

EQUIPE

GENOA UNIVERSITY CASE STUDY

1 - National context

Dating from the academic year 2001/02 the reform of the Italian university system consistently with the Bologna process ruling became a reality and the new shape of first level degree courses <laurea> over three years started running on a regular base. By now the major changes necessary to the scope have already been realized, remaining to be fully implemented only the second level degrees <laurea specialistica> and the complementing master courses <1° and 2° level> .

The CampusOne project is a national experimental initiative sponsored by the CRUI (Conference of Italian University Rectors') whose scope is the improvement of the entire university system along quality assurance lines, by means, inter alia, of the definition and application of a shared model of evaluation of the educational services provided. No specific attention is paid in it to continuing education as a possible sector with particular features.

2 - Local context

Genoa University has completely updated the didactic offer of the existing eleven faculties covering all study areas and, moreover, created some new courses under the cover of the CampusOne project.

Every action planned by that project was considered for implementation, and particularly the quality issues were taken into account, as, according to a previous review <conducted by an external team coming on behalf of CRE in 2001> there was floor for some improvement in the overall academic policy and activities. It must be mentioned, indeed, that in any of this activities there is a UCE service or department actually operating: from 2002, anyway, a Centre for Permanent Education <PERFORM> has been created for the development of specific offers tailored on the local market demand or proposed, in an innovative effort, by some didactic units of singles faculties, most directly involved in pedagogical or technical advance.

3 - Objective

The basic objective is , consistently with the main national scope to realize the changes introduced by the reform process in the entire system, using the proposed quality tools in an experimental way.

Similar pace is very practical and effective when applied to sector already existing and in which the consolidated procedures may be used as a reference to evaluate the results, much more uneasy is to try to introduce some new activity not considered, before then, as a normal part of the "basic mission" of the institution.

This occurrence, however, has obliged the institutional mechanism to review from the very beginning each part of the architecture to verify the improvements, if any, or the constraints incurred in during the first phase of the implementation process: before continuing it's to be stressed that we are still in progress in this initial stage, that will be completed not before the end of this current academic year.

The greater attention paid to the evolutive phenomenon has, anyway, put in evidence some very interesting result that may be the seeds for further development.

Actually, in observing the data relating to the students' performance and the duration of their university studies, it was noticed that a significant part of the *abandons* concerned adult learners, mainly having left previous studies and willing to resume their educational career and get the degree.

To cope the needs of this kind of clients no special service of advise and guidance, or *orientation in entrance* as is called, was existing and the only extra support offered them was the opportunity to have an interview with a particularly expert member of the academic teaching staff to try to find out the best fitting plan for each single case.

No other organizational mechanism <as evening lectures or opening hours for administrative services> was already suitable for the use of adult learners, apart the ones provided for some specialization courses expressly built for some target group in single study fields.

Normally these special offer was supported, from the administrative point of view, by a specific service called “Alta formazione” - High level education – and was not considered conceptually *permanent or continuing education*, even if it was certainly in the post-graduate area and frequently based on practical issues and training linked to the work environment.

4 – Model and organization

The CampusOne model for quality evaluation has been adopted and implemented trough every branch and sector of university activities, involving in the process a high number of teachers and officers at both the central and local level, leading to a complete set of assessment reports for each faculty and each degree course offered by them, as well for each single administrative service.

But this only for the existing ones: thus, any special quality tool for the assessment of the post-graduate offer in term of masters or specialized courses, and related support services, has been implemented.

While an impressive mechanism of training and dissemination of the quality culture is spreading in the administrative and didactic structures of the university, nothing is concerning this UCE sector, even if the units responsible for the specific offer are certainly concerned for their basic first level courses.

5 – Conclusion

The double prospect to start the implementation of a dramatically reformed model of university studies based on a “*life long learning*” principle and, at the same time, the use of proper tools for measuring its effectiveness it's a great challenge to be faced, demanding a step by step approach but also offering new unpredictable chances for changes.

The need to think about creating synergies with the local environment, giving voice to the reasons of the various stakeholders, in order to answer the actual demand of the territory in term of professional profiles and knowledges, will give more strength to the quality issue.

Considering the great importance of this sector in the future, as it may show to be a possible way of feeding the classes with more concerned public and give as well stimulus to didactic developments, even adopting the above mentioned cautious pace, it seems that the Genoa University system has overcome a point of no return on the way of acknowledging its primary responsibility.

The acceptance to be one of the Italian universities committed to the continuing education advance and to cooperate in a prospective national network pursuing this aim add an even more positive dimension to the Genoa attitude toward that awareness and will give floor to the adoption of specific quality standards and monitoring tools.

Short term upcoming will clear up the course through which these expectations will be realized.