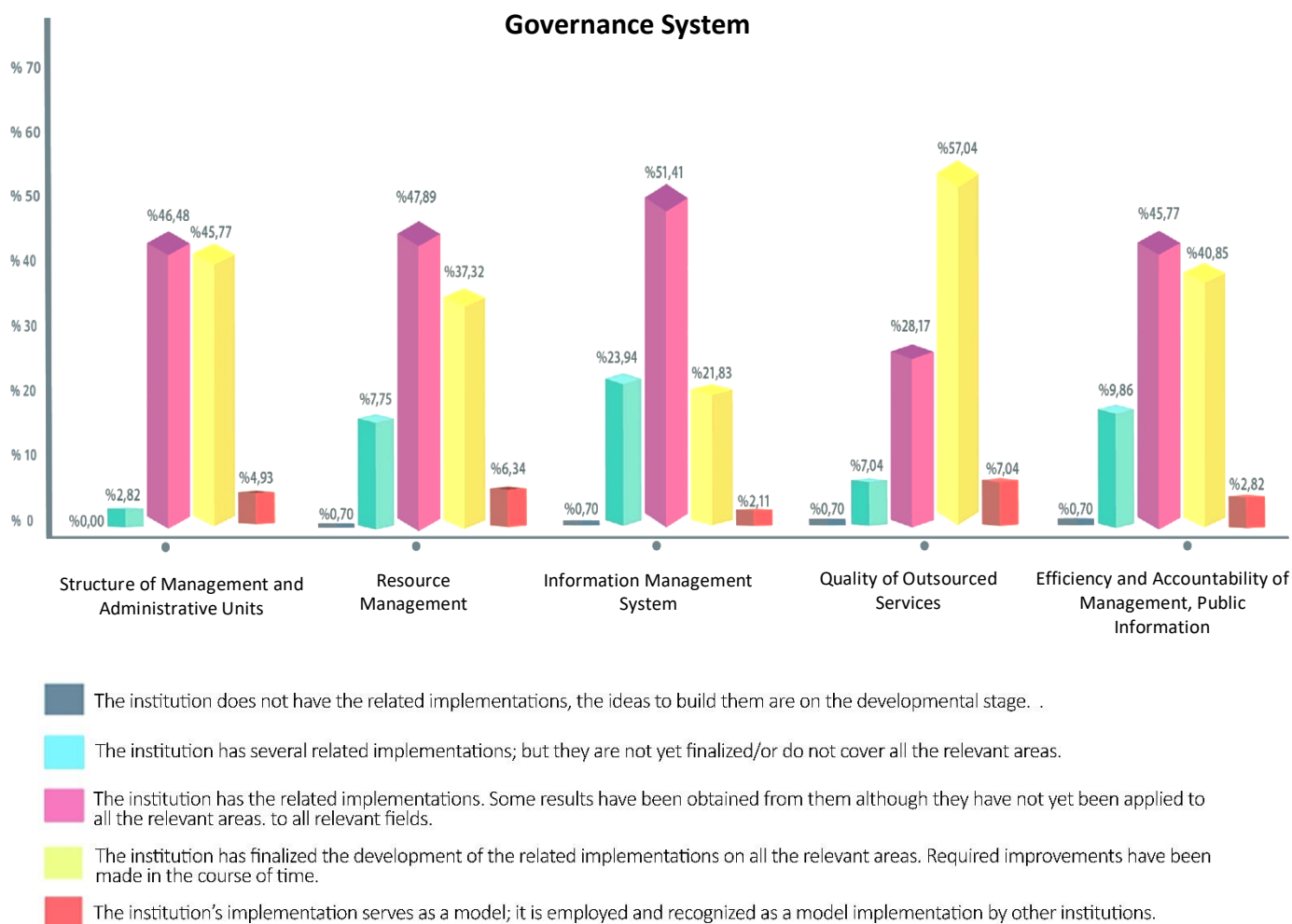


Figure 9. Maturity levels of governance system criteria within the scope of external evaluation


Within the scope of the administrative structure that ensures the integrative management of learning and teaching, research and development, social contribution and administrative support processes in higher education institutions, it is expected from institutions that they focus on all processes and embrace the processes at all levels and thus demonstrate an understanding of management in line with institutional targets.

In this way, process managers will be able to control the operation of the processes as targeted, fulfil the monitoring mission and initiate improvement activities when necessary.


In this context, the availability of management and administrative unit structures was designated in all the institutions evaluated and good practice examples were found in 5% of them. 45% of the institutions have matured implementations covering all areas. In 46% of the institutions, some implementations regarding management and administrative unit structures were observed although they did not cover all the fields

yet. The management and administrative structures of the institutions play a decisive role in strengthening quality assurance culture. The success of institutions in their development and quality improvement implementations depends on their ability to adapt to continuous changes. The key to this ability is a leadership behaviour in the institutions. The leadership qualities of the management and the competencies of the administrative units should be measured and monitored to sustain improvement.

In order to realize their strategies, it is necessary for higher education institutions to manage all their resources in line with their objectives and to mobilize human resources in an effective and competitive manner. In this manner, the duties of all academic and administrative human resources should be compatible with their qualifications and the development of human resources should be supported in accordance with the institutional goals. The performance of all academic and administrative human resources in terms of individual targets and existing competencies should be evaluated and practices to develop their competencies should be conducted.



Universities should establish an accountable system for internal and external stakeholders regarding the knowledge, skills and competencies gained by the graduates they train.



Within the scope of financial resource management of higher education institutions, the integrated planning, usage, control, reporting and review processes of resources such as state subsidies, revolving funds, equities, open/distance education incomes, research resources etc. should be performed. The allocation of financial resources should be performed in line with the strategic objectives of the institution, in accordance with the principle of transparency and accountability. In addition, systematic implementations should be performed to ensure effective and efficient use, control and review of movable and immovable resources, which are planned in line with institutional targets.

