ESIB

The National Unions of Students of Europe

European Student Handbook on Quality Assurance in Higher Education

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Introduction to ESIB

ESIB – the National Unions of Students in Europe

ESIB is the umbrella organisation of 50 national unions of students from 37 countries and through these members represents more than 11 million students. The aim of ESIB is to represent and promote the educational, social, economic and cultural interests of students at a European level towards all relevant bodies and in particular the European Union, Council of Europe and UNESCO.

Aims and objectives:

ESIB – the National Unions of Students in Europe has the following goals:

- to promote the views of students on the educational system as a whole.
- to promote the social, economical, political and cultural interests of students and the human rights of students which have a direct effect or an indirect effect on education and on the status and welfare of students in society.
- to promote equal opportunities for all students regardless of their political belief, religion, ethnic or cultural origin, gender, sexual orientation, social standing or any disability they may have.
- to promote equal chances of access to higher education for all people.
- to promote European and global co-operation and to facilitate information exchange with students and students' organizations.
- to promote co-operation with other organised groups in matters pertaining to education and student life.
- to provide assistance and support to National Unions of Students across Europe – hereafter referred to as NUS's – in their work to protect student interests.

For more information about the structure, members, policies and work of ESIB visit:

www.esib.org

Foreword-About the QA project

The ESIB Quality Assurance project was initiated in June 2001 and was funded by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and the Dutch Government. The project lasted for slightly more than a year and had the following key objectives:

Improving quality assurance processes and students' involvement in them by:

- Collecting, analysing and disseminating theory, good practices and experiences of (student involvement in) quality assurance in Europe, focusing on exchanges between well-developed quality assurance systems and less developed.

- Raising awareness of the importance of (student involvement in) quality assurance processes.

- Identifying and promoting European-wide strategies to involve students and student organisations in quality assurance.

- Promoting co-operation of European student organisations on one of the key themes of the Bologna process.

The project had several target groups which it sought to involve in its work and also affect with its outcomes. These can be outlined as:

- Primary: **students**, especially those who are actively involved in organisations and bodies dealing with quality of education.

- Secondary: other **parties dealing with quality assurance and student involvement** in European higher education, such as educational staff and policy makers.

Throughout the time of the project a number of activities where undertaken which resulted in both direct and indirect outcomes towards the objectives of the project. The main activities are outlines below:

- October 2001-European Student Seminar on Quality Assurance. This seminar brought together student representative and QA experts from throughout Europe to examine developments in QA.

- November/December 2001- A set of checklists and guidelines of best practices arising from the seminar was prepared and distributed to member organizations.

- January/June 2002- The production of the "***European Student Handbook on Quality Assurance***" for local and national student representatives was started with the completion of the first edition in June 2002.

- May 2002 – Training for national student representatives on involving students in Quality Assurance mechanisms.

Quality Assurance and student involvement in it has been topic of work within ESIB for several years and we hope that through the production of this handbook student representatives will be encouraged to get further involved in the QA process. Students are one of the key partners within higher education and should be involved in the quality mechanisms and this handbook will arm students with the tools to be effective and active participants in the future development of a high quality tertiary education system.

Finally, I would like to the two members of the Executive Committee (EC) that took responsibility for the project, Marlous Veldt from EC2001 and John C Friend-Pereira, EC 2002, for their hard work in initiating the project and seeing it through to its conclusion. I would also like to thank the Dutch National Union of Students, LSVb, for their support during the realization of the project.

On behalf of the steering group of the project,

Martina Vukasovic

ESIB Chair 2002

Authors Biographies

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John is a 24 year old student of Media/Communications and History in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. He has been active in the student movement and in the last two years he has been the President of his local union and Equality Officer for USI, the Irish National Student Union. Since January 2002 he has been on the Executive Committee of ESIB and has co-ordinated the QA project.

Kristina Lutz :

Kristina is a 30 year old masters graduate of political science from Umea University, Sweden. She has dealt extensively with QA and educational policy for the past three years having worked as a member of the board of SFS, the Swedish National Student Union She has recently finished as SFS International Secretary and is currently a member of the Commodifcation of Education Committee in ESIB.

Nikki Heerens :

Nikki is a 27 year old masters student of development economics at Wageningen University in the Netherlands. He has been active in local student bodies and in the Dutch National Union of Students, LSVb. In 2001 and 2002 he was on the Executive Committee of LSVb and has been responsible for their international work and key areas for education policy. Nikki has also been elected to the Executive Committee of 2003.

Definitions in Quality Assurance

In any discussion about quality assurance in higher education it is clearly important to start by defining the terms and phrases that will be used. The following definitions are the commonly accepted ones and should be a useful point of reference for remainder of the handbook.

QUALITY

'Fitness for purpose' – Juran

'Conformance to requirements' – Crosby

An educational definition is that of an ongoing process ensuring the delivery of agreed standards. These agreed standards should ensure that every educational institution where quality is assured has the potential to achieve a high quality of content and results.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

The means by which an institution can guarantee with confidence and certainty, that the standards and quality of its educational provision are being maintained and enhanced.

QUALITY CONTROL

Quality control refers to the verification procedures (both formal and informal) used by institutions in order to monitor quality and standards to a satisfactory standard and as intended.

QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

Quality Enhancement is the process of positively changing activities in order to provide for a continuous improvement in the quality of institutional provision.

QUALITY ASSESSMENT

Quality Assessment is the process of external evaluation undertaken by an external body of the quality of educational provisions in institutions, in particular the quality of the student experience.

QUALITY AUDIT

Quality Audit is the process of examining institutional procedures for assuring quality and standards and whether the arrangements are implemented effectively and achieve stated objectives. The underlying purpose of Continuation Audit is "to establish the extent to which institutions are discharging effectively their responsibilities for the standards of awards granted in their name and for the quality of education provided to enable students to attain standards."

STANDARDS

Standards describe levels of attainment against which performance may be measured. Attainment of a standard usually implies a measure of fitness for a defined purpose.

QUALITY CULTURE

Quality Culture is the creation of a high level of internal institutional quality assessment mechanisms and the ongoing implementation of the results. Quality Culture can be seen as the ability of the institution, program etc to develop quality assurance implicitly in the day to day work of the institution and marks a move away form periodic assessment to ingrained quality assurance.

ACCREDITATION

Accreditation is the result of a review of an education program or institution following certain quality standards agreed on beforehand. It's a kind of recognition that a program or institution fulfils certain standards.

1. The Origins of Quality Assurance in Higher Education

The Business of Quality Assurance

The topic of Quality Assurance (QA) has always been of utmost importance, originally, in business but now also in education and other public services sectors. Quality remains the most important attribute that creates value about the product/service for the receiver. It is also the means by which business/service providers differentiate themselves from their competitors. Since businesses are leaders in quality assurance, non-business organisations such as educational institutions can benefit from the important lessons learnt by business.

This opening chapter therefore focuses on the origins and methods applied by businesses in maintaining high quality products/services and how these can be transferred to educational institutions. It should be envisaged that *adaptation* of the most successful and relevant strategies would help educational institutions in creating higher standards of quality in education. Sharing the results and methods of QA practices will also help alleviate some of the problems such as falling student numbers, funding and recognition of courses and qualifications.

