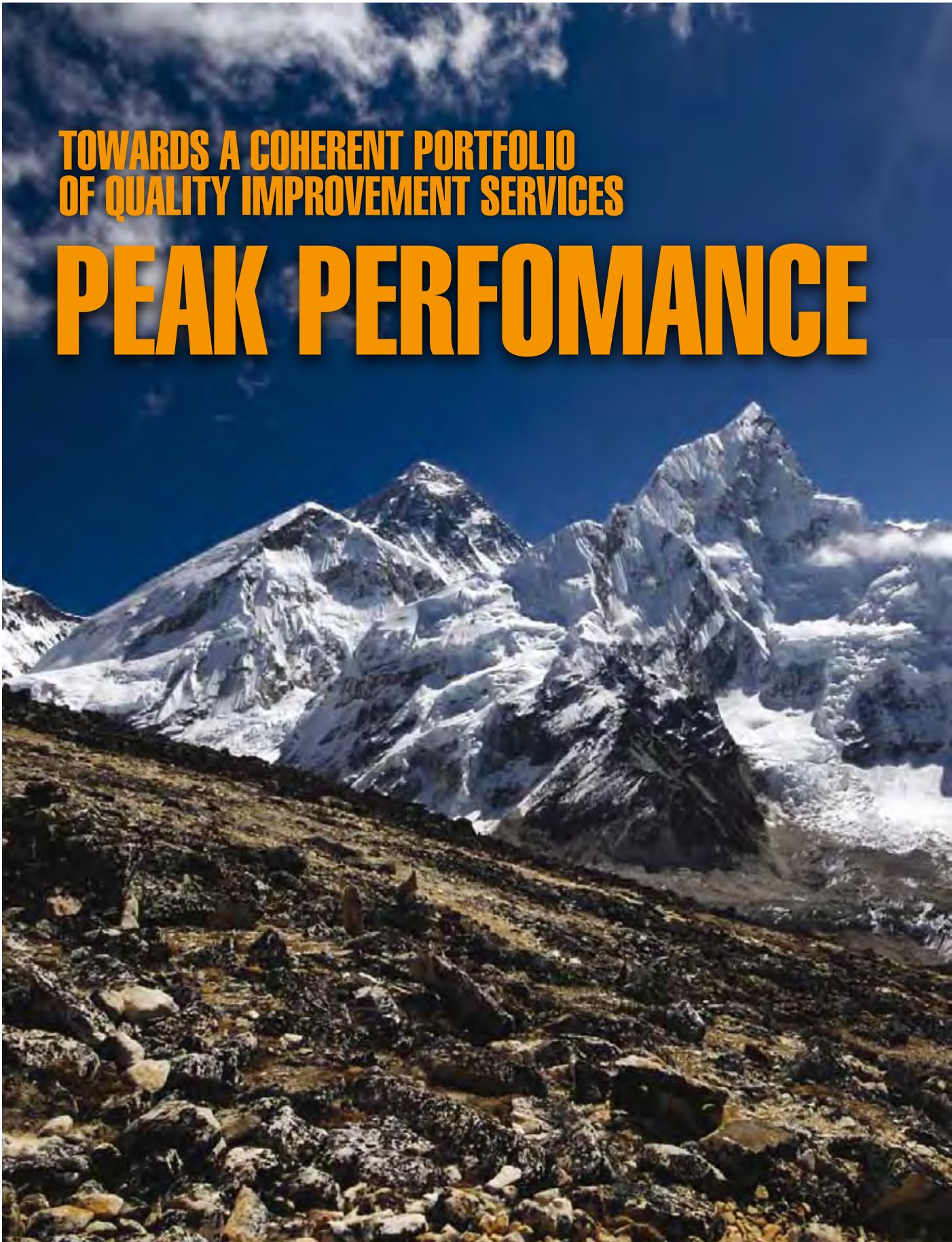


**TOWARDS A COHERENT PORTFOLIO
OF QUALITY IMPROVEMENT SERVICES**

PEAK PERFORMANCE



Chris Greensted explains how the three EFMD quality improvement systems (EQUIS, EPAS and EDAP) are now designed as a portfolio

The overall mission of EFMD is to act as a catalyst to promote and enhance excellence in management development in Europe and worldwide. Given that there are reputedly more than 13,000 business schools in the world, this is not an easy task. It has therefore fulfilled this mission over the last 40 years by offering a range of services which have been developed primarily to meet the needs of its members. These services include offering a wide variety of conferences and seminars, research and information provision to identify and promote the dissemination of good practice, and the promotion of quality improvement in business schools through accreditation and other development services. These activities often utilise the expertise and experience of the members. As part of its responsibility to the whole management education sector, EFMD also sees its mission more widely in terms of going beyond the confines of its 800 members and, in principle, of opening its quality development expertise to any institution that wishes to partake.

Quality Services Systems

The Quality Services Department has provided accreditation services over the past 15 years. These services have the aim of improving management education in Higher Education institutions by establishing internationally agreed standards and assessing institutions against them. Institutions deemed to meet the standards are accredited and thus gain international recognition. EFMD accreditation is recognised worldwide by potential students, employers, other clients, and the media (often being a pre-requisite for entry to rankings). It is the process of striving to meet these standards that leads to quality improvement although such improvements may take time to develop.