Institutions should specify targets to use all resources (human, financial, movable and immovable, etc.) and have systems to monitor them. In all of the institutions participating in the external evaluation process, implementations regarding resource management were found. While 6% of universities have good practice examples, it can be said that there are implementations of different maturity levels in the remaining institutions.

The most critical resource of institutions for realizing their strategies and increasing their competitiveness is their knowledge. This also applies to higher education institutions and makes it compulsory to secure and

make available the explicit and implicit information possessed by individuals, teams, systems and documents.

The usage of information management systems has become a necessity in view of today's information systems and infrastructure facilities in order to effectively perform the production and usage of the institutional information. Institutions should have a specific policy regarding the protection and management of the information they have, and the information management systems and the mechanisms supporting information management should be utilized by establishing a strong and effective information infrastructure.

Despite the importance of information management systems, it is understood that planning processes regarding this criterion do still continue among the evaluated institutions and therefore there are institutions that do not yet have an information management system. However, information management implementations ensure the assurance of institutional memory. On the other hand, good practice examples were found in 6% of the institutions evaluated, in which each member of the institution adopted the principle of sharing information with a cooperative institutional culture that will enrich the knowledge base.

Higher education institutions should ensure the compatibility, quality and continuity of outsourced support services. In this respect, they should have implementations for planning, evaluating and improving the outsourced services within the scope of their institutional quality assurance systems. Since supplier performance has a direct impact on the performance of the institution, the expected quality levels of outsourced services and goods should be systematically monitored and improved. In order to reach the quality objectives, the performance of the suppliers should be evaluated, close relations should be formed and mutual benefit-based cooperation should be established.

Institutions should have a specific policy on supplier selection, evaluation and management. In a cooperative environment provided by the active participation of suppliers; technology and information support should be provided to the suppliers, joint research and development projects should be implemented, joint cost reduction programs should be developed and processes such as in-service training supports should be performed within the institution. Among the five criteria under the main title of governance system, the highest maturity level (57%) is seen to be the quality of outsourced services (Figure 9). In 7% of the evaluated institutions, it was observed that the suppliers and business partners were seen as a part of the institution and included in the processes, so these institutions were observed to have exemplary implementations in which quality improvement activities were performed in cooperation with the suppliers.

Higher education institutions should publish information on all of their activities, including study programs and research and development activities, in an open, accurate and up-to-date manner. Within the scope of quality assurance, higher education institutions are expected to publish accurate, reliable and up-to-date information on their performance results as a requirement of their responsibilities. In this way, they will be able to increase the visibility of their quality processes, for which they exert considerable efforts in their learning and teaching processes, research activities and managerial structures.

It is only possible for institutions to keep up with the changes in the world with a knowledge-based agile management approach.

The institutions should also have approaches that can measure and evaluate the efficiency of their management and administrative staff and ensure their accountability. In this respect, institutions need institutional performance management implementations supported by strong information management systems in order to improve their accountability competencies. As the maturity levels of the evaluated institutions regarding the criterion of “Efficiency and Accountability of Management, Public Information” are considered, relevant implementations were found in all the institutions, but good practice examples were not observed other than a small percentage (3%).

5. ACCREDITATION AGENCIES

5.1. General Evaluation

Program accreditation activities in Turkey are performed on a voluntary basis by independent national and international agencies. The processes of authorization of national accreditation agencies and recognition of international accreditation agencies are carried out within the scope of the principles and criteria determined by THEQC. Information on the programs accredited by the accreditation agencies authorized or recognized by THEQC is included in the Higher Education Programs and Quota Guide published by the ÖSYM.

THEQC considers the following seven criteria in the authorization of national accreditation agencies:

- ◇ Agencies should have predefined and published mission and objectives, should maintain their activities in line with these objectives, ensure a high level of stakeholder participation in their governance and practices, and prove that their practices and criteria for output-oriented program accreditation are reliable and in compliance with national and international standards (particularly with ESG) and that their decisions are accurate.

- ◇ The organizational and financial structure of the agency should be in line with its legislation and area of activity as well as being stable and sustainable.
- ◇ The agency should act independently in its organizational structure, operational processes and formal outcomes.
- ◇ The agency should periodically publish general review reports that analyze the outcomes of its program accreditation activities.
- ◇ The agency should have adequate and appropriate resources, in terms of both human resources and physical infrastructure, in order to carry out its program accreditation activities.
- ◇ The agency should have appropriate internal quality assurance processes in order to monitor, assess and ensure the outcomes of its activities and conduct continuous improvement works.
- ◇ The agency should take part in external evaluation processes for the evaluation of its activities' compliance with national and international standards (particularly ESG) and continuous improvement of its quality assurance system.

THEQC considers the following two criteria in the recognition of international accreditation agencies.

