

Deliverable 38

Chapter for brief guide to policy 'Relations with the State and quality in HE'

1. Importance of QA in the context of the Bologna process

Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies is mentioned in the Bologna Declaration as one of the main objectives to be attained in the way to the European Higher Education Area.

Quality assurance in higher education has become one of three cornerstones of the Bologna Process (so-called 'golden triangle': QA, ECTS and 2-level system of studies) and its role is constantly increasing. The Berlin Communiqué (2003) states explicitly:

"The quality of higher education has proven to be at the heart of the setting up of a European Higher Education Area. Ministers commit themselves to supporting further development of quality assurance at institutional, national and European level. They stress the need to develop mutually shared criteria and methodologies on quality assurance.

They also stress that consistent with the principle of institutional autonomy, the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself and this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework.

Therefore, they agree that by 2005 national quality assurance systems should include:

- A definition of the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved.
- Evaluation of programmes or institutions, including internal assessment, external review, participation of students and the publication of results.
- A system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures.
- International participation, co-operation and networking.

At the European level, Ministers call upon ENQA through its members, in co-operation with the EUA, EURASHE and ESIB, to develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance, to explore ways of ensuring an adequate peer review system for quality assurance and/or accreditation agencies or bodies, and to report back through the Follow-up Group to Ministers in 2005. Due account will be taken of the expertise of other quality assurance associations and networks."

2. Previous and present QA initiatives at the European level

In the last decade there have been several large-scale European QA initiatives. The European Pilot Project for Evaluating Quality in Higher Education, initiated in November 1994 by the European Commission, Directorate General XXII: Education, Training and Youth and finished in December 1995, gave a general overview of existing national QA systems and a comparative analysis of QA for several study areas. The methodological framework in the form of the guidelines for the project was tested and received general support, the relevance and intensity of collaboration made possible during the project was recognized by all participants and support for further cooperation was expressed. It has been also concluded that

- the interpretation of the various elements of the methodology must necessarily be adapted to the educational structures and national institutional and academic cultures in the different countries
- the evaluation methodology must reflect the context in which it is being used.

In 2000 the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) was launched by the European Commission to co-ordinate activities of European QA and accreditation agencies. It is now perceived as the main body responsible for European QA

policy. A series of reports concerning inter alia quality procedures in European higher education, benchmarking in higher education, quality assurance implications of new forms of higher education, institutional evaluations in Europe, has been prepared and disseminated. ENQA coordinates also projects dealing with specific QA issues, such as Transnational European Evaluation Project (TEEP) testing a method for transnational external evaluation in three disciplines (Physics, History, Veterinary Science).

To assist countries of central and eastern Europe in their preparation for accession to the European Union, the project Quality Assurance in Higher Education in the framework of Phare Multi-Country Programme in Higher Education was realised in 1997-98. It promoted quality culture and offered guidebooks on QA for CEE countries. A set of recommendations for ministries, agencies and higher education institutions has been elaborated (cf. Appendix A).

3. Objectives and methodology of HERN analysis

If so many quality-oriented initiatives have been already realised, what is the added value of research conducted by HERN? What does HERN offer is a multi-dimensional approach and synergy with other issues. The network explores the following four domains:

- **Society**: in terms of underpinning European values in each country;
- **Governance**: in terms of institutional management and decision making;
- **Teaching and learning**: in terms of new developments in different countries;
- **Managing change**: in the context of European enlargement.

Quality issue is present in all four domains:

- **Society**: accountability issue and promotion of citizenship values as a quality factor;
- Quality of **governance**, relationships quality-innovation;
- Quality of **teaching and learning**;
- Quality as a main driving force for **managing change**.

HERN creates opportunities for the cross fertilisation of ideas and development of new research partnerships through a series of thematic seminars.

According to HERN methodology, the issue of quality and accountability was considered in the wider context, taking into account not only the main stakeholders (State and Academia), but also 'hidden variables of QA', the relationships of QA with gender issues, equal opportunities, promotion of responsible citizenship etc. The ultimate aim was to formulate precise recommendation for both the decision makers and the wider academic community.

