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IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF SERVICES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF OVIEDO

1. Premises and background of the study

University autonomy is a key instrument for achieving the objectives of quality and progress in higher education. The result of this autonomy is the increasing requirement of accountability to demonstrate that the decisions and actions taken by the university are aimed at **improving quality**.

The evolution of Quality Assurance in Spanish universities can be summarized in the following steps, seen from the standpoint of University Services:

- 1980 s: Disconnected activities, student surveys, etc.;
- 1992–1994: Experimental Quality Assessment Programme of the University System (Spanish acronym, PEXEC). (Tangential inclusion of services);
- 1994–1995: European Pilot Project Programme for Quality Assessment in Higher Education;
- 1995: Start-up of the National Plan for Quality Assessment in Universities (Spanish acronym, PNECU);
- 1996–2000: PNECU Calls for Projects (Including Services).

The University of Oviedo Services did not participate in the PNECU's calls for projects.

2001–2006 (repealed in 2002): II University Quality Plan (Spanish acronym, PCU) (Including Services).

One of the objectives set out in the II University Quality Plan is to:

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- Continue to promote institutional assessment and to foster the implementation in universities of comprehensive quality systems for continuous improvement.

The memorandum, reproduced below, from the Spanish Ministry for Universities on the development of the II University Quality Plan once again highlights the assessment of services as a point to take into account as regards the quality of a university: the universities that respond to this call are to submit a multi-annual quality project, including mandatory assessment throughout the duration of the Plan of all the degrees implemented and the review of the results thereof. The assessment and review of results, in the same period, of departments and **general services** may be included in the project on a voluntary basis.

The services assessed at the University of Oviedo in the two PCU II University Quality Plan calls were:

- Scientific/Technical Services (2001),
- Library Services (2001),
- Halls of Residence (2002),
- University Extension (2002),
- Research (2002).

2003/2004–2006/2007: the Institutional Assessment Programme (Spanish acronym, PEI) of the Spanish National Assessment and Accreditation Agency (ANECA) (does not include services as such).

2003/2004: ANECA Accreditation Pilot Programme.

In parallel, ANECA published specific programmes and guidelines for assessing the Quality of University Services; for example, those applicable to Libraries and International Relations Offices:

- 2003/2004–2006/2007: University Library Services Quality Certificate,
- 2006/2007: Assessment of International Relations Offices,
- 2006: Assessment of University Services in accordance with the EFQM model,
- 2003/2004–2008/2009: Quality Distinction in PhD Programmes,
- 2007: AUDIT and VERIFICA Programmes,
- 2009: Campus of International Excellence,
- 2010: Towards Excellence in PhD Programmes at Spanish Universities Distinction (call EDU/3429/2010).

Spanish University Services are currently implementing tools for improvement that allow them to respond to the requirements of the EHEA and have information available to improve their activities, as can be seen in the table below.

From the results shown in the table above, it can be seen that the majority of Spanish Universities (88.89%) took the drafting of Service Charters as their starting point to inform their stakeholders about the activities they undertake.

Similarly, there have been several actions aimed at the systematization, organisation and documentation of the activities carried out by the Services, either by the

Table 1

Actions developed	Number of universities	%
Service Charters	40	88,89
Actions related to EFQM model	15	33,33
Process and procedures	13	28,89
Evaluation and self-evaluation of the Service	12	26,67
Systems of Quality Management	7	15,56
Drawing up of an assessment, quality, improvement, strategy Plan/Programme for Services	5	11,11
Actions related to ISO Standard 9001:2008	4	8,89
Manual/Guidebook for process design/assessment	3	6,67

Note: data from the review of different university websites in May 2012.
Total number of Universities studied: 45

application of self-assessment models (e.g. EFQM) and/or the design and implementation of Quality Management Systems activities by developing processes and/or procedures that provide support for the different activities.

