

# A Journey towards Excellence: A University Case Study

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*This article describes how the Excellence Model® developed by the EFQM can be used and applied within higher education, with practical examples accompanying the Model in a Russian University to raise management quality.*

## Higher Education and Excellence

Regardless of size, culture, tradition or background, to be successful in the future, higher education needs to deliver excellence in all areas, with less resource, to an ever more demanding global customer base. This means there is a real need to develop more effective and efficient management practices.

Nowadays many Russian Universities direct their attention to the newly-formed education services market and have realized the need for a complex approach to quality management. An appreciation of the need to understand quality concepts which covers education and research activities, leadership

and University management, and also capability to satisfy the customers' requirements is growing.

It is believed that one of the most effective instruments for University Quality Management System development are the national and regional Quality Awards models. The EFQM Excellence Model® developed by the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) is an effective and practical tool to support the analysis and prioritization of improvement opportunities within higher education organizations. It is described by the EFQM as: 'a practical tool to help organisations establish an appropriate management system by measuring where they are on the path to Excellence, helping them to understand the gaps, and then stimulating solutions'.

## Understanding the EFQM Excellence Model

The EFQM Excellence Model®, shown in Figure 1, is a non-prescriptive framework based on nine criteria, with five 'Enablers' and four 'Results'. The enabling criteria cover what the organisation does, and the results criteria cover what the organisation achieves. 'Enablers' cause 'Results'.

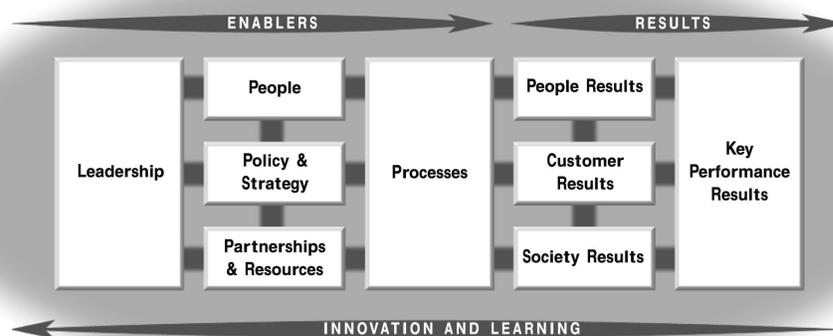


Figure 1 The EFQM Excellence Model®

In the Higher Education Version of the EFQM Excellence Model®, which was created by Carol Steed, Assistant Director at the Centre for Integral Excellence (Sheffield Hallam University) in 2003, gives an interpretation of each fundamental concept for Higher Education. Thus 'Customer Focus' has the following definition: 'Anticipating, balancing and meeting the current and future needs of students, staff and others, through developing and setting a balanced range of appropriate indicators or targets, tracking performance, benchmarking, and taking appropriate action based on this holistic range of information'.

Then when introduced to the EFQM Excellence Model® there are no surprises. The fundamental concepts map onto the Model and provide the philosophical underpinning by a set of eight fundamental concepts:

- Customer Focus
- Results Orientation
- Leadership and Constancy of Purpose
- People Development and Involvement
- Management by Processes and Facts
- Partnership Development
- Corporate Social Responsibility
- Continuous Learning, Innovation and Improvement.

### **The Start of University Journey**

Yaroslavl State University (YSU) has become one of the pioneers in Russia, deploying the EFQM Excellence Model® in Russian Higher Education, initiated the international Project "Raising Management Quality in a Russian University" (MANRU). The Project is run in partnership with Sheffield Hallam University (UK) and the EFQM (Brussels) within the framework of the European Programme Tempus.

The main project goal is the fundamental re-orientation of University management, focussing toward "customers": students, their parents, employers.

YSU is focusing effort in two main areas:

1) Improvements in the student acquisition process and job placement of university graduates.

A specific objective here is the development and implantation of new customer-facing management processes (student admissions, and orientation to employment market through curriculum management).

2) The development of a clear quality assurance system for the management of the University at a strategic and operational level using the EFQM Excellence Model®.

A specific objective is a demonstrable "continuous improvement" in self-management in the Rectorate, in 2 out of 9 faculties and 6 out of 27 departments through the introduction of the EFQM Excellence Model®.