The following deliverables served as a basis for HERN analysis:

Report on state accreditation – Czech case

Report on academic accreditation – Polish case

Report on German accreditation system

Report from the panel discussion 'Hidden variables of QA'

Report from the workshop 'The role of State and responsibilities of HEIs in QA'

4. Conclusions

There is no Europe-wide general model or pattern of quality assurance and accreditation scheme in higher education. Recent developments show that in spite of policy declarations stressing the necessity of harmonisation of national QA systems there is still a lot of

divergence in approaching quality issue by individual European countries. We are witnessing a variety of approaches – let us only compare German meta-accreditation, Polish experiences in academic accreditation and Czech example state accreditation.

There are also different groups of stakeholders, let us only mention:

- national governments and the EC,
- higher education institutions and their associations and networks (CRE etc.)
- professional organisations, learned societies and other organisations and associations representing interests of particular professions/subject areas,
- organisations representing different groups of HEI staff and students (ESIB, EADS, HUMANE etc.)
- organisations and associations of employers.

Different groups of stakeholders often differ in their views concerning various aspects of the Bologna process, they are also interrelated in many ways. Let us look at the European quality space at its present shape. We can then distinguish at least three „quality dimensions”:

- State dimension, including legal regulations, national needs (such as labour market pressures), relationships of academic institutions with the ‘outer world’. Weak points of State-driven QA systems: bureaucracy, attachment to standards and regulations (even if they are outdated).
- Academic dimension, including the community of students and academic staff. Academic community as such is interested in quality enhancement, but on its own terms (‘I am university professor and it means that I do know how to teach!’). Weak points of Academia-driven systems: too academic and often too ‘amateurish’, too much focused on internal matters (closed system) without contacts with the ‘external world’
- European dimension, being a consequence of emerging European Higher Education Area and European labour market and driven by the Bologna process. The European dimension can become a platform for the dialogue between State and Academia (it is driven by the EC being a ‘European Government’, and the EUA, being an umbrella for European academic community).

The above dimensions determine three sets of standards to be fulfilled by higher education institutions:

- Basic **national standards** as set by law (core curricula, regulations concerning organisation of teaching and learning etc.).
- **Academic quality standards** set by academic community itself (in formal or informal way).
- Emerging **European standards**, elaborated e.g. in the framework of TUNING project or by international professional associations (FEANI, learned societies etc.).

The following **general recommendations** have been formulated on the basis of HERN analysis and the present “state of the art.” of the European quality space:

- (a) Evaluation and accreditation processes should not be too ‘academic’ nor too ‘bureaucratic’. They should involve all actors, in particular students and employers. At the national level, they shall also include international components (to ensure harmonisation at the European level).
- (b) The QA and evaluation methodology shall move towards a more outcome-oriented approach. Study programs shall be evaluated also from the point of view of potential employers.

- (c) Accreditation and evaluation bodies should be independent (or at least autonomous) vs both State and Academia.
- (d) The platform of the broad debate should be used (ENQA, CEEN). The examples of good practice should be widely distributed and the goal should be seen in mutual recognition of the national accreditation systems.
- (e) In the system of external evaluation of quality different goals and tasks of individual higher education institutions shall be taken into account.
- (f) There are 'hidden variables' of education quality, such as ensuring equal opportunities, stimulating development of positive attitudes etc. Most of the stakeholders are aware of them, but these quality aspects are very difficult to be quantified and evaluated. Future development of quality culture shall include taking into account broader spectrum of quality factors and performance indicators and thus support promotion of citizenship values and 'human face' of post-industrial knowledge society.
- (g) Psychological aspects of evaluation and accreditation shall be taken into account.
- (h) A thorough research on perception of Bologna ideas among various target groups across Europe shall be conducted. Most of statistical data published in various reports are superficial and do not correspond to real situation.

Recommendations (a-e) can be also found in documents of EC, EUA etc. The discussion in the framework of HERN showed once more inadequacy of many actions undertaken so far: recommendations are formulated since many years, but there is no significant progress in QA-perception and implementation of viable quality-enhancing mechanisms. Therefore the problem is not "what to do" but "how to do".

Recommendations (f-h) usually do not appear explicitly in Bologna documents. Therefore we think that EC and other decision-making bodies shall take them into account as additional important factors influencing quality enhancement.

The basic premise of the successful implementation of the above recommendations is the continuing dialogue between State and Academia – the dialogue in which the European Commission shall play the key role, in close co-operation with the EUA.

