

ISO 9001 and its supporting document IWA 2 may need to be amended to “[focus] on social value” to emphasize concerns universities face.

## ISO 9001 and the Field of Higher Education: Proposal for an Update of the IWA 2 Guidelines

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### Abstract

This paper analyzes IWA 2 guidelines, compares them with the guidance of the ISO 9001 handbook for educational organizations, points out some gaps in these guidelines, and proposes an update to the IWA 2 guidelines to bridge these gaps. The proposed update aims to make ISO 9001 closer to a specific quality standard in the field of higher education. The proposed update is made first by suggesting an amendment to the IWA 2 structure (by adding a reminder about the ISO 9001 requirements, and the consolidation of all definitions into one section) as well as the definitions of product and customer given by these guidelines. Second, it proposes the addition of new requirements specific to the field of higher education, namely, “program withdrawal,” “ethics and corporate social responsibility,” and “financial resources.”

### Keywords

Higher Education Requirements, ISO 9001:2008, IWA 2, Quality Management

### Introduction

Throughout the world, higher education institutions (HEIs) are concerned about insuring and improving the quality of their services and satisfying their customer’s requirements. These concerns have led HEIs to implement a quality management/assurance system with compliance to the ISO 9001 standard. This standard is the popular choice for educational organizations (Thonhauser & Passmore, 2006) despite the fact that previous studies pointed out gaps specific to the field of higher education (HE) within ISO 9001:2000/2008 (Becket & Brookes, 2008; El Abbadi, Bouayad & Lamrini, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c). Furthermore, the ISO strategic plan 2011-2015 does not identify education as one of the sectors where ISO standards provide and achieve benefits (International Organization for Standardization [ISO], 2010-2011).

The ISO 9001 standard gives a set of generic requirements for implementing a quality management system (QMS) independently on the organization’s activities. However, the education sector has its specificity that makes it different from manufacturing and other services sector activities. Therefore, the ISO 9001 requirements need to be interpreted in the educational field (Karapetrovic, 2001; Karapetrovic, Rajamani & Willborn, 1998; Van den Berghe, 1997). The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) is aware of this problem; it has published the *IWA 2 (2007): Quality Management System-Guidelines for the Application of ISO 9001:2000 in Education* and the *ISO 9001:2008 Handbook for Educational Organizations-What to Do: Advice from IWA 2 Working Group*. The focus of this paper is on the IWA 2 guidelines which complement the ISO 9001 standard (Roszak, 2009). These guidelines provide the conduit through which education organizations of all types, including HEIs, are able to implement ISO 9001 (ISO, 2007). More precisely, we analyzed the IWA 2 guidelines benefits and limitations from the lens of the needs and expectations for quality assurance of HEIs and the HE sector in general in northern Africa. The analysis was based on projects sponsored by Nations Development Programme project (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2009) and the European Union Tempus project ALTAIR (European Union TEMPUS Project ALTAIR, 2008). We

also verified if the HE specificities are taken into account by these guidelines.

This paper begins by outlining the history of the application of the ISO 9001 standard in the field of education. It also presents and analyzes the IWA 2 guidelines as well as the ISO 9001 handbook for educational organizations. The paper ends with a proposed update of the IWA 2 guidelines to make them more suitable for HE institutions and systems.

## The ISO 9001 Standard and the Field of Higher Education

In 1987, ISO published the ISO 9001, ISO 9002, and ISO 9003 standards which defined the requirements for a QMS. These standards were subsequently revised in 1994, 2000, and 2008, with a decision in March 2012 to create a new revision of ISO 9001 (West, Hunt, Croft, & Jarvis, 2012).

In the early 1990s, educational institutions in Europe began to implement the ISO 9000 family of standards (Apoyo a la Calidad Educativa, 2006; Van den Berghe, 1997), followed by those in the United States and Asia (Van den Berghe, 1997). These institutions encountered enormous problems because this standard was designed mainly for manufacturing. Indeed, the requirements and vocabulary were not adapted to service providers or educational institutions. The problem of interpretation has been the subject of several studies during this period. The ISO 9001:1994 key terms, such as product and customer, and its requirements have been interpreted in the field of education by, for example, Karapetrovic et al. (1998) and Van den Berghe (1997).