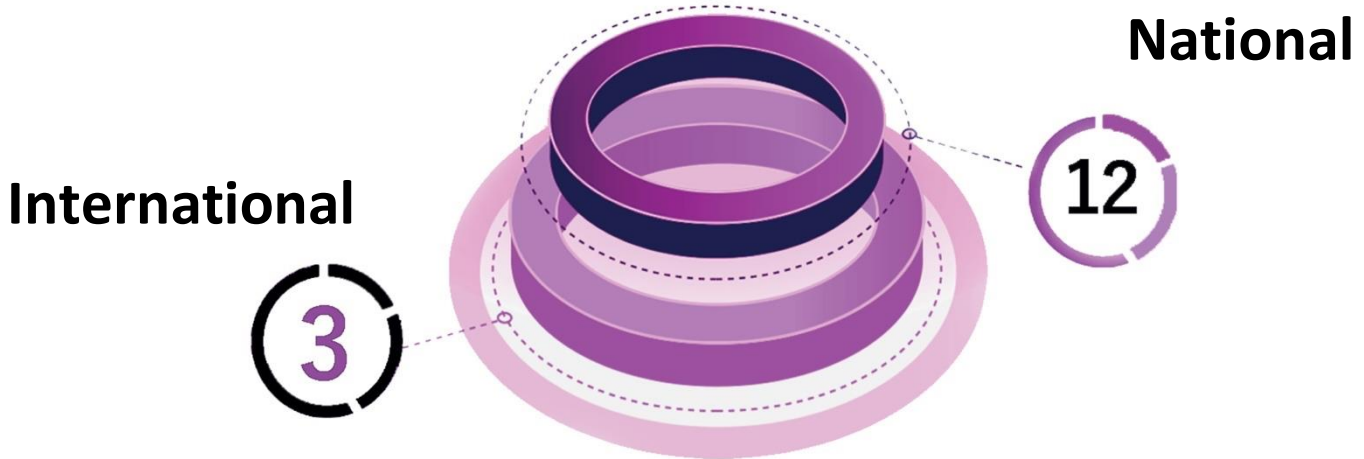
- ◇ The agency must verify that the implementations and criteria employed for program accreditation are reliable and in compliance with national and international standards (particularly with ESG).
- ◇ The agency must verify that it adopts an output-oriented accreditation approach (learning outcomes of programs, monitoring student success, assessment and evaluation approaches, feedback of graduates etc.).

As of October 2019, there are 12 national accreditation agencies holding the Quality Evaluation Registration Certificate. These are:

- Evaluation and Accreditation Association for Programs in the Faculties of Pharmacy (ECZAKDER)
- Evaluation and Accreditation Association for Teaching Programs (EPDAD)
- Science, Literature, Faculty of Science and Letters, Faculty of Languages, History and Geography Curriculum Programs Assessments and Accreditation Association (FEDEK)
- Association for Evaluation and Accreditation of Nursing Education Programs (HEPDAK)

- Theological Studies Accreditation Agency (İAA)
- Communication Research Association (İLAD)
- Association for Evaluation and Accreditation of Engineering Programs (MÜDEK)
- Association for Evaluation and Accreditation of Health Sciences Education Programs (SABAK)
- Association for Evaluation and Accreditation of Medical Education Programs (TEPDAD)
- Turkish Psychological Association (TPD)
- Tourism Education Evaluation and Accreditation Board (TUADER)
- Association for Evaluation and Accreditation of Educational Institutions and Programs of Veterinary Medicine (VEDEK)

ACCREDITATION AGENCIES



MÜDEK, FEDEK, HEPDAK, ECZAKDER and EPDAD applied to be re-registered in 2018 and received Quality Evaluation Registration Certificate. ILAD, SABAK and TUADER filed their first applications in 2018 and İAA filed its first application in 2019 and received the Quality Evaluation Registration Certificate. Several other agencies that want to offer accreditation services in different fields are maintaining their efforts in this regard. In addition, there are some agencies that have started their activities to perform accreditation in the fields of fine arts, sports sciences and dentistry. Figure 10 presents the data for the years between 2016 and 2019 regarding the accredited undergraduate programs in Turkey.

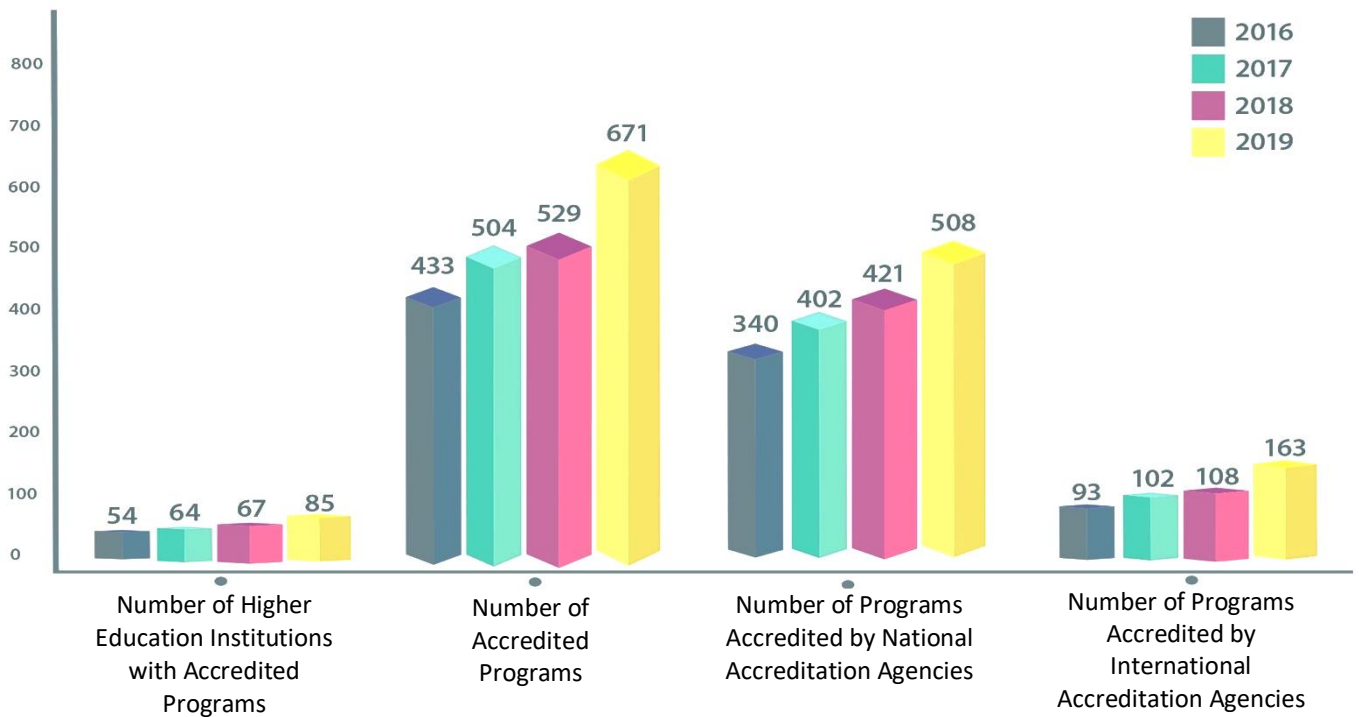


Figure 10. Accredited program data of 2016-2019 (general)