The first stage for joint collaboration between Yaroslavl State University and Sheffield Hallam University was in June 2003. During this first visit to YSU a self-assessment using the Excellence Model® was undertaken by the Rectorate. This showed a real need to make fundamental changes to the management system, and so a joint bid to JEP-TEMPUS fund was created and submitted by December 2003. The success of the bid for 3 year project was announced in June 2004 and MANRU Project started 1 January 2005.

The key motivators to start the change management system in YSU were defined as:

- excessive centralisation of decision-making, slow to take decisions, document flows unclear;
- low staff motivation, no regular information about policy and plans by top management;
- no overall development strategy for YSU and no system to develop and guide this;
- processes, especially between faculties and departments, are poorly understood, not properly defined and not managed;
- there is no system for establishing quality criteria and for monitoring these.

So far, the learning activities within the MANRU project have included two types of analysis: process thinking and management, and introducing, exploring and assessing excellence.

It was essential to introduce process thinking and process mapping methods for the teams working with the student acquisition process and curricular management process. To enhance performance through process management it is essential that we know and understand our processes more fully. Latest research projects from Sheffield Hallam University have highlighted the hierarchical nature of institutions and the opportunities to break down the relationship barriers between departments and faculties. A series of workshops acquainted YSU staff with the methodology and templates used by Sheffield Hallam process analysts. Two teams of 5-6 persons representing

different departments and faculties involved in the two processes were trained and mapped the main customer-focussed processes.

The second area covered was Excellence, with an initial workshop covering “Excellence and EFQM self-assessment methodology”. Firstly, the group of leaders – the EFQM ‘Ambassadors for Excellence’ were trained to help the cross-diagonal teams at faculties and departments to understand the Model methodology. Next, all participating staff learned about self-assessment principles and the concepts of excellence. The main self-assessment workshops were held with these trained teams over two days. Every Model criterion was discussed by the teams and analysed using the RADAR scoring principles of the Model (Results, Approach, Deployment, Assessment & Review). Presentations by every team after each criterion had been reviewed showed the sincere interest and understanding, and highlighted the necessity for improvements activities. The way of working within the workshops, which required a high level of group working, started to break down barriers between departments in terms of communication and co-operation. After each self-assessment, Workplans were prepared which reflected the real actions and key problems to work at. Every participating unit developed its own plan which has been aligned with the overall Rectorate plan. The teams discovered that there are no completed plans showing what should be written, only the criterions’ guidelines from the model giving suggestions of good practice, because every University has its own way towards Excellence and that is why it must develop its own plan.

Examples from YSU Key Actions Plan 2005-2006 years (Customer Results Criterion):

- Modify the University Internet site; add new sections, including section for alumnus.
- Develop University newspaper (share outside the University, increase the circulation, get the necessary licence).
- Develop computer system for surveying students and employers.
- Establish Educational Association of IT regional companies in order to study market demands and customers’ satisfaction.
- Collect and systematize appraisals and estimations of University educational services.
- Appoint curators responsible for new specializations development and for co-working with customers.
- Revise approach to students’ practice and its results based on placing in a job after graduation.

- Special Programme experiment – support of students’ practice at Psychology Faculty.

### The Main Project Outcomes

There have been a range of expected and unexpected outcomes from the project to date. The regular quality monitoring of new activities and feedback from participants to all the workshops has led to an impressive change in the overall perception of the University by many of the staff. The following project outcomes are a direct result of implementing the new quality management methodology.

- Provided a critical judgement of the University work – first attempt of inside and outside view through the eyes of clients and staff.
- Team work methodology – a new and exciting experience for University staff.
- Found critical areas for improvement.
- Developed wider understanding, that a student, an entrant – are «Clients», «Customers».
- Realisation of the need to get and analyse feedback from all stakeholders.
- Need to make more active career-guidance services.
- More active University marketing and branding needed – the demand of the educational market.
- Rectorate involvement – Project and Quality Management System establishment success has been guaranteed with championing from the top.
- Acknowledgement that “Clients” feedback mechanisms need to be developed, to provide a clearer understanding of market demand.
- More close co-operation with graduates as potential investors and employers has to be a part of the University strategy.
- Development of processes, structures and maps has helped developed a deeper understanding of needs and links.
- Raising professional skills is essential not only for academic staff, but for administrative staff as well.
- Need competent resources management for both human and financial resources.