The main objective of this paper is to present the initiatives being developed in Service Quality Management at the University of Oviedo in relation to the actions of other Spanish Universities and the applicable requisites, such as adaptation of studies to the European Higher Education Area, the International Campus of Excellence Programme and the University 2015 Strategy. The paper also analyses, using a simple 1 to 5 points Likert scale questionnaire for the Heads of Service and users, whether the implemented initiatives (process manuals and service charters) have met the objectives established at the beginning of the project regarding the improvement of information about the service, systematization of activities, efficiency of resource management and monitoring of the Quality System by means of indicators.
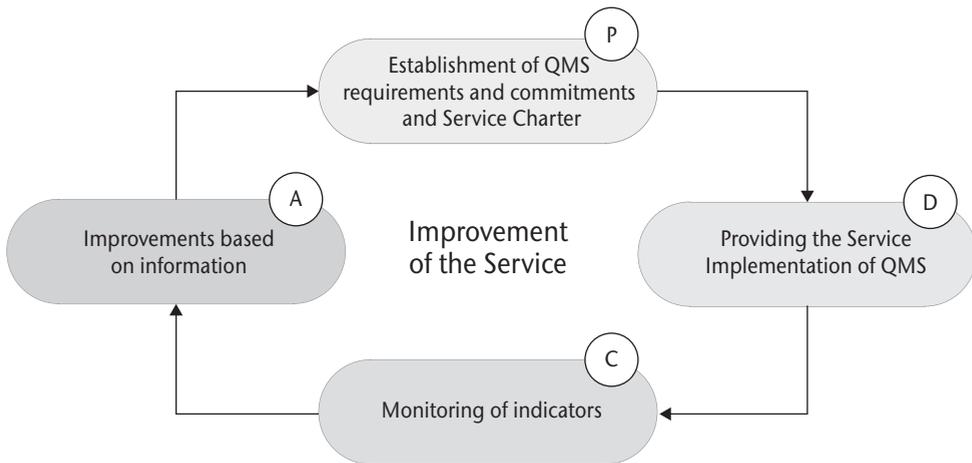
2. Methodology followed in the study

The need to establish quality assurance criteria that facilitate assessment, certification and accreditation consider quality assurance as an essential aim of university policy, across the board.

On the basis of these requisites, the University of Oviedo – via its Technical Unit for Quality and in collaboration with its Services – launched the activities of drawing up and implementing process manuals (Quality Management System) and service charters to meet the criteria and guidelines for quality assurance established in the European Higher Education Area, aimed at achieving the following objectives:

1. To raise awareness regarding service quality, with a training plan for Administrative and Services Staff.
2. To analyse the current status of the service in terms of quality, through meetings with the assigned technical staff.
3. To design a process manual and service charter. To establish indicators and quality commitments with users.
4. The way to quality of service is continuous improvement.

Figure A

The Quality Plan for Services was drawn up by the Technical Unit for Quality and approved by the Management Team at the University of Oviedo. It comprises the following three lines of action:

1. **Drawing up of Service Charters** (document which constitutes the instrument through which organisations inform users about the services commissioned, the rights they have and quality commitments in terms of service provision) for the 25 services provided by the university. This line of action is intended to:
   a. Make **information** available to users about the **services provided**.
   b. Inform users of the channels for communicating **incidents and suggestions**.
   c. Act as a starting point for aiming university services towards a **policy of continuous improvement**.
   d. **Publicize** the **quality commitments** that have been adopted.
   e. Check the degree of compliance with quality commitments by **monitoring the associated indicators**.

The adopted recommendations are those of Spanish Royal Decree 951/2005 of 29 July, establishing the general framework for improving quality in General State Administration and UNE standard 93.200:2008. Service charters. Requisites.