The accreditation process is well established and consists of self-reflection and peer review followed by recommendations for improvement and, where appropriate, for accreditation. Peer review is based on the expertise and wisdom of senior staff of the member institutions. These people give their time to the process and share their knowledge with the institutions under review. This leads to mutual learning and sometimes to the development of partnerships. In turn this strengthens the EFMD network and the management education sector.



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Beginning in 1997, the EFMD Quality Improvement System (EQUIS) was designed to assess the quality of a business school holistically and to grant accreditation to those that met its exacting standards. These standards cover the school's governance and strategy, its resources, its faculty and their intellectual activity, its degree programmes and students, executive education and the school's international focus on the business world. However the EQUIS approach to quality assessment is rooted in respect for diversity of institutional and cultural contexts and EQUIS therefore does not believe in "one best model" for a business school. Since its standards cover all of a school's activities, it is not surprising that, after 15 years, there are still only 140 EQUIS accredited schools. This relative uniqueness places EQUIS as the leading international system for Quality Assessment, Quality Improvement and Accreditation of business and management institutions/schools. The intention is that EQUIS will continue to focus on and recognise excellence and therefore the number of accredited schools is likely to remain relatively small – maybe 200 altogether in another 5-10 years – who knows!

In recognition of the fact there are many excellent programmes offered in schools that may not yet be able to achieve EQUIS accreditation, in 2005 EFMD launched the EFMD Programme Accreditation System (EPAS). This is designed to assess in depth the design, delivery and graduate output of any business and/or management degree programme, or set of programmes. Such programmes would normally be offered by a business school but EPAS also recognises that many other types of organisations offer business related programmes such as degrees in health or engineering management. The EPAS process focuses on the rationale for the programme design to ensure that it will meet the objectives implicit in its target markets, through to assessing the quality of faculty and of their teaching, the learning achieved by students and ultimately to evaluating the quality of the graduate output. The key issues are the realised academic depth and rigour of learning, its applicability to international business and management, and the robustness of the quality assurance processes. To date there are 80 EPAS accredited programmes from 60 different institutions. Given that there are likely to be many more good programmes worldwide, we might expect these numbers to double or triple in the next 5-10 years.

Because of the fact that EQUIS and EPAS between them can only touch maybe 500 schools which is a very small, and top end, proportion of the business schools community, EFMD launched EFMD Deans across Frontiers (EDAF) in 2011. This is a service designed to assist the management of business schools at any stage of their evolution to develop their institution further. Many business schools in both developed and developing countries often struggle to fully achieve their potential because of their challenging environment. In such circumstances it is sometimes difficult to appreciate the factors necessary to raise their quality profile. External guidance or advice of a strategic nature may be beneficial not only to the business school but also to the parent institution or university. By peer review, EDAF evaluates where the institution is currently positioned with respect to its key strategic objectives and it makes recommendations for improvements. EDAF then provides a 3-year mentoring process to assist the institution's management to achieve its goals, which may include eventual accreditation. The mentor is mutually selected from within EFMD's large pool of experienced deans or associate deans. The evaluation and mentoring stages follow a structured process which is monitored by the EFMD EDAF team. At present there are five institutions as pilots in the EDAF process and the system is open to both EFMD members and non-members. Since EDAF is available to virtually any serious business school, the numbers in the system are limited only by the availability of EFMD members willing to act as advisors and mentors.



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“EFMD and Quality Services offer a coherent portfolio of improvement and development services which are open to the full quality spectrum of business schools or institutions”

The QS Portfolio

The three systems (EQUIS, EPAS and EDAF) are now designed as a portfolio. Each of them is a free-standing quality improvement process dealing with different aspects of an institution. However they are also linked as a potential pathway between systems. For example an institution entering EDAF may either use it as part of its development trajectory or to aim in due course for EPAS accreditation for one or more of its programmes, or perhaps to achieve EQUIS. On request EDAF can provide a gap analysis on the key areas requiring improvement in order to achieve an accreditation. Alternatively an institution entering EPAS may just be seeking programme accreditation or it may use it to develop its range of programmes before aiming for EQUIS and it too can receive advice on its readiness for EQUIS as part of the EPAS process (EQUIS gap analysis).



In principle the directional arrows on the diagram below can also be reversed. For example an EPAS school could use the EDAF process to assist it to evaluate its gap to EQUIS accreditation and to receive guidance through mentoring to achieve its goal. Alternatively and in the light of the acknowledged value of EPAS reviews, an EQUIS school might wish to have one of its programmes, such as its doctoral programme, reviewed in depth by EPAS. However, this would require a change in the policy agreed by the EFMD membership some time ago that EQUIS schools should not be permitted to undergo EPAS. Finally EQUIS and EPAS member schools (as part of their own social responsibility) are particularly welcome to sponsor EDAF schools in terms of supplying advisors and mentors and/or funding some of the EDAF costs.

With this structure, EFMD and Quality Services offer a coherent portfolio of improvement and development services which are open to the full quality spectrum of business schools or institutions. They now all have an opportunity to benefit from the expertise and wisdom of EFMD's members through taking part in these activities. EFMD welcomes expressions of interest. [gf](mailto:gf@efmd.org)

For further information go to www.efmd.org

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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