One of the Project tasks was to create a University structure for longer term support of improvements activities. In the beginning of 2006 the Quality Management Department (QMD) was established in the University. Its staff have been trained in process management, in the EFQM Excellence Model® methodology, and even participated as a department in the self-assessment

process. QMD managers prepare different surveys, consult departments' and faculties' teams, analyse the achieved success and bottlenecks in YSU work. The success of the first project year became the basis for raising the quantity of participants: in 2006, 3 faculties and 6 departments additionally decided to join the self-assessment process. Introduction to Excellence and EFQM Excellence Model workshops for new staff were held in March 2006. In April 2006, 5 faculties and 12 departments have implemented self assessments with the help of Quality Management Department and colleagues from Sheffield Hallam and EFQM. All participants

developed Workplans for the development of actions in the short, medium and longer term.

Feedback from participants of all the workshops shows that this kind of improvement activity 'made me think', was 'useful', 'enlightening', 'hands-on' and 'interesting' for most staff. Therefore, outcomes are very positive. The workshop process itself has introduced a new way of working and sharing ideas. Team work has united staff and identified concrete steps for improvement and promoted cross-University open discussion.

An initial values assessment allowed YSU to identify the main personal values and values that are important in the University (Table 1).

Personal values	University values
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Health</li> <li>▪ Family</li> <li>▪ Responsibility</li> <li>▪ Balance (home/work)</li> <li>▪ Competence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Competence</li> <li>▪ Customer satisfaction</li> <li>▪ Vision</li> <li>▪ Cooperation</li> <li>▪ Community service</li> </ul>

Table 1. Values assessment by YSU staff

The majority of surveyed personnel have named these values, which have been accepted as the initial level of our values research and will be validated by a full University values assessment in the Autumn of 2006.

Moscow, St.-Petersburg, Ivanovo, Kostroma, Perm, Ribinsk and other regions of Russia.

It is expected that all members of the Network will respect and act in a way that reflects the values of EFQM, embracing:

One of the key activities within MANRU project is establishing the Learning Network of Excellence (LNE) with three key purposes:

- To bring together representatives from within and outside the partner organisations to act as a knowledge exchange on issues that are relevant to the successful completion of the MANRU project and the wider learning objectives of the group.
- To enable members to share and exchange the work of the project and other learning gained with wider audiences, supporting the dissemination of the project.
- To support the sustainable development of the learning and practices adopted throughout the project in the longer term, both within the University and across the wider community.

- Trust, openness and honesty
- Working in partnership for the common good
- Respect for each other and each other's opinions
- The ethos of continuous learning and open knowledge exchange
- Recognition and celebration of individual and collective achievements

The Learning Network meets several times a year. It is open to new members for sharing ideas, initiatives and experience in improving the quality of university management. Next LNE Meeting is planned on 7 December 2006 and will be held in Internet video-conference regime.

### What's Next

The next steps in our Journey to Excellence are further self-assessments and follow-up process mapping work, curriculum management process review and mapping, and further work with the Rectorate to explore strategic concepts, including cultural development and values.

Members are drawn from each of the partner institutions involved with the MANRU project and invited guests from key stakeholder groups across Russia. Currently, the Learning Network of Excellence involves representatives Yaroslavl,

Plans for 2006-2007 are the following:

- Surveys each year to review and improve the process improvements made on an on-going basis.
- Improvements and review of student acquisition and curriculum management processes.
- Every year self-assessments to monitor improvements and identify further areas for development.
- Total University coverage with self-assessment, sharing the Excellence principles and developing internal communication.
- Partnership within the Learning Network of Excellence.

And we finish our article with the words of Ursula K. Le Guin: 'It is good to have an end to journey

toward; but it is the journey that matters, in the end'.

The introductory text has been reproduced from the EFQM Excellence Model® Higher Education Version 2003, written by Carol Steed, Centre for Integral Excellence, Sheffield Hallam University.

Additional process management and the SHU journey text has been reproduced from the recently published 'Embedding Excellence in Higher Education' report written by Mike Pupius and Carol Steed from the Centre for Integral Excellence, Sheffield Hallam University

Both publications are available from the Centre for Integral Excellence:

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