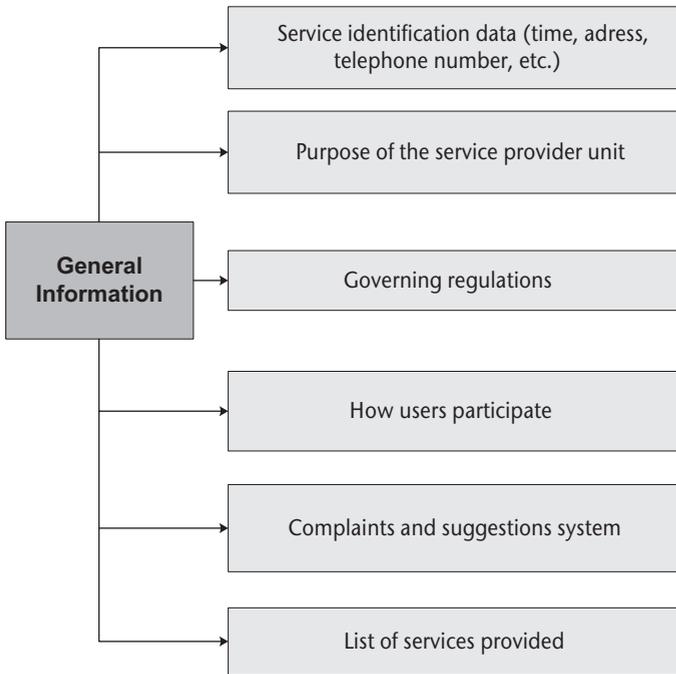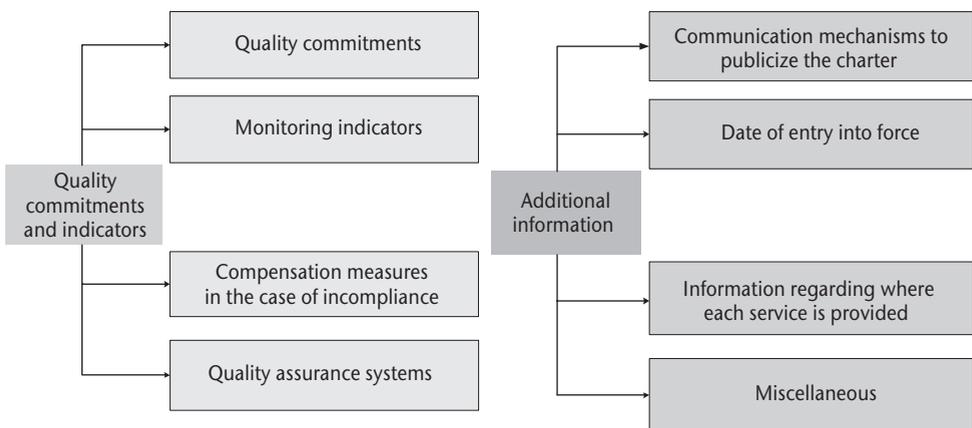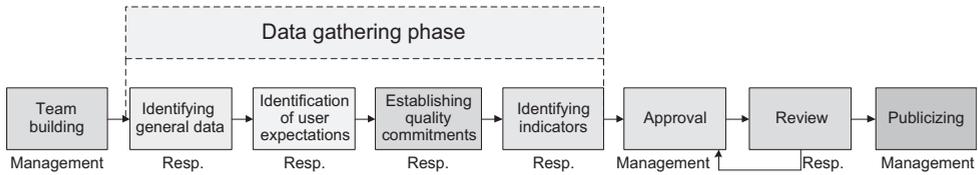The following information was chosen to be included in the service charters:

Figure B

Figure 1. Scheme of the information to include in the service charter

The main steps in the drafting of the charter were:

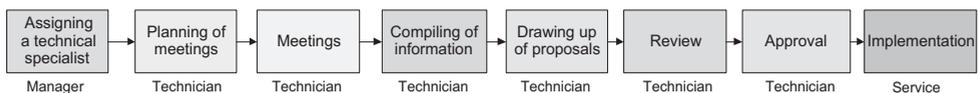Figure 2. Major milestones in the drafting and implementation of service charters

2. **Design and implementation of a Quality Management System** – Work Procedure Manual for each of the 25 services, following the process approach of the Technical Unit for Quality (UTCal) at the University of Oviedo[1]. The objectives of this line of action are to:
   a. systematize and unify the activities undertaken in the different university departments,
   b. increase the efficiency of resources (time, information, economic, material, etc.),
   c. facilitate the incorporation of new staff to the service,
   d. monitor the activities performed by services via indicators that allow objective decisions to be taken regarding processes.