As can be seen from Figure 10, there is a steady increase in the number of accredited programs and higher education institutions with accredited programs over the years. The proportion of accredited undergraduate programs to all undergraduate programs is 10.53%. In addition, the number of higher education institutions having accredited programs increased by 57% and the number of accredited programs increased by 55% in 2019 compared to 2016. The three-year experience in the Institutional External Evaluation Program shows that the higher education institutions with accredited programs further internalize the quality processes. Therefore, although program accreditation is a voluntary activity, the accreditation activities in higher education institutions should be expanded and accreditation agencies operating in different fields should be encouraged. Field-based accredited program data are presented in Figures 11 and 12.

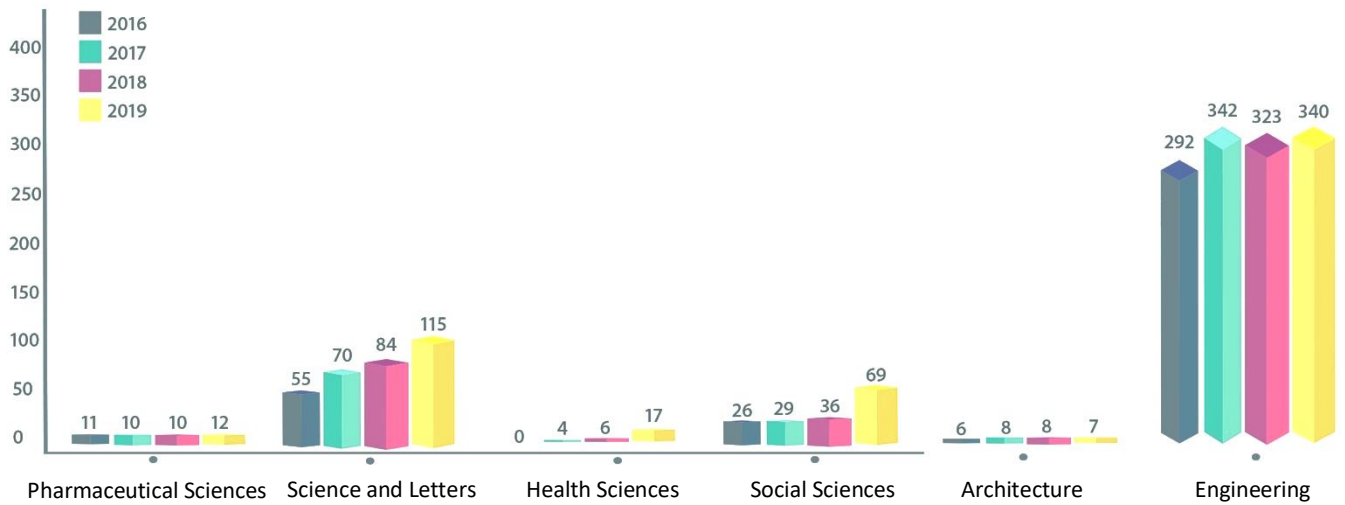


Figure 11. Distribution of accredited programs according to fields 2016-2019

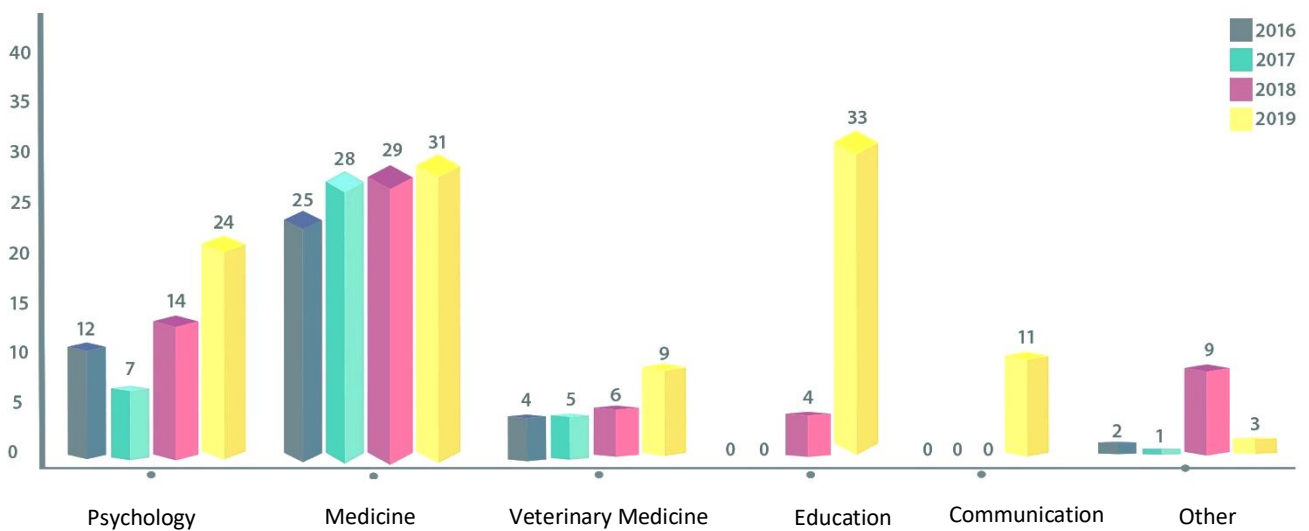


Figure 12. Distribution of accredited programs according to fields 2016-2019 (cont.)