The Origins of Quality Assurance

Quality Assurance (QA) clearly emerged as a principal business methodology in the Western world throughout the 1950's and in the early 1960's. The concept of "quality" is rather elusive, because it expresses a relative, though, noticeable difference between one thing and another. Relative terms such as "better", "superior", "acceptable" are applied to judge quality. However, quality is a universally acknowledged factor in successful business. Winning companies are those that meet quality standards and for whom customer services is an obsession in every single market in which they operate.

There is a need to understand the different philosophy which predominates QA in the business sphere and that in the public services. Within the industrial/business setting the philosophy over the past 50 years has focused on the training of employees to prevent problems, strengthening organisational systems, and continually improving performance. While within public service areas such as health and education the philosophy has been based on taking a watchdog approach, relying on government controls, professional credentials, internal audits, and, more recently, external inspections to maintain standards, weed out poor performers, and solve problems.

The concept of quality assurance is not a new one, but the range of the terminology and methodologies which are now used to define, develop and apply it, are relatively recent. There are a great number of different perceptions of what is meant by quality in higher education. Varying definitions have been suggested, but it has not been possible to reach consensus. The most widely accepted criterion of quality in higher education is probably "fitness for purpose". Consensus about this does not solve the problem of what is meant by quality in higher education: it just carries the discussion one step further to the question "what is the purpose of higher education?". However, this is helpful, since to a large extent it is the different opinions about the purpose of higher education, that lie behind the varying concepts of what should be meant by quality in higher education. The different approaches to quality reflect different conceptions of higher education itself. Several overviews of current theories and practices in national systems of quality are presented in chapter three. Conceptions of quality have been categorised in different ways, showing different perspectives and illuminating various aspects.

Most individuals include parts of more than one perspective in their personal conception of quality. Therefore, when looked at on an individual level, there might not seem to be any significant differences between the way different stakeholders perceive quality in higher education. Also, combining each perspective with a particular group of stakeholders should not be taken to mean that every individual in that group sees quality in exactly the same way, in every group there are pronounced individual differences. However, the suggested perspectives represent fundamentally different views of what higher education is for. It is, therefore, important to describe each perspective separately in order to get a clear picture of what each stands for, what the ideological basis is, and what the implications of the proposed view of quality are. It will also make it possible to discover points of agreement and disagreement, thus providing a useful starting point for negotiations about a common platform for quality work in a given situation.

Indeed QA has implicitly predominated all walks of life from industry, service centres and hospitals to education. The need for quality has therefore proved to be the decisive factor in determining the success or failure of many products and services throughout the development of society, although it has often been implied rather than explicitly analysed and measured. There are of course advantages in applying more explicit measurements of quality. Among these is an increased ability to readily compare similar services and products, the development of common standards and of course wider information for the consumer. Thus the emphasis on the need to employ explicit measures to check and monitor quality is the challenge that we in the education arena must now deal with.

Higher Education and Quality Assurance; the first link

The increasing demands for good quality higher education by students and society imply that Higher Educational Institution (HEI's) now face similar pressures that the business sector has been facing for decades. These implications often become even more serious for HEI's who lack the finance and infrastructure resources and have recognition issues, as well as facing stronger competition from local, distance and international education institutions. Some of the lessons to be learnt from industry are as follows:

- Make the desire for quality an overarching principle in every operation (creating a quality culture)

- Be knowledgeable about the needs of students and academics (the actors involved in the service)
- Creating desirability for the HEI through meeting social and economical trends while maintaining high level of academic integrating and superior quality.

Organisations that provide quality and value in the provision of their educational services are likely to grow and prosper. Such organisations gain benefits like stronger student and staff loyalty, lower vulnerability to economic changes, ability to command higher funding and more autonomy from the state in policy development. Some HEI's currently experience problems in retaining both academic staff and dealing with growing student needs. Some of the reasons for this may be that staff and students perceive that other institutions are offering more valuable education in terms of quality (recognition, career development, student support etc). It thus, becomes imperative for HEI's to ensure that their services are in demand. Various strategies to make higher education affordable and valuable for students need to be applied on the national level in order to support the social role of the HEI's and the growth in QA methodologies and the implementation of the results of QA both institutional and socially.

Quality Assurance in Higher Education

"An examination of a knife would reveal that its distinctive quality is to cut, and from this we can conclude that a good knife would be a knife that cuts well". Aristotle

A new form of Quality Assurance

The application of QA in the sphere of Higher Education, while having the same base objectives of defining and recognising quality, is somewhat complicated by the important socio-economic role that education plays in developing local, national and global societies. Quality is the distinguishing characteristic guiding students and higher education institutions when receiving and providing higher education. The integration of Quality Assurance principles into higher education have become a European wide issue since the need for a clear QA and Accreditation system was laid out as one of the aims of the Bologna Process. This move towards integrating QA into higher education has benefited institutions and students by

setting out to achieve a model in the international co-operation in higher education, which improves the quality, transparency and comparability of degrees, and studies that have been involved in the process. The benefits that can be gained therefore by having a recognised quality assurance process at a course, faculty, institutional and national level is clear for the institutions and students, academics and society.

Defining Quality Assurance in Education

Quality is often described as the totality of features and characteristics of a service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs. Quality in higher education, according to Article 11 of the World Declaration on Higher Education published by the United Nations, is a multi-dimensional concept, which should embrace all its functions and activities: teaching and academic programmes, research and scholarship, staffing, students, buildings, faculties, equipment, services the community and the academic environment. It should take the form of internal self-evaluation and external review, conducted openly by independent specialists, if possible with international expertise, which are vital for enhancing quality. Independent national bodies should be established and comparative standards of quality, recognised at international level, should be defined. Due attention should be paid to the specific institutional, national and regional contexts in order to take into account diversity and to avoid uniformity. Stakeholders should be an integral part of the institutional evaluation process. Quality also requires that higher education should be characterised by its international dimension: exchange of knowledge, interactive networking, mobility of teachers and students, and international research projects, while taking into account the national cultural values and circumstances.

Principles of QA in Education

Aristotle stated in his Book VIII of Politics that 'this education and these studies exist for their own sake'. In this context quality assurance should exist along side and support the ideal of 'fitness for propose of education' where the purpose is the development of society and education of the individual. Again, there are the two approaches that can be taken to quality assurance, which can define the methods and type of QA processes that higher education institutions can combine:

- The intrinsic qualities of higher education refer to the basic values and ideals, which form the very heart of higher education: the unfettered search for truth and the disinterested pursuit of knowledge. It focuses on the knowledge creating processes and student learning. Even though most academics today will agree that quality in higher education is more than this, intrinsic quality represents the core of academic quality. The academic community can be seen as guardians of intrinsic quality.

- The extrinsic qualities refer to the capacities of higher education institutions to respond to the changing needs of the society with whom they interact. Extrinsic quality concerns the demands that society directs towards higher education. These demands change in tandem with social changes, which occur over time. It could be argued to what extent extrinsic quality should be determined by economic demands or the state (government) demands – both of which form pillars of society.

This therefore leads to a wider range of issues such as:
- The purpose of education?
- The ways in which educational institutions serve society and who decides this?
- The complex processes of teaching and learning and their evaluation?
- The development of appropriate knowledge, skills, competencies among staff to enable them to enhance their performance as teachers.