The systematizing of tasks was carried out through monthly meetings with each service.

Figure 3. Major milestones in the design and implementation of the Quality Management System

ISO standard 9001:2008, adapted to the requirements of university services, was followed in the design of the service.

3. **Obtaining external recognition for the services** most involved. Not yet implemented, this line of action would consist in ISO 9001:2008 certification and/or EFQM recognition.

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[1] The methodology employed is registered as University of Oviedo publication *Metodología Innovadora para la Gestión por Procesos: GESTIONNA* [*Innovative Methodology for Process Management: GESTIONNA*]; legal deposit AS-2689–2011.

Via an anonymous assessment questionnaire, UTCal evaluated the satisfaction of the different services with the activities carried out by UTCal and with each of the lines of action in the Quality Plan. See the appended satisfaction survey:

3. Results

The project kicked off with its communication to all the Heads of Service by the Management Team during January and February 2011. The Head of the Technical Unit for Quality, along with the technical specialist assigned to the service, presented the project to each university service, as well as organising the respective awareness-raising seminars.

a. Service charters:

The charters for the 25 university services were drawn up during 2011:

Table 2

Recruitment and Heritage	Student and Employment Management
Personnel Management	Research
University Libraries	University Extension
Legal	Internationalisation and Cooperation for Development
Gijón Campus Administration	Infrastructure
Administrative Organisation and General Affairs	Budgetary and Financial Accounting
Mieres Campus Administration	Economic Planning
Computing and Communications (GAE)	Faculty, Departments and Centres
Computing and Communications	Process Control
Cost Accounting	Academic Affairs and New Degrees
Milán Campus Administration	University Services
Llamaquique Campus Administration	Cristo A Campus
Campus of Excellence	

Eighty-four scheduled meetings, 93 visits and 152 calls were made in the drawing up of the service charters, in addition to the 2,340 work hours logged by the Technical Unit for Quality.

Figure 4. Example of the charter for the Research Service

Figure 5. Research Service control board

Inicio | Atención Telefónica | S.G.C. | Tareas de Personal | Configuración | Acerca de
Documentación del sistema | Inventario de equipos | Indicadores de Calidad | Helpdesk

Nuevo | Consultar | Mis indicadores | Nuevo indicador compuesto | Consultar indicador compuesto | Gráficos histórico | Listado

Gestión de Indicadores de Calidad

Seleccione el año: 2012

Indicadores

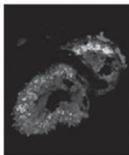|	Estado	Tend.	Meta	Unid.	Indicadores	Responsable	Periodicidad	Forma Cálculo	Resultado	Observaciones
Ver			>1101	A	IND-SGI-01 % Of Transmissions And Receptions Of Employment Contracts Realized By The Works Council And Processed On Time.	Carlosc	Annual	Ultimo Mes	150	
Ver			=100	A	IND-SGI-02 % Of Registrations In The Contrat@ Application From The Public Employment Service Of Contract Signed By The Applicant And The Legal Representative Of The University And Processed On Time.	Carlosc	Annual	Ultimo Mes		
Ver			>=2	A	IND-SGI-03 % Of Transmission Of Complete Record To Staff Management Service And Processed On Time.	Carlosc	Annual	Ultimo Mes		
Ver			>=1	A	IND-SGI-04 % Of Calls Analyzed And Disseminated On Time.	Carlosc	Monthly	Acumulado	2	
Ver			>=50	A	IND-SGI-05 % Of Applications For Projects From External Official Calls Reviewed On Time.	Carlosc	Monthly	Acumulado	0	
Ver			=100	A	IND-SGI-06 % Of Applications For The Research Promotion Plan Reviewed On Time.	Carlosc	Monthly	Media	96,67	
Ver			<=35	A	IND-SGI-07 % Of Contracts With Companies And Subsidies Reviewed On Time.	Carlosc	Monthly	Media	6,67	

Approval of service charters:

Once approved, the service charters were published in the Official Gazette of the Principality of Asturias (BOPA), No. 4 of 7 January 2012.
https://sede.asturias.es/bopa/2012/01/07/2011–24 446.pdf

Publicizing of service charters:

The 32 drafted and approved service charters were publicized via the Technical Unit for Quality website.
http://calidad.uniovi.es/servicios/cartasservicio
Since being published, the service charters have received 3,460 visits in all as of June 2012.