When Figures 11 and 12 are examined, it is seen that the number of accredited programs in engineering is higher than the other fields. The proportion of the accredited programs among all the engineering programs with graduates is approximately 34.7%. However, in the medical faculties accredited at the faculty level, this proportion is 39.7%. The field with the smallest number of accredited programs is social sciences. The diversification of agencies providing accreditation services in different fields has led to an increase in the number of accredited programs over the years.

Accreditation agencies should focus on whether students acquire necessary competencies, the quality of teaching staff and learning environments to ensure the acquisition of these competencies, and the employability of graduates by reducing bureaucratic burden in their processes.

Table 5 shows the higher education institutions with 15 or more accredited programs. When examined in terms of field, it is seen that engineering and health sciences programs are highly accredited in these institutions. Although the number of accredited programs in state higher education institutions is larger than the foundation higher education institutions, the gap has been narrowing over the years.

Table 5. Universities with 15 or more accredited programs

UNIVERSITY	TYPE	NUMBER OF ACCREDITED PROGRAMS
Istanbul Technical University	State	36
Sakarya University	State	36
Istanbul Gelisim University	Foundation	34
Hacettepe University	State	21
Istanbul Medipol University	Foundation	21
Istanbul Aydın University	Foundation	18
Karadeniz Technical University	State	18
Yeditepe University	Foundation	17
Kocaeli University	State	16
Ankara University	State	15
Dokuz Eylül University	State	15
Middle East Technical University	State	15

5.2. Thematic Analysis Reports

THEQC regularly requests general review reports from national accreditation agencies that analyze the results of their program accreditation activities.

The findings obtained as a result of a detailed examination of these reports, which are referred as thematic analysis reports, draw attention to the presence of some common issues in all the reports. Although having different importance levels according to the related accreditation field, these issues are grouped under the titles of "Strengths" and "Areas for Further Development" and are listed briefly below. However, it should be noted that these issues have been stated by the accreditation agencies based on the observations made in the institutions that have gone through the accreditation process.

STRENGTHS

Willingness to Improve Education Quality: It is stated that institutions are significantly willing to improve their education quality. To that end, awareness in terms of learner-centred education, teaching strategy and activities has increased. In addition, it is stated that the programs are willing to use the current educational technologies.

Increase of Accreditation Awareness: It is stated that the number of program evaluation applications received from institutions increases every year and university administrations follow policies that support the accreditation processes and this situation is considered as an indicator of the increase in accreditation awareness. In addition, the willingness of higher education institutions in terms of identifying their strengths and areas for further development is noteworthy. As a result of this interest, it is expected that the quality of the programs will gradually improve and a quality culture including external evaluation will be achieved, which will contribute to the achievement of the targets.

Transparency and Informing: It is expressed that the program outputs are defined in detail and shared with the public in the programs applying for accreditation.

Faculty Member and Student Communication: It is stated that the communication between faculty members and students is very strong in the programs and there are scientific, social and cultural activities available for students and faculty members.

Implementation of Exchange Programs: It is stated that exchange programs such as Erasmus, Farabi etc. have been implemented successfully in institutions. In addition, it is expressed that there are double major and minor opportunities available for the students and they are actively utilized.

Internal and External Stakeholder Awareness: With the accreditation process, it is observed that awareness has been raised in receiving opinions from internal and external stakeholders in order to determine educational objectives. In addition, it is expressed that cooperation protocols with external stakeholders (public institutions, non-governmental organizations etc.) have been made in the programs having accreditation implementations.

AREAS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Systematic Relationships with Stakeholders: Stakeholder opinions are received in various ways (meetings and surveys) to identify stakeholder needs in the programs, but it is stated that the systematic processes on the subject have not been fully defined yet. In addition, it was found that the internal and external stakeholder meetings did not become systematic and the improvements could not be reflected in the programs. It is stated that there are some shortcomings in the participation of students in management of programs and in the sharing of scientific knowledge with the public-private sector (public information).

Increasing Number of Students: It is observed that the number of students per faculty member increases gradually and this situation leads to problems in the academic consultancy system, physical infrastructure and technical and administrative staff.

Differences between State and Foundation Universities: It is stated that there are differences between state and foundation universities in terms of quantity and quality of academic staff. In addition, it is pointed out that there are problems in meeting the minimum number of academic staff required by the accreditation criteria and keeping qualified staff (in a permanent way) in undergraduate programs in foundation universities.

Internship Practices: It is expressed that there are problems in internship practices in the programs with internship requirements. The main problems mentioned in this scope include the challenges encountered while finding internship places and the problems related to the quality of internship.

Management and Coordination: It is stated that faculty members who are not experts (graduates) in the relevant field are appointed to the programs as coordinators. It is also emphasized that the coordination between practice units (hospital, laboratory etc.) and education units (dean's office, department etc.) should be improved.

Alumni Tracking System: It is pointed out that the programs have some shortcomings in tracking their graduates regularly, updating their programs according to the tracking results with a systematic method, and documenting the processes employed in these efforts.

Career Counseling: It is stressed that there are some shortcomings in providing counseling services to guide students on career planning issues. In this regard, it is expressed that the number of non-field elective courses that may influence students' career choices is insufficient.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

THEQC was established to help higher education institutions have sustainable quality assurance systems through quality-oriented guidance and leadership in the management processes. Since its establishment, the most important institutional goals of THEQC are to monitor and adopt the methods and models of international quality assurance systems as well as national requirements and targets; to be able to guide higher education institutions in terms of quality assurance of learning and teaching processes, research and development activities, administrative structures and social contribution mechanisms, and to reveal the areas for further development in our national higher education system and thus making meaningful contributions to raising qualified human resources who are equipped with the skills required by the era and

open to learning, development and collaborative processes. With this perspective, the Council carries out internal and external quality assurance processes related to the stated activities and performs the authorization and recognition of independent external evaluation organizations in the field of program accreditation.