In 2000, ISO revised and combined ISO standards 9001, 9002, and 9003 into one standard, ISO 9001. The resulting standard provided a set of generic requirements for a QMS applicable to any type of organization, regardless of activity, size, or if it is public or private. New requirements were added, the structure of the standard was changed, and the vocabulary adapted to make it applicable to all sectors, including education. The revised ISO 9001:2000 standard contained eight clauses. The first three were introductory in nature, while the last five contained generic requirements for any organization to implement a QMS, manage its processes, and meet customer requirements.

Despite the revisions in the 2000 version, difficulties remained in applying and interpreting this standard in the educational field (Karapetrovic, 2001). This was probably because the ISO 9001 requirements were more generic in the 2000 version when compared to the 1994 set of standards (Karapetrovic, 2001). To deal with these issues, Karapetrovic (2001) looked at the key terms of ISO 9001:2000, interpreted them for engineering education and research, and gave a seven-step approach to implementation.

In 2003, ISO published the first version of IWA 2: *Quality Management System—Guidelines for the Application of ISO 9001:2000 in Education*. It was revised again in 2007. The purpose of the initial international workshop agreement and its update was to provide guidelines for educational institutions (including HEIs) to use when implementing the ISO 9001:2000 requirements. These guidelines were written by a group that included education experts along with experts representing national organizations for standardization.

In 2008, a new version of ISO 9001 was created to clarify the requirements of ISO 9001:2000. One year later, the IWA 2 working group developed *ISO 9001:2008 Handbook for Educational Organizations—What to Do: Advice from IWA 2 Working Group*. This handbook provides guidance to educational organizations for implementing a QMS in compliance to ISO 9001:2008.

In March 2012, ISO agreed to revise ISO 9001:2008 (West et al., 2012). It will probably add new concepts to this standard (AFNOR, 2012). The fifth edition of ISO 9001 is expected to be released in 2015 (West et al., 2012).

## Analysis of IWA 2 Guidelines

The IWA 2 Guidelines made the ISO 9001:2000 standard easier for HEIs to understand and to implement (Caraman, Lazar, Bucuroiu, Lungu, & Stamate, 2008; Roszak, 2009). The guidelines were structured similarly to the way ISO 9001:2000 was written. Among the major differences, in our point of view, is that the terminology is more understandable to common educators, for example the terms curriculum, learner assessment tools, course, accreditation requirements, and learning outcomes. The guidelines provided definitions for four key terms found in the standard that were not as familiar or required additional detail to give educators points of reference. The defined terms included: customer, product, education provider, and educational organization. The two latter terms were defined in section 3: *Terms and Definition*. The customer and the product were defined in the first and second notes in the section 5.1: *Management Commitment*. While in IWA 1 guidelines for health service organizations and IWA 4 guidelines for local government, all terms were defined in the appropriate section, section 3: *Terms and Definition*.

Later revisions of both the standard (ISO 9001:2008) and the guidelines (IWA 2:2007) are not seamlessly linked because of the year difference between the two. Therefore, the ISO 9001:2008 clarifications were not integrated into IWA 2. Another gap occurs where IWA 2 neglects research activities (Rodman & Godnov, 2010) and its customers (which are industry, research sponsors, other universities, and research community (Karapetrovic, 2001)). The difficulty here rests on how IWA 2 defines the

product as an educational service and the customer as a learner. This definition of product does not take into account the role research plays in HE, especially the research-intensive institutions, and the subsidiary concerns of intellectual property that research (and to a lesser extent, teaching) need to address.

IWA 2:2007 section 7 (Realization of the Educational Service) indicates that education is a service. Section 5.2 (Customer Focus) states that the focus of the educational organization's top management is to identify and document the needs and expectations of learners and that specific performance indicators often imply learner requirements. This approach demonstrates a difference between manufacturing and education because, in the former, the organization's staff is the actor responsible for the realization and the quality of the product, while in the latter the learner is both customer and actor (Becket & Brookes, 2008). A learner is a "customer" in the sense that the individual acquires new knowledge, skills, and attitudes. On the other hand, the learner is also an "actor" who contributes in the delivery of HE services and whose behavior influences the quality of services offered by an institution. Parenthetically, the dual role the learner plays requires that he or she should know what his or her rights and responsibilities are, a point covered by the code of conduct for learners integrated by the IWA 2 guidelines as part of requirements established by organization.