Implementation of service charters:

Once the service charters had been published in the BOPA, their implementation commenced with the monitoring of the fulfilment of quality commitments.

A software application was designed to facilitate the uploading of data and the tracking of the indicators that monitor quality commitments. This application allows real-time monitoring of the implementation in each of the services and the analysis of the data from their indicators.

Quarterly meetings are held to monitor their implementation and analyse the scores of the indicators, the degree of fulfilment of quality commitments, the evolution of the service and any changes produced. These meetings are coming to form part of the routine activities of the service as quarterly service monitoring meetings.

b. Design and implementation of Quality Management Systems

The Quality Management Systems are based on Process Management, which will mean a change in organisational culture in each service, aimed at "understanding the difference between the 'document what you do' approach and the 'process' approach to system development" (Hoyle, 2000). Previous studies show that process management increases adaptation in stable environments, such as university services, and hence can be considered a good initiative (Ford, 2012). As it entails a profound paradigm shift, it is advisable to raise the awareness of and train everyone in the service facing this change. At the University of Oviedo, the Technical Unit for Quality provides training sessions to the different services upon request aimed at transmitting the concepts, methodology, tools and steps to address the drawing up and implementation of process manuals. They have a highly participatory component that

reproduces the work methodology that should then be addressed in each of the services in the drafting and implementation phases.

As the first line of action drew to a close in the different services, the design and implementation of the Quality Management System commenced following ISO standard 9001:2008 requisites with the help of the process approach of the Technical Unit for Quality. Work began on the core processes.

In 2011, this line of action was started up in 18 of the 25 services, drafting 23 processes and 25 documented procedures.

As of June 2012, 72 processes and 51 documented procedures have been drafted, 94 scheduled meetings and 20 visits to department have been held and 240 calls have been made.

Five technical specialists belonging to the University of Oviedo's Technical Unit for Quality have worked on the development of this line of action. As of June 2012, these technical specialists have logged a total of 5,694 work hours.