As of 2019, THEQC's institutional external evaluation of 160 universities (77.29% of all higher education institutions) has been completed for the first five-year cycle. Thus, the institutional external evaluation processes of all the universities with graduates have been completed. The institutional external evaluation processes of newly-established higher education institutions that have not yet produced graduates are planned to be completed in the upcoming period. The reports on the evaluation processes have regularly been published on the official website of the Council, <https://yokak.gov.tr/>. Accordingly, the annual situation reports for 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 have been prepared and shared with the public on the THEQC's official website. The authorization of 12 national accreditation agencies and recognition of 3 international accreditation agencies have been completed. Information sharing meetings have been held with higher education quality assurance organizations of various nations and cooperation agreements have been signed with them, which have significantly contributed to THEQC's international recognition and prestige. All these activities have been carried out thanks to the dedication, participation, cooperation and contributions of the Council members, consultants, related commissions, experts, employees and other stakeholders.

6.1 Evaluation within the Scope of the Strategic Objectives

Strategic Objective 1: To construct and disseminate bureaucratic burden-reduced quality assurance systems in higher education with innovative applications and to ensure the continuous improvement of these systems.

One of the most important components of a sustainable quality assurance system is information management system that alleviates the bureaucratic burden of information and data management. The higher education institutions in our country, of which number is 207 as of 2019, annually present their ISERs to THEQC and are included in the Institutional External Evaluation Program at least once every five years. In addition, the activities of accreditation agencies, whose number is gradually increasing, are continuously monitored and evaluated by THEQC. In a quantitatively large higher education system, thanks to all the endeavours of the THEQC assisted with information systems, various quality assurance instruments have successfully been implemented such as the evaluation and monitoring of annual reports, updating of information, documents and guidelines, training of evaluators, authorization and recognition

of accreditation agencies, achieving reliable and consistent evaluation results, continuous training, information and dissemination activities, and stakeholder engagement. With the Quality Assurance Management Information System (QAMIS), various stages of self-evaluation and external evaluation processes such as report writing, appointment of teams, and receiving feedback are modularly managed. The evaluator system is integrated with QAMIS, and evaluator applications, online trainings, reports and feedback surveys are uploaded to the system. The Accreditation Agencies System (AAS) has also been used for accreditation agencies to file their authorization and registration applications. In addition, the Information Portal developed by THEQC aims to create an online source of information for higher education institutions in the process of structuring internal quality assurance systems.

The competencies and behavioural features of the evaluators constitute the most important factor in the success of the Institutional External Evaluation Program. In this context, one of the most important practices as part of THEQC's innovative approaches is the evaluator training program. Since 2016, the face-to-face trainings and complementary printed training materials have been supported with online learning platforms (flipped classroom) and active learning approaches (cooperative learning, case studies, jigsaw technique, problem-based learning and problem solving, etc.). The evaluator training program, which is integrated with information technologies, is continuously improved and updated with the regular feedback received at the end of the trainings. The evaluator module, which is integrated with QAMIS, significantly reduces the workload of the evaluators during the external evaluation and training processes and facilitates reliable data entry. Furthermore, the adaptation and evaluation of innovations such as short-term competence-based degree programs, digital and online credits, artificial intelligence, augmented reality, which have emerged in the global scene of higher education in recent years and have a serious impact on education processes, are also on THEQC's agenda. With these practices, THEQC aims to establish a quality assurance system that is specific to our country and able to speak to the whole world and plans to progress in the path that the world has taken in 30-40 years in a short time.



Strategic Objective 2: To promote the development of quality assurance systems in higher education.

In current period, the qualifications that young individuals are required to have are called the 21st century skills. Today in Turkey, as well as all over the world, higher education systems and institutions are in a transformation that closely follows innovations and increasingly becomes more student-centred, transparent and accountable in their learning and teaching, research and development and governance processes with the aim of equipping students with the knowledge, skills, and competencies demanded by the new global context. Another important issue in this dynamic process is the quality assurance of the services offered by higher education processes. At this point, the higher education quality assurance system, which THEQC tries to structure and maintain in higher education institutions, and the principles and criteria cognizant of the national requirements and international norms defined within this system ensure the quality of our HEIs' processes of raising individuals with the competencies of the information age.

Strategic Objective 3: To encourage the dissemination of quality culture and establish cooperative relations between all stakeholders.

One of the essential elements of competitiveness for universities is to create a culture of quality. Quality culture created in the sense of continuous improvement has to provide a continuous interaction between the top-down structural and administrative processes and the bottom-up cultural and psychological elements. The quality culture created in the universities increases the reputation and confidence of the university. The most important structural and administrative elements that positively affect the development of quality culture are to develop a strategy for the continuous improvement of the university and to include stakeholders in all processes with well-functioning and useful quality management and

quality assurance systems. THEQC endeavours to disseminate and internalize the quality culture with stakeholder participation in higher education institutions. The trainings, workshops, presentations, national and international cooperation works, e-newsletters, ISERs and IFRs are published on the official website of the Council (yokak.gov.tr).

Strategic Objective 4: To become an independent, reliable, expert and institutionalized organization in the evaluation of quality assurance.