El Abbadi et al. (2011a, 2011b, 2011c) and Rodman and Godnov (2010) have noted how aspects of both ISO 9001 and IWA 2 do not seem to be easily applicable or sufficiently appropriate for HE. These ISO documents only focus on current requirements and approaches toward implementation rather than expanding requirements to meet unique university activities. Actually, emerging trends in HE quality assurance place much emphasis on ethics (as seen in accreditation practices in numerous disciplines) and principles of corporate social responsibility (similar in thinking to ISO 26000). This implies that IWA 2 may need to be amended in spite of statements in the second QMS principle, "focusing on social value," which does not emphasize these concerns universities face. In fact, we underline the importance of the interactions between HEIs and societies wherein the educational leaders are responsible for the integration of their institutions into their societies (Padró, 2012) as well as for the effect of their decisions and activities on society (Padró, 2012).

Other areas of concern that are not currently dealt with effectively in the ISO 9001:2008 standard or the IWA 2 guidelines are a balanced approach to program planning and review focusing on course/program development and course/program withdrawal/termination (and teach-out). According to Eckel (2003), the decision to withdraw/terminate programs is hard for

the affected students, so the HEIs are strongly advised to pay special attention to program withdrawal/termination decisions and put appropriate procedures in place (Eckel, 2003; Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2006, 2011; University of Wisconsin System, 2010).

On the other hand, HEIs, whether public or private, face diminishing financial resources. Thereby, HEIs must ensure good management of financial resources in parallel with investing in quality. These investments allow HEIs to eliminate nonconformities and resulting costs (ISO, 2009b). The financial resources lacking in ISO 9001 and IWA 2 (El Abbadi et al., 2011a, 2011c; Rodman & Godnov, 2010) are considered in ISO 9004 standard (Rodman & Godnov, 2010) and according to AFNOR (2012), these resources are among new concepts recommended for integration into the next ISO 9001 edition. Likewise, the quality standards implemented in several Moroccan HEIs in the frame of Tempus project "ALTAIR," and which were adapted from quality standards developed by Germany's (Accreditation Agency for Degree Programs in Engineering, Informatics, the Natural Sciences and Mathematics) and the EFQM model (European Union TEMPUS Project ALTAIR, 2008), included special requirements related to financial resources. Actually, in the context of south Mediterranean countries, the experts assembled in the project all agreed that these requirements are worth considering for emerging countries whose universities are developing to reach the size and the influence of prestigious western institutions.

## What About the ISO Handbook for Educational Organizations?

The ISO 9001:2008 handbook for educational organizations is a more detailed document than the IWA 2 guidelines. It has included almost all of the IWA 2 guidelines and completed them with supplementary explanations and recommendations. It explained the utility of a QMS within an educational organization and the steps for its implementation according to ISO 9001:2008; presented this standard; defined the key terms such as product, educational organization, supplier, and stakeholders; provided a reminder of the requirements of this standard before interpreting them in the educational context; and gave practical advice to satisfy them (ISO, 2009a).

This handbook defined almost all terms in the education field in the section *Explanation of Terms Used*, except the term "customer," which was defined as the student in the section 3: *Terms and Definition* and as a learner by Note 1 in the section 5.1: *Management Commitment*. In addition, this handbook widened the definition of "product" to the outputs of all activities undertaken by educational organizations such as educational services

and research. Despite this definition of product, this guide has focused especially on educational services (Note 2/ section 5.1: *Management Commitment*), and other neglected activities that can be performed within a HEI and excluded other customers such as the industry and the research community.

On the other hand, financial resources lacking in IWA 2 are mentioned without further details in the handbook, along with the resources that the organization needs to ensure are available. The statements regarding ethics and social responsibility in IWA 2 are the same in the ISO handbook. Finally, the program withdrawal, which is not dealt with in IWA 2, was not also mentioned in this handbook.

### Proposal to Update IWA 2 Guidelines

Some gaps in the IWA 2 guidelines can be addressed by modifying the existing guidelines, others by appending new requirements specific to the field of HE.