Merging QA in Education

QA is still a much-debated concept in many countries. Often educational institutions are responding to governmental pressure to "pay more attention to and be more accountable for quality". The issue of autonomy and freedom within academic life is one of the most contentious areas among academics in the discussion regarding the introduction and development of a functioning QA system. In order to have input into this crucial discussion and the future of QA in education, we must first seek to address the following questions.
- What is the significance of QA?
- What is relationship of QA to Accreditation?

What is the significance of QA?

Quality Assurance is a condition that leads to the achievement of transparency. It will ensure the quality of the *academic* (teaching, curriculum etc) and *structural* (buildings, computers etc) provision of courses and it will allow an objective review of their quality. The transparency should be dialectical, meaning that the quality assurance should make institutions transparent, but also that the quality assurance in itself should be transparent, allowing the outcomes to be shared by the participants (actors). As students we particularly want to overcome the obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement of students, recognition of courses and qualifications and guarantee the 'fitness for purpose of our education' and ensure that the outcomes of higher education meet our expectations.

What is QA's relationship to Accreditation?

Quality assurance is a prerequisite for accreditation. Higher education intuitions are constantly evolving and changing, accreditation is based on an evaluation done at a specific point in time, normally with reference to a specific area of the institutions (a course or facility). This normally leads to the awarding of certificate or recognition that the institution or part therefore meets certain standards. When accrediting, quality assurance should be the guarantee that the standard measured in the accreditation process can be upheld in the long term. Thus accreditation cannot be said to be complete unless the three steps outlined in the Quality Assurance and Accreditation policy are enacted and the process is seen as ongoing. The importance of accreditation for students can be stated in three points:

1. Accreditation provides students with programs, which are clearly defined and appropriate. Accreditation provides added assurance that the program in which students are enrolled or are considering enrolling is capable of achieving what it sets out to do.

2. Accreditation facilitates the mobility of students because it provides the higher education institutions with independent approval of the various programs at other institutions where a student can come from. This can lead to development of pre-recognition of degrees.

3. Accreditation must facilitate the recognition of degrees in other countries and thus facilitate mobility of graduates.

Conclusion- The Next Step

There are several key questions that now become clear when dealing with the challenges and opportunities presented through the quality assurance processes in higher education. These will be addressed in the later chapters and will provide both the background information and the thematic tools needed to deal with quality assurance at a local (course, faculty and institutional), national and European level.

It is clear however that the state will continue to have an interest in using higher education to promote important policy developments. There is nothing wrong with that, society pays for higher education (in most countries the income comes from the state) and has a legitimate claim to influence what is done and to check that they get what they pay for. However, this does not necessarily have anything to do with quality in higher education. Quality is important, and it is to be expected that quality will continue to be used to further the political agenda. If the hope is that quality assurance should not be ongoing this will not be the case.

Higher education will continue to play an ever more important role in modern society. If anything, the demand for educated citizens and critical analyses of society will increase. We must also be prepared to make every possible change in organisation and methods in order to improve student learning, to handle an increased number of students and to give adequate support to new categories of students. Quality does not require doing the same things that we have always done, but finding new ways to achieve the goals that have always been there.

2. Quality Assurance at a European and International level

New need for QA:

Europe is characterised by mostly public higher education systems in which institutions and programmes derive their formal degree awarding capacity directly or indirectly from the state. This has happened partly because of the diversity of both degrees and institutions. However public knowledge about their quality is often opaque across national borders, and even sometimes within one country.

Degree and institutional diversity is matched by a great variety of national quality assurance systems. Few of these quality assurance procedures take account of the internationalisation of the higher education. While national quality assurance agencies have been exchanging information about their procedures and co-operation for some years now, there are no European mechanisms in place to recognise the results of an evaluation across national borders. As a result, credit transfer and student mobility can be hampered. Internationalisation of higher education implies, however the need to internationalise quality assurance procedures to a certain extent.

In the context of globalisation and internationalisation, quality assessment implies, more than ever, comparing approaches and results as well as learning from the good practice. It is necessary and beneficial to extend international co-operation among institutions in view of implementing quality assessment and assurance mechanism, improving the assessment of academic programmes, sharing assessment methods and exchanging systems.

Recent developments

Five key developments have taken place in Europe over the past few years; The **Magna Charta Universitatum** (1988) which upholds university autonomy, must be the precondition for fostering the adaptability of universities to the ever-changing requirements of today's society.

The meeting of ministers at the **Sorbonne University (**1998) referred to the central role of higher education in the development of Europe through the creation of a European Higher Education Area.

The Bologna declaration (1999) by which the signatory states agreed to act in concert to increase the competitiveness of Europe through a range of measures aimed at creating a European Higher Education Area. These include the adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, a system of credits and co-operation in Quality Assurance at a European level. The objective of such tools is to promote mobility, inter institutional co-operation and integrated programmes of study, training and research.

The **Salamanca Convention** (2001) of European higher education institutions considered quality as a fundamental building block of the European Higher Education Area and made it the underlying condition for trust, relevance of degrees, mobility, compatibility and attractiveness.

Similarly, the **Prague Communiqué** of the European education ministers (2001) regards quality as a major factor in determining the competitiveness and attractiveness of European higher education.

In September 1998 the Council of Ministers issued a recommendation on European co-operation in QA in higher education. The recommendation states that ´a high quality of education and training is an objective for all member states. It also calls for co-operation in the introduction of efficient and acceptable methods of QA to complement national initiatives. There are many reasons why it is imperative that there is consistency across European states in terms of the quality and standard of higher education. One of the primary reasons for promoting QA in higher education is to ensure public confidence in the quality of educational provision and help guarantee that standards of awards in higher education are being safeguarded and enhanced. There is also mounting concern about the growth in the number of non-accredited universities currently offering different courses. Such institutions offer diplomas from prestigious non-accredited universities based on your knowledge and life experience rather than tests, classes, books and interviews. These institutions offer a variety of courses and qualifications for a price. Despite concerns over their legitimacy and

credibility, the courses can sometimes be completely legitimate and the diplomas they confer genuine. Such fraudulent courses have resulted in the emergence of intense interest and activity in the international world over the past decade around the nature of QA and its place in higher education.

In the European dimension, quality assurance, as foreseen in the Bologna Declaration, is a vital aspect of any system of easily readable and comparable degrees as well as Europe's attractiveness and competitiveness in the world. Its importance is widely recognised and indeed emphasised by the vast majority of European countries in order for the creation of recognition procedures, facilitated mobility, increased confidence and to avoid the lowering of standards. Its development is seen as a necessary complement for the increased curricular autonomy of universities.

The Prague communiqué states that the ministers responsible for higher education who were present at the meeting also encouraged closer co-operation between recognition and QA networks. In making this declaration the ministers were recognising the importance of both QA and the international recognition of qualifications as key elements in the move towards the creation of a European higher education area.

ENIC-European Networks of Information Centres

The Council of Europe and UNESCO established the ENIC network to develop policy and practice for the recognition of qualifications. An ENIC is a body set up by the national authorities to provide information on the recognition of foreign diploma's, degrees and other qualifications and to provide information about education systems in both foreign and ENIC's own country.