Figure 6. Documentary repository of the Quality Management Systems of University of Oviedo Services
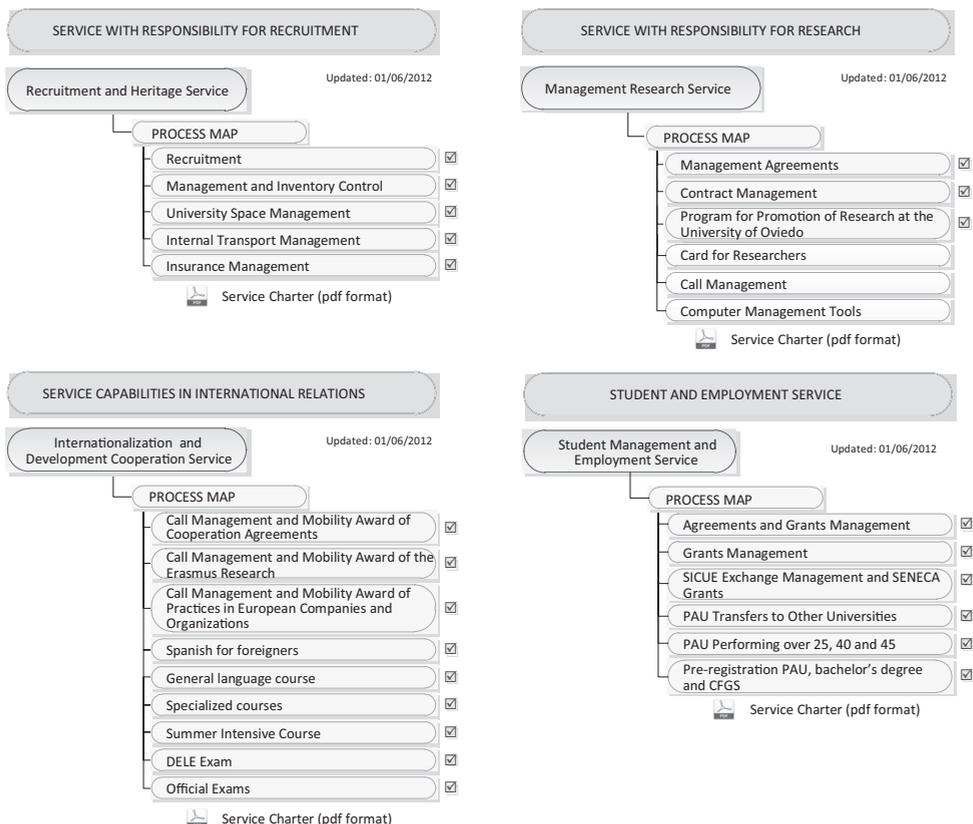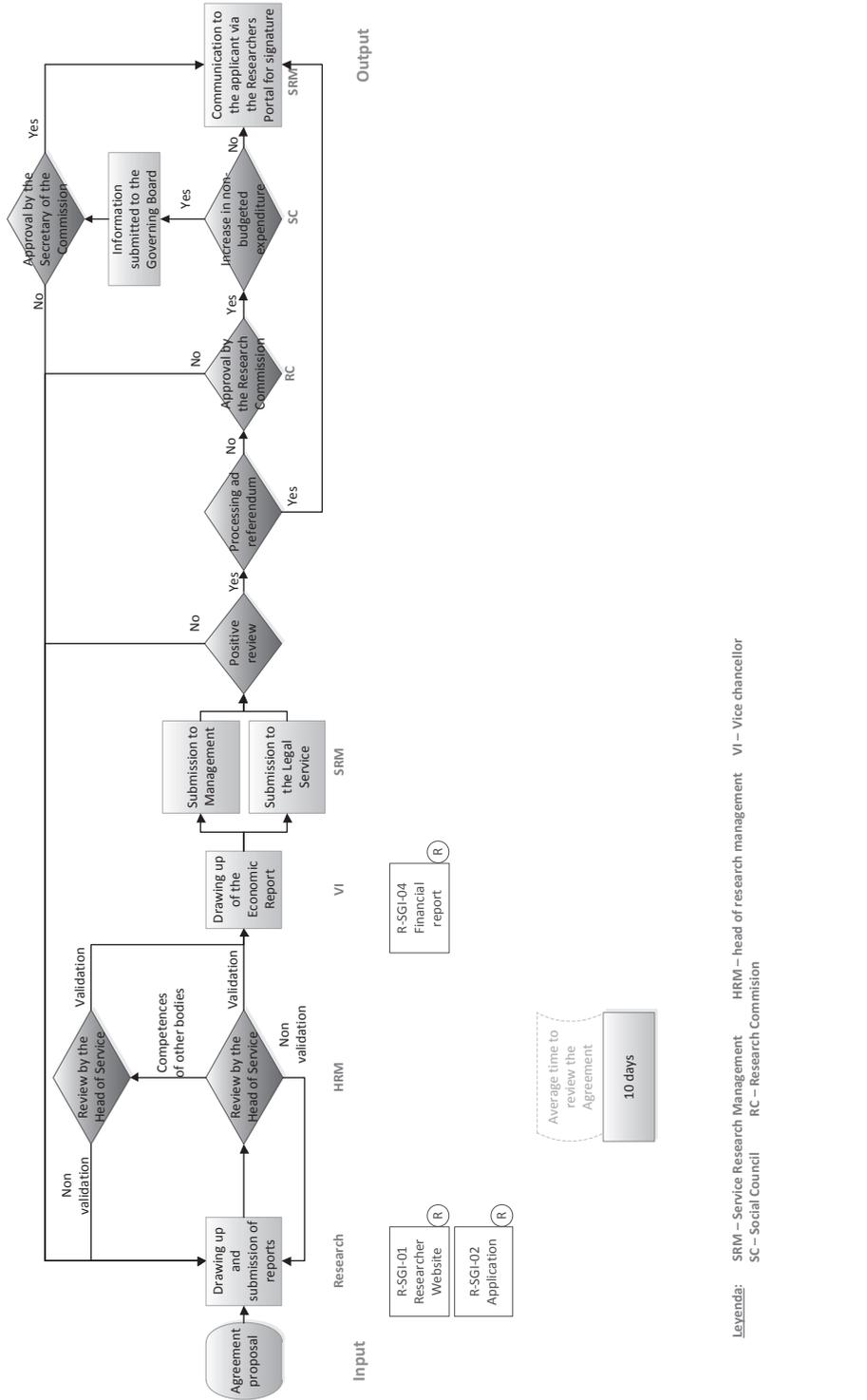
Figure 7. Extract of the process of Managing Agreements in the Research Service