There is also a set of recommendations for the university leaders and academic community at large:

- (i) Awareness of importance of Bologna process among university staff shall be enhanced. In particular, research mentioned in point (h) shall be performed and serve as a basis for the realistic programme of Bologna promotion.
- (j) Quality assurance shall be seen as one of cornerstones of European house of education.
- (k) Accreditation/QA shall be seen as a mirror for self-control of academic community.
- (l) Academic institutions and academic community shall develop sense of ownership or at least participation with respect to QA processes.

(m) At the institutional (university/faculty/department) level internal evaluation shall be correlated with external evaluation to optimise the work performed to such purpose.

5. Possible future developments

As it has been mentioned in the previous section, the most important issue in promoting the quality culture is not “what to do” but “how to do”. The level of understanding of key features of the Bologna process remains low. In spite of many declarations, also the co-operation between different target groups is not satisfactory. Therefore European initiatives and projects (such as HERN) shall support international networks and organisations dealing with quality assurance and accreditation through joint actions, in particular by setting up new projects based on past experiences and taking into account emerging needs. Recently several new ideas are being discussed with CEEN (Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies), such as

- Preparation for mutual recognition of CEEN member agencies
- Repository of past and present QA-oriented projects realised in CEE (with stress on transferable good practice)
- CEE ‘pool of young researchers’ working on EHEA

There are also open possibilities for co-operation on QA with university networks, such as Coimbra Group and Compostela Group.

There are at least two very concrete examples of showing possibilities for implementation of proposed recommendations:

- (1) The MuRACEE project proposal submitted within Erasmus Mundus scheme (see Appendix)
- (2) Research project just launched by the Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools of Poland. Project concerns investigation of dynamics of the Bologna process in Poland and research on the perception of Bologna ideas by Polish university staff and students.

Both projects are closely related with HERN.

6. Recommendations for the EC

European decision makers shall support and correlate bottom-up and top-down ideas aiming at quality improvement. Real (and not wishful) picture of perception of Bologna ideas among different target groups shall be drawn and used in development of quality enhancement strategies. Quality improvement is a dynamic process, therefore newly emerging factors shall be taken into account as quickly as possible. More attention shall be paid to **implementation** of recommendations and promotion of good practice in QA.

- EC should support/promote determination and introduction of **European standards** in QA in HE
- EC should conduct a rigorous **benchmarking exercise** that charts all national systems performance against these standard EC benchmarks
- EC should publish the standards and the findings as an annual “Quality Report”
- There should be no EC comments (either positive or negative) but let the data stand by itself. The EC has done this with employment statistics and it is a method of introducing objectivity without implying that any national system is better than any other.

ANNEX: MuRACEE project proposal (Erasmus Mundus Action 4)

The main objective of the MuRACEE project is to prepare for mutual recognition of accreditation agencies in Central and Eastern Europe. The driving force behind the project is the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEEN), founded in October 2001, uniting 18 agencies and councils from 16 countries, from Germany and Austria through new EU members up to Russia and Southern European states such as Albania and Macedonia. The project is based on previous work and experiences of partners (besides regular CEEN activities, also Tempus projects, Higher Education Reform Network activities and actions of academic networks).

Target groups of the project are national accreditation centres, higher education institutions, academic associations and educational decision makers as well as international academic organisations and network.

The activities of the project include: self-description of the agencies involved, analysis of self-description through external review, preparation of the report on the degree of convergence needed and degree of divergence possible to achieve comparability and compatibility of various accreditation systems and elaboration of an action plan for mutual accreditation to be accepted by the CEEN members by the end of the project.

Expected outputs will be: guidelines for mutual recognition of accreditation across CEE countries; repository of QA materials, case studies, examples of good practice and bank of "transborder experts"; the interactive electronic glossary of educational terms; MuRACEE web page serving as a kind of a "meeting point" for all groups/organisations interested in mutual recognition, QA etc. in Europe and other regions of the world. The participation of university networks (Compostela Group, Santander Group, Coimbra Group) and of external experts will ensure transferability of project's outputs to other regions and link European QA community with their U.S and other overseas colleagues. Last but not least, the project itself will mirror the concept of good practice in accreditation in that data gathered in on-going fashion will be used to modify policies and procedures so that objectives can be achieved. The methodology of formative evaluation will be applied throughout all the project's life cycle.