NARIC-National Academic Recognition Information Centres

The NARIC is an initiative of the European Commission with the aim to improve academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study in the member states of the EU, the EEA countries in Central and European and Cyprus. The network is part of community's programme Socrates/Erasmus.

QA can provide stakeholders (students, potential students, rest of society), in particular, with information that will be useful to them in making decisions about programmes and qualifications in different member states. If co-ordination and communication could be achieved between QA and recognition activities, they could together provide a powerful source of useful information about institutions and qualifications, which would be a great benefit to a wide range of stakeholders.

Quality assurance agencies and recognition bodies in Europe are at the present characterised mainly by their great variety. This is especially marked in the QA agencies, most of which have been set up to meet local needs and reflect local higher education and political agendas. This has led to a number of differences of types, methods, focuses and organisational structures. So far as the recognition bodies are concerned, the structures are similarly diffuse, with some closely linked to ministries of education and others operating more independently. Progress in the area of mutual understanding and effective recognition in new areas of academic activity would benefit greatly from the interaction of quality assurance agencies across Europe. At present this is difficult because no structure ore framework exists

The Prague communiqué with its section concentrating on quality assurance has paved the way for a concrete and comprehensive discussion within the European context. The steering group of the European network for Quality assurance in Higher education (ENQA) drafted a position paper in 2001, which anticipated the networks expectations to have a visible role in the developments after Prague. Both ENQA and ENIC/NARIC networks have clear recommendation stated in the Prague communiqué to work for the promotion of quality assurance and fair recognition of degrees.

The rapid internationalisation of both studies and education institutions, the development of transnational higher education and the need for student mobility together with the related mutual recognition of qualifications between institutions, place QA even more in focus.

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ENQA The European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
Has been established to promote European co-operation in the field of quality assessment and quality assurance between all actors involved in the quality assurance process. The idea for the Network originates from the European Pilot Project for Evaluating Quality in Higher Education, which demonstrated the value of sharing and developing experience in the area of quality assurance. The idea was given momentum by the Recommendation of the Council (98/561/EC of 24 September 1998) on European co-operation in quality assurance in higher education and the Bologna declaration.

Accreditation

Accreditation is a concept, which is widely understood, in theory. But it becomes incredibly difficult when it comes to putting it into practice. The subject is quite easy as long as all the actors involved share the same vision of the goal they want to reach together through accreditation, without confusing the different parts, levels, and possibilities. Most important of all is that the actors involved need to know why they are taking the steps they make. Accreditation should not become a goal as such; it is only a tool to encourage high standards.

There has been much talk both within and outside Europe during the past two years about the spread of accreditation, and the possible need to meet what is perceived to be a big threat, by the creation of some form of European accreditation system. This has on various occasions been proposed at the level of the academic programme, institution and quality assurance agency. Major difficulties have been identified in the approach, however principally related to the significance, reliability, burden, value and cost of any such schemes.

The interest in accreditation has arisen because, despite the work of various institutions such as ENIC and NARICs in respect of individual student's credential, there is a real confusion about the relative value of the programmes and qualifications of different institutions and countries. The unimpeded movement of students within Europe is an important freedom and every effort should be made to ensure its early achievement. Similarly employers in the European labour market need to have ways of understanding what they can expect from graduates of higher education systems which are different from the ones that they are

acquainted with. The information available to them must take into account the academic quality and standards of the relevant higher education institution.

Accreditation seems to be a possible method to work towards quality assurance in Europe because international criteria can be made. So what system will work best? Will it be a system of national, regional or European level? Should it be an institutional or specialised body? When we accept that comparable criteria need to be developed for recognition of qualifications, it follows that it would be useful to develop these on European level or at least decide what European criteria should be taken into account.

There are many issues, problems and possibilities with and in the development of accreditation, the setting of different criteria, the financial side of accreditation and the fast growing number of stakeholders. But accreditation is one tool that can be used to reach a better level of co-operation in quality assurance, in terms of compatible or comparable degrees. From theoretical point of view, accreditation will be useful in order to reach the goals and objectives of the Bologna process, but as with everything in life, it depends on how it will be done in practice.

Transparency in European higher education

The trends presented in the previous sections show a move towards more attention in Europe to quality evaluation and assurance, with or without special accreditation agencies next to quality assurance agencies. The creation of ENQA carries hopes that these developments will indeed help to create more readability and transparency. There is, however, a danger that Europe may be moving out of a jungle of degrees but into a jungle of quality assurance and accreditation standards, procedures and agencies. A precondition for progress for stakeholders would be to clarify the confusion in terminology. The word "accreditation" is generally used to designate the administrative process leading to the authorisation to establish an institution or a programme as well as a recurrent quality assurance process. It may also apply to credit transfer, e.g. in the process of "accreditation" of prior learning. The development of ENQA may prove of importance to progress in the whole area of quality assurance and "accreditation". There seems to be unanimous agreement that Europe should not plan for a single quality assurance agency trying to enforce a single set of criteria. Ranking and uniformity in procedures are neither wanted nor needed. Future architecture of

quality assurance in Europe ensuring quality in quality assurance should be about respecting differences and not overloading universities. The notion of a European "platform" based on criteria that must be met by quality assurance/accreditation agencies and on the mutual acceptance of their conclusions, which could be a possible way to the future for the European Higher Education Area. It could enhance quality and transparency and hence also mobility within Europe as well as readability and acceptance, and hence attractiveness in the world.

For quality assurance the goal of this European dimension should be to achieve transparency of quality assurance systems, not to replace them. Therefore a co-operation should be established, with commonly agreed standards, procedures and guidelines for quality assurance. This co-operation will recognise that a quality assurance system uses the agreed standards, procedures and guidelines. It will however not get involved in the process of quality assurance to enhance the quality of education and the mobility of students and graduates in Europe. Accreditation agencies could be able to work in the whole European area. However in order to give legitimacy to accreditation agencies working in Europe, a European agreement on methods for accreditation could be made between the different systems of quality assurance.

Implications for quality assurance in Europe

What kind of action can be expected from the ongoing dialogue between ministers, ministerial officials and higher education institutions? One could expect a series of national reforms, possibly taking inspiration from those countries that recently reformed their systems in line with the Bologna Declaration. The Bologna Declaration includes a phrase on the promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies. In this context, it is only proposed so far that a common framework of reference for qualifications will be worked out. As stated before this should not introduce a new category of European degrees or qualifications, but a common framework for existing ones. Some recent reactions on the Bologna initiative from the side of the higher education institutions demonstrate an agreement on the need to guarantee the quality of programmes, credits and degrees. Accreditation is seen as a means to guarantee such minimum standards of quality in favour of students, employers and society. It was emphasised, however, that this should refer to content and not lead to the labelling of quantitative factors.

The question on how a European-wide accreditation system and quality assurance system should operate was answered in the following ways. It would be the responsibility of the higher education system itself to develop a continental-wide system, based upon self-regulation schemes, which would use the national systems of quality assurance as a reference point or benchmark. Therefore there should be close liaison between the higher education system on the one hand, and governments on the other. This does not mean that a European accreditation agency would be desirable, since the recognition of credits and degrees is within the autonomy of the universities.

It is clear that there is no body or platform with the necessary competence in this field that could operate at a European level and also that this idea would not be acceptable for the higher education institutions, as much as for most governments.