All the documents that make up the Quality Management System are published on the university's intranet and are accessible in read-only mode to the entire staff of the university. This measure is intended to:

- Facilitate the implementation of the Quality Management System.
- Assist new staff in their integration in the workplace.
- Publicize the services provided, how they are carried out and by whom.
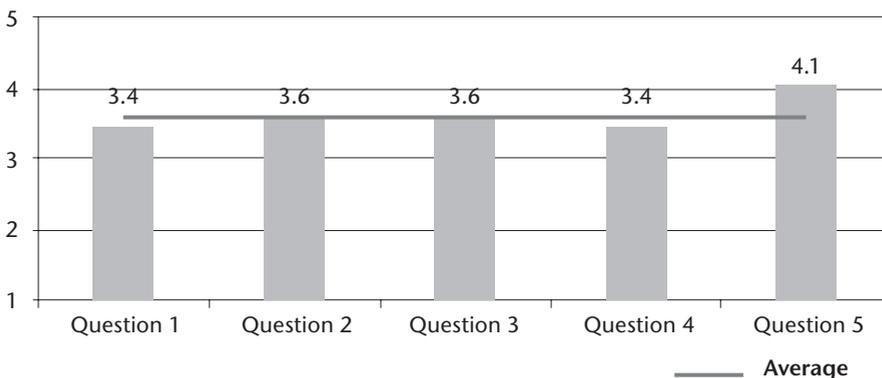- Make all institutional templates accessible in their latest version.

This repository was published on 16 May and receives an average of 67 visits per week. Approximately 30% of viewings are over 5 minutes.

As an example of improvement resulting from the implementation of Quality Management Systems in university services, a pilot project was launched to gather suggestions and/or comments about the teaching support services offered by the Teacher Training Faculty. During the implementation period, there were 52 incidents, of which 32% were responded to and resolved immediately, 28% received an immediate response and 16% received no response. 24% required no response or/or solution. The overall score of the people who took part in the survey regarding the services offered at the centre was 6.08 (scale 0–10).

4. Conclusions

The key success factor of the service quality plan is the active involvement of staff. In meetings with the different services, most of the staff has been motivated and become involved. The results of the satisfaction survey of service personnel are considered very satisfactory, as the lowest ranked item has a score of 3.4 on a scale of 1 to 5. The response rate was 50%.

Figure C

See: annex 1.

The quality plan should be multi-annual and highly structured. This entails re-thinking the purpose and design of management systems so as to build enduring services that create value not only for current stakeholders, but also for future generations of stakeholders to come (Latham, 2012). Planning should be tailored to each of the services so as to evolve linearly.

The conclusions drawn from the actions taken are:

- **Service charters** have been the starting point for continuous improvement in services- They have allowed all stakeholders to be informed of the existence of the service, of the services provided and of how to get in contact and communicate incidents and/or suggestions. The drawing up of the service charters has been very well received in services due to:
  - Identifying the services provided and their publicizing.
  - Informing users of contact details, thus reducing the amount of calls to wrong numbers.
  - Encouraging improvements in the service by defining quality commitments and their monitoring through indicators.
- The second line of action of designing and implementing a Quality Management System:
  - Facilitates document management, thus reducing search times, and generating documents and templates of records. Improves the incorporation of new staff, thus reducing the time needed for their integration and increasing the sense of security of new employees.
  - Monitors the development of the service by means of indicators of both service charters and processes.
  - Systematizes and standardizes the activities carried out in different services.
  - Integrates the different services.
  - A crucial factor in the implementation of the plan has been the incorporation of IT tools that:
  - Facilitate the uploading of data and the monitoring of indicators.
  - Document management.