As the only national organization authorized in the field of quality assurance in higher education, THEQC is a public legal entity with administrative and financial autonomy and a special budget and performs its duties without the influence or interference of public institutions, organizations or authorities, evaluated higher education institutions or other stakeholders. The external evaluation teams participating in THEQC's institutional external evaluation processes are selected on the basis of their knowledge, experience, scientific and technical skills in accordance with the qualification requirements and procedures described in the Regulation on Higher Education Quality Assurance and the Higher Education Quality Council, the Institutional External Evaluation Directive and the THEQC Code of Ethics. Evaluators consist of independent external experts trained to conduct evaluations in accordance with THEQC's external evaluation methodology. The Institutional External Evaluation Program was designed according to the procedures and technical principles of ESG and the European University Association (EUA-IEP), adapted to the requirements of Turkey's national higher education system, and implemented with full independence principle. In this context, evaluation teams make their decisions as organs and the IFRs that they prepare for higher education institutions are announced to the public by THEQC. Within the scope of the program accreditation activities, the choice and responsibility of selecting and working with national and international independent external evaluation and accreditation organizations authorized or recognized by THEQC are within the jurisdiction of higher education institutions.

Where do stakeholders want to see THEQC in the future? *



*Compiled from stakeholder opinion analysis

Strategic Objective 5: To heighten the recognition of THEQC by increasing its internationalization level.

As a national quality assurance organization, THEQC has maintained its quality assurance activities only in Turkey since its establishment. One of the objectives determined within the 2019-2023 Strategic Plan in terms of THEQC's international activities is to "To heighten the recognition of THEQC by increasing its internationalization level". Since cooperation with international organizations is a priority for THEQC, cooperation protocols were signed in 2018 and 2019 with national accreditation bodies of France (HCERES) and Russia (NCPA) on quality assurance and evaluation of higher education. In addition, information sharing meetings were held with the QAA (UK), EKKA (Estonia), and HQA (Greece), in which the parties agreed to engage in cooperation on quality assurance and evaluation in higher education. THEQC closely monitors the activities of leading umbrella organizations of QA in higher education such as INQAAHE (International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies) and APQN (Asia Pacific Quality Network). The Council has also organized information sharing meetings with various international organizations offering accreditation services in Turkey.

Another important outcome of the Council's activities is the ongoing ENQA membership process. ENQA is a highly prestigious network representing the organizations that provide quality assurance to the higher education systems of member countries of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). In February 2019, THEQC was accepted as a member of ENQA.

6.2. Maturity Level of the Quality Assurance System in Higher Education within the Scope of the Institutional External Evaluation

The Institutional External Evaluation Program, which is one of THEQC's most important areas of activity, has been implemented since 2016. In a four-year period, all the higher education institutions with graduates have been included in the THEQC Institutional External Evaluation Program. The universities annually submit their self-evaluation reports that cover the mission and policies of the institution determined by taking into account the developments in the world and the targets of our country. And the external evaluations reveal the strengths and improvement areas of the institutions. In these processes, self-evaluation reports, evaluation teams and external evaluations focus on the same goal. The maturity levels of the quality assurance systems in the 160 higher education institutions evaluated are summarized below on the basis of THEQC Institutional External Evaluation Criteria:

Criterion 1. Quality Assurance System

Universities are responsible for their own quality. So, they are expected to involve their stakeholders in the processes of learning and teaching, research and development, social contribution and internationalization and to evaluate the results together with the stakeholders. This is possible only through the establishment of a simple, transparent and accountable system within the institution. The key concepts in the quality assurance system are accountability, transparency, learning outcomes, evidence-based approach, leadership and innovation.

It has been observed that the level of awareness regarding the quality assurance system in the higher education institutions evaluated within the scope of the Institutional External Evaluation Program is high, the structuring of quality commissions has been completed, the quality policies have been prepared with stakeholder participation and shared with the public in most of the institutions. However, in order to mature the internal quality system in institutions; defined and planned processes need to be put into practice, processes implemented in all areas of activity should be monitored with performance indicators and continuous improvement mechanisms need to be implemented. Stakeholder participation in the internal quality assurance system has been observed as the leading area for further development in the higher education system.

Criterion 2. Learning and Teaching

In the context of learning and teaching, universities are expected to provide their students with the competencies required in the complex world, and focus on the learning environment's and teaching staff's ability to provide these competencies as well as the graduates' employability.

The findings obtained from the evaluation of 160 higher education institutions show that the majority of the institutions in the field of learning and teaching have reached a certain level of maturity in the process of defining and implementing processes and that there are a few examples of good practice. The leading areas for further development have been observed in the titles of “student-centred learning, teaching and evaluation” and “continuous monitoring and updating of programs” due to the lack of monitoring and improvement mechanisms. Although a certain level of maturity is observed in the defined processes such as “the design and approval of programs” and “student admission, progression, recognition and certification” in the evaluated higher education institutions, continuous monitoring and updating activities are carried out in only 13% of the institutions. In terms of student-centred learning and evaluation processes, mature practices are observed in only 28% of institutions.

Findings related to monitoring learning outcomes and program qualifications may vary in international reports. For example, according to the US-based Higher Learning Commission’s 2018 report, 63% of institutions have mechanisms that monitor whether learning outcomes have been achieved, while 84% have regular monitoring and updating processes in their programs.¹ When the reports of EUA published in 2018 regarding European higher education processes are examined, it is stated that 67% of higher education institutions have directives for monitoring and updating programs, 47% have program monitoring committees, but 41% of faculty level programs have been developed.² According to the same report, even if there are defined processes for 77% of European universities to use their own teaching methods and 67% for student-centred learning approaches, only 42% of universities can take responsibility for the selection of teaching methods and techniques alone.

Program accreditation is the most preferred quality instrument of the institutions, but its effect outside the accredited programs is insufficient. The most important aspect of the quality assurance system is the assurance of program qualifications applied in all programs with student-centred approaches. Therefore, the following are recommended to our institutions:

- ◇ The program objectives and learning outcomes should be based on stakeholder opinions, announced to the public, compatible with NQF-HETR, related to the learning outcomes of the courses and enable graduates to adapt to the complex and rapidly changing world; and output oriented measurement, monitoring, evaluation, prevention and improvement steps should be determined.