A different type of initiative is the European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS) through which provision in Business Schools is accredited. The process has the aim not only of improving quality but also of creating transparency to assist and inform students, stakeholders, and enhance recognition. An increasing number of Business Schools from Europe, and some from beyond, have been accredited. Other accreditation processes include the AMBA accreditation of MBAs and accreditation by the AACSB. Indeed several of the best-known Business Schools have sought and been awarded accreditation by more than one accreditation body which poses questions about transparency. Although no top-down process is intended, this type of approach would at some point put pressure on countries where quality assurance systems do not yet exist, or where they are not sufficiently transparent. If they respond positively, by establishing or improving such systems, this would contribute to the desired convergence. However, if this would not be the case, an undesired division would be created in Europe, with possible negative consequences for the competitiveness of these non-convergent systems and for the flows of students from these particular systems to others, which better guarantee the quality and thus the recognition of qualifications. Finally, it should be emphasised that in general the role of governments and thus that of national recognition agencies, in recognition of qualifications is being marginalized by bottom-up developments at other levels.

Further internationalisation of QA

Internationalisation and quality of higher education have always been closely linked together, at least at the conceptual level. This is based on the strong belief that internationalisation enhances the quality of higher education. Many policy documents, especially those published in the 1980s and early 1990s, consider internationalisation as a means to improving quality, rather than an end in itself. Examples include OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) and EU documents statements on national policies for internationalisation, and also many institutional-level policy plans for internationalisation.

From these various initiatives, it became clear that, although internationalisation and quality may be closely linked at a conceptual level, they were not so much linked at the level of practice and policy. Increased international competitiveness and international academic and professional mobility only had a marginal impact on the quality debates, which were situated at the level of national policy-making. Increasingly, quality assurance actors and agencies became involved in international networks and associations, e.g. the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), through which they exchanged information and experiences. It was acknowledged that also in education, taking an international approach could strengthen quality assurance processes and outcomes, as had been the case for a time already in research reviews. Both external and internal pressures motivated the demand for international quality assurance. Internal pressures include the enhanced international mobility of students and the overseas marketing of higher education systems, i.e. the export of higher education, and external pressures come from the globalisation of the professions, regional trade agreements, and international organisations.

The internationalisation of quality assurance did not in all cases automatically lead to an increased focus on quality assurance of the increasingly important international dimension in higher education itself. The main reasons for this included:
(a) internationalisation was in some cases still seen as a marginal activity
(b) national processes for assuring quality were not intended to serve an international purpose
(c) the diverse nature and spread of internationalisation activities within individual institutions and across institutions within a higher education system
(d) the above-mentioned lack of co-ordination between quality assurance and internationalisation actors and agencies.

Transnational education: international quality assurance initiatives

Under the auspices of UNESCO (Europe region) and the Council of Europe and following the approval of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European region (the Lisbon Convention). A Working Group on Transnational Education was set up (in 1998), to develop a Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education. The composition of the Working Group reflected a mix of the education exporters, the USA, UK and Australia, countries where transnational education was delivered such as Israel, Slovakia and Spain, and countries that both receive and provide Transnational education such as Russia and Latvia. The Code (which is still in draft) includes a set of principles that should be respected by institutions involved in the provision of educational services through transnational arrangements. The Code will be complemented by a recommendation on procedures and criteria for the assessment of foreign qualifications to be implemented by the network of recognition centres in the Europe region. See ESIB's TNE handbook for more information on this specific area of education.

New key issues for QA agencies

Transnational education is not going to disappear while an enormous demand for learning and qualifications goes unmet in the developing world. To legislate it out of existence would be to deny access to education for many people. The fast pace of development of ICT and the use of the Internet will provide one means of meeting increasingly diverse demands for flexible access to education and qualifications from those already in employment. It is not sufficient to define these developments such as the increasing number of TNE providers simply in the terms of 'new forms of delivery' of higher education since there are also developments in the type of provider offering higher education in the forms of provision. In addition, categories of provider, provision and delivery mechanism overlap. At present we are witnessing a blurring of boundaries between existing forms of higher education and the emergence of new forms of provision generated both from within and from outside the traditional public and private higher education sectors. All this is having a big impact on the conventional forms of higher education and creates a wide range of new challenges for quality assurance.

Last words conclusion

This chapter has shown there is a general trend today towards increasing national and international transparency and comparability between different systems of higher education. But homogeneity is more popular and easier than local variation. This reflects a fundamental question and central problem- how to balance between standardisation and situation based systems of quality assurance. The issue that is most important to ask and discuss is the relation between the different models and systems for evaluation of quality and the views on higher education. To critically look at different models for centralized and precise measure mechanism and how different routines can become institutionalized (and later can be hard to change). If you look at knowledge and education from a strict economic perspective then this is the right way to go, but if you have a wider view on education, quality and the role of education in society then you most likely make a different analysis.

The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) was established in 1991.

The Role of the Network

The main purpose of the Network is to collect and disseminate information on current and developing theory and practice in the assessment, improvement and maintenance of quality in higher education.

Through this information sharing, and otherwise, it is intended that the Network should:

- Promote good practices in the maintenance and improvement of quality in higher education;

- Facilitate research into the practice of quality management in higher education and its effectiveness;

- Be able to provide advice and expertise to assist the development of new quality assurance agencies;

- Facilitate links between accrediting bodies especially insofar as they operate across national borders;

- Assist members to determine the standards of institutions operating across national borders;

- Permit better-informed international recognition of qualifications;

- Be able to assist in the development and use of credit transfer schemes to enhance the mobility of students between institutions within and across national borders;

- Enable members to be alert to dubious accrediting practices and organizations.

3. Comparative analysis of National QA Systems

Different systems across Europe

All countries have some kind of quality assurance mechanism in place, although they differ significantly in terms of purpose, focus and organisation. Quality evaluation is only an internal responsibility of higher education institutions in some countries where no national agency exists, e.g. in Austria, Switzerland, the French community of Belgium, Germany
and Slovenia.

In many countries there is an obligation for universities to have their own quality evaluation system and a body at national level responsible for the organisation and stimulation of this process, e.g. in Portugal, Spain, Germany and Iceland. However the majority of countries have a quality assurance agency also carrying out external evaluation functions. Most were created or restructured in the 1990s. Some operate as single national agencies in unitary or integrated systems (e.g. in the UK, Norway, Sweden and Romania) or in binary systems (e.g. Denmark and Estonia). Other countries have an agency for each sub-sector of a binary system, e.g. Poland and Ireland. In countries with decentralised or federal structures in higher education some specific features exist; in Spain, some communities like Andalucia and Catalunya have their own quality assurance system and agency that follows the same principles as the national level. In Germany the Federal Ministry is funding a special project operated by the Rectors' Conference for the sharing of information and experience concerning quality evaluation between the federal states. In the UK there are two agencies, one for Scotland and one for the rest of the country. A few new quality assurance agencies were set up or are in preparation. In Italy the 1999 reform laws required all universities to re-organise their self-evaluation and replaced the former "observatory" for university evaluation by a new, independent National Committee for Quality Assurance which can set standards and produce reports. The first phase of Spain's national plan for quality evaluation expired at the end of 2000 and it is at this moment not yet clear which changes will be introduced. In Ireland the new qualifications Act of 1999 created a new National Qualifications Agency with two awarding bodies (for higher education

and for further education) next to the standing Higher Education Authority which reviews the quality assurance procedures of universities. Austria, Switzerland, the French community of Belgium and Slovakia have plans to set up a national quality assurance agency which would seek links with ENQA. A project also exists in Greece, where quality assurance has gained acceptance, but the role of the agency under consideration has not yet been defined. Slovenia has reported no plans for the creation of an agency. While in the UK and in Ireland quality assurance is mostly outcome-based, many other systems remain primarily based on inputs such as curricula and resources. In most cases external quality assurance agencies deal with programmes rather than whole institutions and in several countries the evaluation process is organised along subject lines on a cross-institutional basis, e.g. in the Netherlands, Flanders, Estonia and the UK. This type of "benchmarking" of particular disciplinary or professional areas is becoming more important and more common.

