

Quality Assurance and the Autonomy of Universities

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Universities in the Europe of Knowledge (I)

- real autonomy and accountability at institutional level
- “In return for being freed from dysfunctional over-regulation and micro-management, universities must accept their full institutional accountability to society at large for their results and cost-efficiency.”

(EU-Commission, Delivering on the modernisation agenda for universities, Draft 30.03.2006)

Universities in the Europe of Knowledge (II)

- break down the barriers around universities in Europe
- provide the right diversity of skills and competencies for the labour market; structured partnership with the business community
- broaden access on a more equitable basis, research excellence at the highest level
- reduce the funding gap (from 1.28% of GDP to more than 2%) and make funding work harder

(EU-Commission, Annual Progress Report, Feb 2006, and Communication „Delivering on the modernisation agenda for universities: education, research and innovation“, COM(2006)208 final, 10 May 2006)

QA: an essential tool

- Because of the international competition
- Because of the Bologna process
- Because of the Lisbon objectives

In other words, quality is important

- For research and education
- For creativity and innovation

QUALITY ASSURANCE AND THE EHEA

Bergen Communiqué, May 2005: Key decisions regarding QA

1. **Standards and guidelines** apply to:

- Internal quality processes in institutions
- External quality processes of institutions
- External quality processes of QA agencies

-> Risk: looking at this as a checklist! -> rigidity/standardisation

2. **Peer-review process**

3. **Register of QA agencies** operating in Europe

-> Risk: looking at this as the prerogative of QA agencies! -> conflict of interest

QUALITY ASSURANCE AND THE EU

The EC Recommendation adopted (15 February 2006)

- Encourage HEIs to develop internal quality processes
- Encourage QA agencies to apply the Bergen standards and guidelines
- Encourage the establishment of a register of QA agencies
- Enable HEIs to turn to any agency in the register, provided it is compatible with national legislation or permitted by national authorities.

Post-Bergen discussions

1. Policy and structural issues:

- Will the Register be developed in the framework of the Europe of 25 or the Bologna process that includes 45 countries?
- What should be the appropriate role of ENQA in order to avoid a conflict of interest?
- What will be the degree of autonomy of the Register Committee vis-à-vis governments and to whom should it be accountable?

Post-Bergen discussions

2. Content issues:

- Will the Register include any and all QA/accreditation agencies?
- Will it categorise them and how?
- Will it exclude some agencies for failing to comply with the European standards and guidelines?
- What would be the legal implications of each option?

3. European QA Forum:

- A space for dialogue of all stakeholders to discuss QA issues in the context of European and international HE trends (Munich, November 2006)

What is at stake?

- Develop an **internal quality culture** in institutions
- Ensure a proper **external evaluation**:
 - ✓ With a European/international outlook
 - ✓ Mindful of the need to increase the creativity potential of higher education, the researchers and the learners
- Link up internal and QA processes to learning outcomes and to the **QF for EHEA**