¹ Barbara J. Johnson (Vice President for Accreditation Relations) (2019). HLC, Key Insights: A Re- view of Core Components and the Comprehensive Evaluation. Higher Learning Commission.

² Gaebel, M. ve Zhang, T. (2018). Trends 2018. Learning and teaching in the European Higher Education Area (Brussels, EUA). <http://bit.ly/EUATRENDS2018> (accessed 05/07/2019).

- ◇ At least 25% of the courses in the curriculums should take into account the balance between field and non-field courses, provide an opportunity for students to get to know different disciplines and gain global and individual competencies.
- ◇ Learning environments should be organized by making the necessary plans for the use of interactive, student-centred and learning outcome-oriented learning methods and techniques in in-class and non-class learning environments.
- ◇ Activities (courses, workshops, courses, seminars, etc.) should be organized for all instructors to be able to implement interactive learning environments and adopt student-centred evaluation approaches (process-oriented, project, portfolio, performance, multiple exams, peer review, etc.). Centres of excellence in learning and teaching that would take on the responsibility of organizing such activities should be established. Rewards, funds and competitive appointment and promotion criteria for teaching staff should be determined.
- ◇ Prior learning of students (knowledge and skills acquired through formal education, non-formal education and free learning) should be recognized.
- ◇ Statistical indicators related to learning and teaching (courses opened each semester, number of students, success status, feedback results, course diversity, laboratory practices, undergraduate/graduate student ratios, number and reasons of exmatriculations etc.) should be periodically and systematically monitored, evaluated and compared while their improvement in terms of quality education should be followed.
- ◇ The plans, practices and results for the improvement of foreign language/English proficiency should be evaluated and the measures taken in this regard should be declared; the establishment of foreign language/English preparatory schools should be completed their performance should be evaluated.
- ◇ Information on graduates with regard to learning outcomes such as graduate employment, enrolments in graduate programs, income level, and employer/graduate satisfaction level should be systematically and comprehensively collected, evaluated and employed for the institutional strategies.
- ◇ Physical infrastructure facilities (class, laboratory, library, studio), course books and human resources (learning supports, counselling services, etc.) addressing students should be available in appropriate quality and quantity, be accessible and presented to the students; all the plans and practices related to accessible university elements should be monitored and evaluated.
- ◇ Relations with research processes should be established in study programs.

- ◇ Physical, financial and advisory support should be provided to the social, cultural and sporting activities of student societies; an effective administrative organization that would conduct and manage these activities should be established and operated.
- ◇ Supports provided to program accreditation should be maintained; in-house program evaluation mechanisms that would operate like quality agencies should be formed in the programs in which program accreditation is not possible.

In addition, the rate of attending open education programs among individuals of higher education age in our country is quite high. However; on the basis of competence, knowledge and skills, it is very difficult to provide skills and competence with the open education system especially in the evaluation of learning and teaching. If the open education system will continue to exist in its current form, it should be supported with face-to-face trainings aiming to gain competence (co-education) or it should continue as a second university.

Criterion 3. Research, Development and Social Contribution

Institutions are expected to define performance indicators in line with their research objectives, to conduct effective monitoring and improvement activities, and to focus on the effectiveness and local, national and international contributions of their research and development processes rather than the numerical values of these processes.

It has been observed that the evaluated institutions have generally determined their research strategies and targets and carried out various implementations on the subject, established monitoring mechanisms for the effective use of research resources and obtained their outcomes. In addition, it has been found that they have completed their structuring in terms of research staff, and a variety of works have been carried out for the improvement of staff. However, there is a need to increase the maturity level of the practices and systematically continue the improvement works. In the main title of research and development, “monitoring and improving institution’s research performance” is the weakest criterion compared to the other criteria. Although not extended to all the areas, we have institutions that have carried out monitoring and improvement activities and obtained results from these practices. But most of the institutions should define performance indicators in line with their research strategies and objectives, conduct data-based monitoring through the indicators and increase the effectiveness of the monitoring processes by introducing information management systems in this context. The data obtained as a result of monitoring should be evaluated, the areas in need of improvement should be determined and related works should be carried out.

Criterion 4. Governance System

Using knowledge-based management systems, universities are expected to create an accountable system for the internal and external stakeholders regarding the knowledge, skills and competencies that they provide to their graduates.

In the 160 higher education institutions evaluated, the fact that the senior management is easily accessible and solution-oriented and the existence of strategies that regulate the management and efficiency of resources come to the forefront as strengths. In addition, leadership at all levels, reducing the bureaucratic burden of employees and using knowledge-based management systems to ensure the continuous improvement of the institution are identified as areas for further development in the quality assurance system.

Program accreditation activities strengthen the quality practices at the program level and increase the quality awareness at the institutional level while ensuring the internalization of quality processes. Among the higher education institutions evaluated within the scope of the Institutional External Evaluation Program, the maturity levels of the quality assurance processes of those who have program accreditation are higher. In this context, increasing the number and diversity of accredited programs and increasing the number of institutions offering accreditation services in different fields will make significant contributions to the establishment of internal quality assurance systems in higher education institutions.

In conclusion, the most important outcomes of quality assurance system efforts in higher education can be listed as guiding the continuous improvement of higher education institutions in line with their missions and objectives, adopting transparency and accountability in relation to resource use, strengthening the employment opportunities of graduates, increasing the contribution of stakeholders to higher education outcomes and increasing the international reputation and competitiveness of the higher education system. Since the day of its foundation, THEQC has been focusing on the establishment and continuous improvement of a quality assurance system within the Turkish higher education system. Of course, among all the efforts made towards the establishment of a quality assurance system in higher education, and within this significant progress achieved in a short time; the contribution of all internal and external stakeholders, especially the CoHE Presidency, is significant. We hope that the results and recommendations presented in this review report, which is based on the annual situation reports published by THEQC since 2017 and the outputs of these reports, will be beneficial to our stakeholders.



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