You can say that from a European perspective there is a development of different systems and methods that look more alike. If this is the result of the aims of the European Union or of the international interaction it is hard to say. But you can draw the conclusion that the Humbolt ideals with knowledge primarily as a personal-humanistic function are to a growing extent competing from the view on education as solely an economic good. The discussion about the increasing need for further education for a bigger part of the population in the knowledge-based society is now the goal description for higher education in all countries. If the economic-productive view on knowledge and the human capital ideal is also something that dominates the students view on their education or if it is only in the program descriptions and in the contemporary rhetoric for the governments is not clear. In the current political rhetoric, education is given a fundamental importance for economic and democratic development. There is also a trend towards a more professional form of university teacher that is supposed to be the 'teacher, researcher and administrator'. There is also a trend aiming university teachers towards a more discipline and research oriented view on quality. A conclusion from this is a move towards a more political and "user" oriented view on quality.

Different QA system- different values on knowledge?

The different systems of evaluation exemplify differences between the various opinions on who should guide the evaluation of quality of knowledge. But the systems do not only vary on the issue of steering power. There are also different views on knowledge in the various

systems. When evaluation has a political/democratic function knowledge is seen as a value in the political system, more specifically for the democracy. When there is an economic-producer function, knowledge has a more widely economic value for competitiveness, profit and employability. An individual- humanistic function reflects a view in knowledge as personal good something to make the life richer for the individual. Conflict between the different views on knowledge is obvious in most theoretical work about quality and quality assurance and reforms on higher education. An effect of this is also the difference there is about knowledge and the value of it for the contemporary society and is still very much based on these three different modern goals of knowledge.

You might wonder why this is important in the analysis of and work with different systems of quality assurance. One can stress that the view on knowledge within the society also dominates different quality assurance systems. It is not a rule and it has different implications in different systems, but some conclusions can be drawn. Can the same quality measures and system be used when there are different views on the values of knowledge? Can the same criteria be used for all programs, subjects and institutions? The different systems also produce different forms of knowledge about quality and this results in different higher education institutions.

The National Structure

In most cases the national structures of quality assurance should be established by law and funded by the state. However the agency should retain its independence from government. The organisation should be governed by an elected board, consisting of nominees from universities (including both academic and administrative staff); student representatives nominated by the national unions, representatives of the employers sector, other stakeholders and lay members (representing the role of higher education in the wider society).

This national structure should allow for a certain degree of autonomy of individual institutions, providing the sector with examples of both good and bad practice, nationally and internationally. The organisation should be focused on supporting and advising institutions on quality assurance rather than policing. In addition as an expert in the field of higher education the agency should be able to advise the government on higher education policy.

A common approach used recognises a reasonably consistent set of principles:

- Meeting public information needs, so that stakeholders have information about the quality and standards of learning and teaching at different HEIs and in different subjects

- Recognising the primary responsibility of each HEI to operate suitable internal mechanisms for monitoring and assuring quality.

- Ensuring that HEIs are not burdened with administration that the system is accountable and greatest value is secured from the resources invested.

Many decisions will have to be taken relating to how intrusive inspections/audits/assurance will be, and in many cases this will be in part determined by the state of development of institution level quality assurance structures.

The institutional self-evaluation document most usually forms the core documents for all discussions concerning quality assurance

Major concerns will include the frequency of assurance processes, the level of external involvement and the type and amount of information collected. There has frequently been an argument made that those institutions seen to perform consistently well should be subject to a less rigorous assessment than others judged to be at risk of not meeting the desired standards.

Most systems will involve some form of inspection/audit. Throughout the duration of this audit the stakeholders should be involved at all times.

A recent development in England is the creation of a national student satisfaction survey. This tool would allow students to input into an independent and national assessment of student satisfaction. Questions may relate not only to the provision of teaching and learning but also to the provision of support services such as IT, library facilities, careers advice and pastoral support.   This provides supplementary evidence to support any system of inspection/audit and can be a valuable source of both qualitative and quantitative data.

The Institutional Structure

It is critical that all higher education institutions maintain their own internal, rigorous quality assurance systems. These structures should permeate every area and every level of teaching and learning.

Ideally reports should be presented back to committees at all levels of university administration i.e. course, department/school, faculty and institution-wide. The committees to which reports should be made should include representatives of the internal stakeholders including students, academic and administrative staff. At the higher levels there should also be lay-members involved, representing the interests of the local community. In this way the committees should very much reflect the structure of the board of the national agency.

At the lower levels of this assurance structure a functioning and effective course/class representative structure will be necessary. These elected representatives are able to act as the voice of their peers, feeding into the process of quality assurance and taking an active role in course/department and faculty meetings and driving forward the process of quality assurance and enhancement.

In addition to this a variety of methods will need to be used to assess quality including collecting student feedback and assessing levels of student satisfaction.

Case studies

When looking at and comparing different QA systems there are certain questions that should be asked to be able to understand the culture in which they work, there aim and purposes and what role they play not only for the HE institutions but also for politics and society at large. What is steering the evaluation of quality and QA mechanism in higher education? What is being evaluated and why are some factors more important to look at than others? Who decides what is important? Who steers the decision making process and manages the evaluation of quality. What is the relationship between the different actors on the local, regional national level, between politics, administration, institutions and students. What criteria are used when judging the quality and what are they based on? What are the guiding principles within the system? What are the strength and weaknesses with the different

systems and principles? What similarities and differences between the systems and what factors decide this?

Sweden

Introduction

The evaluation of Higher Education went threw a major change in 1992. The focus and the responsibility of the evaluations were shifted to the different HEI institutions; the students were seen as the most important actor. It views mainly their interest and end that was to guide the priorities for the institutions. The basic idea for the evaluation of quality is the result of quality, what have students actually learned when they leave the institutions. There was also a need for evaluations on the national level to have an international perspective. The follow up these results and quality assurance was seen as two parts of the same quality system. The actors, that are locally responsible for the education, base every evolution of quality on a self-evaluation. To this self-evaluation, an external evaluation is added (peer review) that is given to the actors involved and that can be sued as the base for further development and change.