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Appendix

Figure D

SURVEY OF HEADS OF SERVICE

This questionnaire is completely anonymous. Your opinion will be especially useful to improve the quality of services provided.

Score the following questions on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating you strongly disagree or are very dissatisfied and 5 that you strongly agree or are very satisfied.

1. Has the drawing up of **service charters** served to publicize the information on your service?

   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

2. Does the design of the **Quality Management System** provide an overview of how your service works and its utility?

   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

3. Do you find the **software application** for uploading **indicators** useful to analyse the data on your service?

   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

4. Does the documentary repository of available services on the Uniovi **website** provide you with a view of how the rest of the services provided by the University of Oviedo work?

   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

5. Rate the **work carried out** by the **Technical Unit for Quality** for your service.

   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

6. Comments and/or suggestions for improvement.

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF SERVICES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF OVIEDO

Abstract

With the purpose of fostering a continuous improvement policy in the 25 services provided by the University of Oviedo aimed at increasing the quality, effectiveness and efficiency, the Technical Quality Unit has drawn up a specific Quality Plan for Services.

The main goals are:

- To foster public information to users on the services provided and on the quality commitments assumed in their provision (Service Charters).
- To improve the quality and efficiency of the services provided to users (Internal Quality Assurance System).
- The obtaining of external accreditations.

The Project started with the drawing up of 31 Service Charters and their subsequent publication in the Official Gazette of the Principality of Asturias. This means that all the services have been accordingly defined and that their quality commitments have been communicated to society at large.

The monitoring of these quality commitments is carried out by means of 273 indicators. A software application has been designed to facilitate the uploading of data by users, the exploitation of results and the subsequent decision-making process.

A pilot-test has been jointly carried out with the Research Service in the design of its Internal Quality Assurance System. Support is currently being provided to different services in the day-to-day job of adopting the aforementioned continuous improvement policy.

Key words: University Services, Service Charter, Quality Management Systems, EFQM, Quality Plan

PODNOSZENIE JAKOŚCI USŁUG NA UNIWERSYTECIE OVIEDO

Streszczenie

W celu podnoszenia jakości, efektywności i sprawności 25 usług oferowanych przez Uniwersytet Oviedo Jednostka Jakości Technicznej przygotowała Plan Jakościowy dla Usług. Jego główne cele to:

- przygotowywanie informacji publicznej dla użytkowników dotyczącej oferowanych usług oraz zobowiązań jakościowych przyjętych w jego postanowieniach (Karta Usług);
- podnoszenie jakości i efektywności usług oferowanych użytkownikom (System Zapewniania Jakości Wewnętrznej);
- uzyskanie zewnętrznych akredytacji.

Projekt rozpoczął się przygotowaniem 31 Kart Usług i ich kolejną publikacją w Oficjalnej Gazecie Księstwa Asturii (*The Official Gazette of the Principality of Asturias*). Oznacza to właściwe zdefiniowanie usług oraz zakomunikowanie zobowiązań jakościowych społeczeństwu w dużej skali.

Monitoring zobowiązań jakościowych jest prowadzony z wykorzystaniem 273 wskaźników. Aplikacja komputerowa została zaprojektowana w celu umożliwienia przesyłania danych przez użytkowników, obróbki wyników oraz dalszego procesu podejmowania decyzji.

Test pilotażowy dotyczył usług badawczych w zakresie projektowania Systemu Wewnętrznego Zapewniania Jakości. Codzienne wsparcie jest zapewniane dla różnych usług wspomnianej polityki ciągłego podnoszenia jakości.

Słowa kluczowe: usługi uniwersyteckie, Karta Usług, systemy zarządzania jakością, EFQM, plan jakościowy