### Proposal to Modify Some IWA 2 Guidelines

To make IWA 2 guidelines understandable and implementing the ISO 9001 requirements easier for users, we first recommend changing the structure of the IWA 2 guidelines and making it similar to the structure of the ISO handbook, e.g. IWA 1 and IWA 4 guidelines, which provide the ISO 9001 requirements first before interpreting them at the appropriate field. By offering a reminder of the ISO 9001:2008 requirements will also help align the IWA 2 guidelines with the ISO 9001:2008 requirements. In fact, the ISO 9001:2008 standard aims at updating the ISO 9001:2000 requirements without changing them or adding new requirements, so the IWA 2:2007 could remain valid for the ISO 9001:2008 if a reminder of the requirements of this standard were in place. Second, we propose to amend the definition of customer and product given by Note 1 and 2 in the section 5.1: *Management Commitment*, which does not take into account all HE core activities and customers. We suggest the adoption of the definition of product given by the ISO handbook (2009) and the definition of customer given by Karapetrovic (2001), which are broader instead of those given by IWA 2. Finally, we propose the consolidation of all definitions in *Section 3: Terms and Definitions*.

### Proposal to Add New Requirements to IWA 2

As cited above, some requirements specific to the field of HE are not found in the ISO 9001:2008 standard or the IWA 2:2007 guidelines. We can mainly name financial resources (El Abbadi et al., 2011a, 2011c; Rodman & Godnov, 2010), ethics and corporate social responsibility as well as program withdrawal. These concepts can be integrated into the IWA 2 guidelines by

referring to other ISO publications and/or adding new requirements related to them, such as it was done by IWA 1 guidelines for health service organizations which provided amendments specific to the field of health services such as new requirements related to “financial measures” and “urgently needed purchased product” (ISO, 2005).

Based on our analysis of IWA 2:2007 and our experience in implementing quality standards in HEIs, it seems judicious to propose the addition of the following new requirements to IWA 2 guidelines. Each proposed requirement will be preceded by a number indicating its placement within the IWA 2 sections.

- The first proposed requirement: 6.5: *Financial Resources*

“The educational organization should identify the financial resources needed for a good functioning of its QMS, the use of quality tools and for the delivery of services, seek funding sources and ensure the availability and good management of its financial resources.

The quality investments are gainful for the educational organization. They can diminish financial resources used. In fact, investing in quality tools and in QMS implementation with compliance, for example, to ISO 9001, allow educational organizations to eliminate non-conformities and resulting cost.

For more information on financial resources, the educational organization can refer to ISO 9004 (2009): *Managing for the sustained success of an organization—A quality management approach.*”

- The second proposed requirement: 7.3.8 *programs withdrawal*

“When the educational organization decides to withdraw a program, it must inform learners registered or admitted to this program.

The educational organization must also help these learners to choose another program regarding suitability with their course of study.”

- The third proposed requirement: 6.2.3 *corporate social responsibility and ethics*

“The educational organization should establish a code of ethics and introduce the corporate social responsibility principals in the institution’s environment. The institution’s staff, learners and partners must respect these principles and adhere to their code of ethics.

For more information on this requirement, the educational organization can refer to ISO 26000 (2010): *Guidance on Social Responsibility*.”

## Conclusion

Throughout the world some HEIs choose to implement generic quality standards which have an undeniable success, especially in the industrial field. These standards are more known than the specific quality standards which can differ from a country (or a group of countries) to another. Moreover, they may induce renewed confidence of customers in the effectiveness of the HEIs' processes and management. Among these generic quality standards, ISO 9001 is increasingly used by HEIs as a viable option in implementing quality assurance practices. HEIs interested in adopting ISO 9001 receive guidance on how to become ISO 9001 compliant through the IWA 2 guidelines and the ISO 9001 handbook for educational organizations.

Focusing on the needs of HEIs, this paper analyzed the IWA 2 guidelines, compared them with the handbook guidance, outlined some gaps in IWA 2, and proposed an update pending the release of the new version of ISO 9001. This update suggests a reminder of the ISO 9001 requirements, a broadening of the definition of product and customer, bringing together all definitions into one section, and finally the addition of some requirements specific to the field of HE; namely “program withdrawal,” “financial resources,” and “corporate social responsibility and ethics.” This proposed update will upgrade IWA 2 guidelines to the latest version of ISO 9001 and will make the ISO 9001 standard more suitable for HEIs and aligned with their needs and expectations. As well, it will make understanding the ISO 9001 requirements easier for HEIs, which can promote their implementation within these institutions.

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