Finally the evaluation has to lead to concrete measures if to be considers valid and valuable. There should also be a long-term strategic plan for the evaluation so that the institutions know what to expect. Every university and högskola has the responsibility to make a plan and program for the evaluation of quality. The national agency of higher education should look at specific things. When evaluating the institutions means judging the strategies, goals, plans, systems, methods and the organisations that the institutions use to secure and develop the quality devices are "evaluate to develop" and "quality is a journey not a destination". The most important, method in the evaluation work of the institutions is the self-evaluation, a study visit by externals, and a meeting to discuss the evaluation report from the group. The roll of the external group is to initiate discussions, create reflections and give a base for the problem solutions. The open approach means that the evaluation group has a consultative role, and that importance should be on the self-evaluation. The board of the institution, the Agency and the external group should decide the final report; every institutional evaluation is reported in a separate document. A good institution should be characterized by, self guidance, learning environment, long term thinking and planning, transparent leadership, co-operation with the surrounding society, equality and to always have the focus on the student

as the center. Since 1999 there is also evaluation of certain perspective in the institution they cross over the between different programs and topics.

Equality, student influence, ethnic and social diversity. One of the main reasons for the increasing ambition in quality is that Swedish education has been able to be compared and analysed in an international perspective and that prospective students have access to the information of a high quality. From the side of the ministry and the agency there are certain purposes and aims with the evaluations; control- the quality should be evaluated to be a base for educational political discussions, the citizens have the right to see how their tax money is spend, development- the institutions should be able to use the self evaluation for in their own quality and development work, information- students and other stakeholders need easy accessible information when choosing education and institution, and comparisons-.people should be able to compare the different institutions, both on national and international level. A last tend is that an increasing number of Swedish institutions are accredited by international accreditation agencies such as EQUIS.

Estonia
Introduction

External quality assessment in Estonia is a continuous process of accreditation. The main difference from the American accreditation system is that the government finances the process of accreditation and the body responsible for accreditation decisions is a government agency. As in most Western European countries the quality assessment includes the following methods - self-evaluation of higher education institutions, peer-review and public report. In general the process of accreditation comprises of four parts - self-evaluation; recommendations of foreign experts on the basis of the self-evaluation report and assessment visit; accreditation decision made by the governmental expert body Higher Education Quality Assessment Council on the basis of the recommendations of foreign experts and the final part is the self-improvement of the institution.

Accreditation in Estonia

According to the Law on Universities (1995), all study programmes in universities must be evaluated and accredited once every seven years. The accreditation of universities and applied higher education institutions and their study program is granted by the Higher Education

Quality Assessment Council, which established in 1995. The latter is formed by the Government and operates by the administrative jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education. The Higher Education Quality Assessment Council forms evaluation committees. The recommendations of which the Higher Education Quality Assessment Council makes proposals regarding universities/applied higher education institutions and their operation. The evaluation committees are made up of representatives of research and development institutions as well as of experts from two foreign countries.

In 1997, the administrative office of Estonian Higher Education Accreditation Center within the Foundation Archimedes was established. The center prepares all relevant documentation for the Higher Education Quality Assessment Council, including self-analysis reports and reports by expert commission, as the main documents for accreditation of study programmes

Two types of accreditation are available:

- Institutional i.e., for a higher education as a whole or for its structural units.
- Program.

There are three accreditation categories:

1. Accredited: Indicates that the higher education institution or the study programmes meets the set of requirements. The decision may also include recommendations for eliminating minor shortcomings.

2. Conditionally Accredited: Indicates than institution or study program under
Review has major shortcomings, which need to be eliminated or addressed.

3. Not Accredited: Indicates that the institution or study program has serious shortcomings that jeopardize the quality of graduates knowledge and skills. In the case of a negative accreditation decision ("Not Accredited") for the first time for an institution or study program, the university/applied higher education institution may apply for a second accreditation, one year after the first accreditation decision.

Experience shows that accreditation of the curriculum means the accreditation for the institution, particularly if the curriculum, which was accredited, is the profile course for this

institution. If the Council for evaluation of higher education in Estonia grants the accreditation to a certain curriculum, it means that the curriculum satisfies the Estonian educational standards and that the government recognizes the diploma of this institution.

Quality management at state level has lead to the identification of typical problems in academic higher education. The previous Soviet higher education system and the rapid transfer caused the main problems in academic higher education from the old system to the new system.

The awareness of students about accreditation has grown but it is troubling that the students don't believe that their opinions are considered in the process. Their knowledge is also lacking on the part that accreditation is a continuous process aimed at improvement.

Accreditation processes have stimulated inner quality assessment at the university, faculty and department level to the extent that there is a goal to establish a regular quality assurance system within the university. This would be a beneficial addition to the overall quality management model. In this respect quality management would lead to quality improvement.

Typical problems in higher education

Recommendations made by the foreign experts have not only helped to make individual decisions and conclusions, but studying different expert reports made by different experts in different areas of study has been beneficial to discovering the typical problems in higher education irrelevant of the specific study field. On the basis of a study that examined 41 expert reports made in 1998 - 1999 typical problems concerning the structure and content of the study programmes, organisation of studies, study process, academic staff, students resources and inner quality assurance systems can be described. In short the most common problems are the following –

Problems concerning curricula:
- Over 30% of expert reports stated that the curricula are too intense, because they include too many small subjects;
- Principles for the compilation of curricula require review; they are currently based on traditions, ad hoc decisions or availability of lecturers;
- It has been recommended that they be preceded by clear formulation of aims and goals and defining of vocational skills and knowledge sought;
- The total duration (10 years) of academic studies is too long; according to the opinion of different experts 8 - 9 years would be reasonable.

The Netherlands

Introduction

The quality assurance-system in the Netherlands today is threefold: internal QA (activities pointed at preservation and improvement of quality within the institution itself), external QA (retaining experts and external people the quality assurance-process) and a meta-evaluation by the government (to control the quality-preservation by the institutions and the way of how these institutions assimilate the results of the quality-review). Before the description of the quality assurance-system, it should be made clear that there're two different kinds of higher education institutions in the Netherlands. There's a division between university and non-universitary higher education (hogescholen).

The universities are responsible not only for providing good quality study programmes; they are also responsible for a satisfactory system of external quality assurance. The other side of this autonomy is accountability to the taxpayer, to the government, to present and future students and society as a whole.

Universitary higher education

The responsibility for the organisation of the quality assurance is up to the higher education institutions themselves. The Dutch universities are due to watch over permanently the quality of their education and research (internal), to organise a review of this (external) and to give effect at the recommendations. There is a close relationship between the internal and external QA: the external QA can stimulate the internal QA, while the internal QA is essential for the external QA. In this perspective both QA are to be regarded as complementary and integrated.

Internal Quality Assurance
The self-evaluation report is the corner stone of the whole QA-system. It should stimulate the internal QA by a strengths/weakness-analysis, be a preparation for the external visitation and give information to the review committee about the internal QA. The better this report, the better the review committee will be able to perform its tasks. The form and the content are set out in a protocol, to make sure only relevant information is brought together. A standard self-evaluation report contains several quality-aspects like objectives, structure and content of the study programme, learning and teaching environment and curriculum organisation.

External Quality Assurance
The external QA is organised by the independent council of Dutch Universities (VSNU) or the council of universities of professional education (HBO-raad). A review committee visits every eight years each study programme at all the different universities in order to form a judgement about various aspects of the quality of the study programme (the visitation-system). The main objectives of the QA are first of all quality guarding, quality-improvement and establishing accountability. These objectives are translated in four tasks for the review committees: to assess, to advise, to compare and to inform. The system of external QA consist of the following elements: the visitations are related to a study programme or a group of, inter-universitary, based on a self-evaluation, executed by a committee of independent external experts, including a student, published in a final and public report, and an implementation of the recommendations as described in the report by the members of the review committee.

There're three different phases in the visitation-system: first of all a critical self-evaluation of the study-programme itself by the higher education institution by interviewing the staff, the

students, and the administration. The results are brought together in an internal self-evaluation report. It forms the corner stone of the whole visitation-system. The other element of this first phase is the composition of the review committee.

The second phase consists of the real evaluation of the education and research quality by the external review committee. The committee visits the universities for three days. Their first task is to draw up a frame of reference, with a detailed description of their approach. They keep separate conversations with the different parties involved (students, staff,...). At the end of the visit a short oral report is given, with the first impressions of the review committee. Finally, the review committee publishes a final and public report: the findings and recommendations are embodied in a detailed description. The study programme must carry out the recommendations of the review committee. The outcome of the review committee can be used to change and improve a study programme. Thereby, the external investigation by the review committee is a safeguard as well as a test of this self-appraisal.

At the same time, it augments the goal of improvement. The external review committee also places the assessment in a national and international context. It's their task to identify the areas that have to be improved.

Non-universitary higher education

The decree on the higher education institutions outside the universities states that these institutions are responsible themselves for the organisation of their internal and external quality assurance. The law makes mandatory upon these institutions to organise continuous quality control on a permanent base, investigating their education.

The QA-system here is also based on three kinds of investigation: internal (self-analysis and a self-evaluation report), external (visiting committees) and a control function by the Education Inspection. During the quality-investigation, different actors are involved: students, alumni, staff, employers, experts, government, etc. Important is the obligation to make the advises and remarks public. This is also an obligation: it is impossible for a higher education institution not to improve their education and research. If so, the government can take severe measures.

Internal Quality Assurance
The process of internal quality assurance takes place within the study programme itself. In general, this process consists of continually collecting information about the quality that is being achieved. For the purposes of external quality assurance, this internal process results in a description in a so-called self-evaluation report. Next, the analysis of these results leads to a strengths/weaknesses analysis. The form and the content are set out in a protocol, to make sure only relevant information is used.

External Quality Assurance
The organisation of the external Quality Assurance is in the hands of the HBO-raad (Dutch Association of polytechnics). Their role is to make a list of members of the review committee, to construct a protocol for the visitations, to receive the general report with the remarks an recommendations of the review committee and to evaluate the quality assurance. The members of the review committee are drawn from a broad spectrum. It is their responsibility to draft a general report on the quality of the investigated study programme. It is important to note that this report must be made public by the HBO-raad. The objectives and the role of the review committee consist in the preparation of their visit, the make-up of a time-schedule, the analysis of the self-evaluation-report, the visit itself, an oral judgement and a final public report.

Meta-evaluation by the education inspection: a watchdog role

The independent education inspection (Onderwijs inspectie) watches over the Quality Assurance system and checks the workings of the internal and external Quality Assurance as follows frequently. It can also do comparative research to the quality of education in a certain program or group of programs through a committee of independent experts, which reports its findings publicly. Thirdly the Education inspection sees to it that university and non-university institutions follow up on the results of the quality assessment in their policies. They report in their year report on the quality control and the measures they have taken to follow up on the findings and recommendations of the internal and external evaluation.

If the Education inspection assesses that the quality of education or research is questionable, the board has to present a plan within six months that shows which measures it intends to take to eliminate the assessed shortcomings. In case the quality of education of a program, after thorough quality assessment, is reckoned to be insufficient the Dutch government can decide to stop financing the program and its students, or that the program cannot reward degrees anymore. The role of the education inspection will be taken over in 2008 by the new national accreditation organisation that will be created following a new law implemented in 2001.

Conclusion
QA in the Netherlands (based on and in close co-operation with Flanders) is quite well organised and is mainly intended to improve the quality of the study programmes. The different parties involved are all contacted and consulted in the different aspects of the quality assurance, internal and external. A close reading of this short description, makes clear that the QA system is almost the same for the universities and the other higher education institutions. Still, there are some weak aspects in the QA system: the clarity and explicitly of review reports, the acquaintance of the foreign experts in the review committees with the internal QA of the visited institutions, their understanding of the legal framework, the internalisation of external QA and how academic research is integrated in the academic education.

Summary Table of Sweden, Estonia and Netherlands

Main Questions	Sweden	Estonia	Netherlands
Who orders the evaluation?	State/Government	State/government	State/Government
Ownership of evaluation?	National Agency for Higher education	Higher Education Quality Assessment Council	Netherlands Association of Universities of Professional education (HBO-raad) for professional Higher Education and the Dutch Association of Universities (VSNU) for academic HE. Owned by the institutions
Financing	State	State	HE Institutions
Who **– organizes/ coordinates** **– executes**	Staff from the Agency for Higher education. Staff primarily from HE institutions executes. Students included.	Evaluation Committees from the Council. Estonian Higher Education Accreditation Center	For professional Higher education (Hogescholen) HBO raad. For university education, VSNU. Staff from universities, polytechnics and external executes. Students are included. Inspectorate executes Meta evaluations for Higher education.
When/timeframe?	6-year cycles. Continuously after application.	7 year cycles	6 year cycles
What is evaluated **–size** **–object**	Sector for Higher Education. Institutional, general degree, professional degree, subject evaluation. Evaluation of preconditions for performance and result in relation to the state of law, practice and degree structure. Guiding documents.	Institutions as whole or structural units and study programmes. Aim of evaluation to meet educational standards for the recognition of diplomas.	Sector for Higher Education. Inspection of programs. Inspectorate performs meta inspections in relation to goal descriptions. Guiding documents.
Why? What is the purpose of Evaluation?	Control, information, comparison and development	Control, development, improvement, information.	Control, accountability and development
Method	Self evaluation, external evaluation group, study visit and publication	Self-analysis reports and reports by expert commissions, in which often foreign experts take part.	For program evaluation; self-evaluation, external evaluation group. Study visit, and publication

Comparative perspective on Accreditation

Accreditation, defined as the public confirmation by an external body that certain standards of quality are met, is not a tradition in Europe. Many countries in Central and Eastern Europe established accreditation agencies after the political changes and transformations in higher education in the region. These agencies differ from each other in several respects. Their status and composition reflect various degrees of independence from the ministry, government or parliament that they advise. In most cases their prime mission has been to "accredit" new programmes or institutions (universities or faculties), in particular private ones. In this case accreditation is rather an authorisation to set up an institution or a programmes based on an ex evaluation of the components presented. Such authorisations have also existed in other countries to protect the homogeneity of nationally defined curricula and degrees, e.g. in France, Spain and Italy. In its broader, more widespread definition accreditation refers to a cyclical process (e.g. every 5 to 6 years) of certification of the quality of a program (sometimes a whole institution) based mainly on outcomes rather than on inputs.

This mission of accreditation agencies is well established in some countries (e.g. in Hungary) and is gaining importance in others. The relationship between quality assurance and accreditation varies from one country to another. In the UK and Ireland, accreditation is carried out de facto and not by separate specialised agencies but by the quality assurance agencies. In these cases a publicly expressed opinion on the quality of a program, based on established standards, is seen as a final step of the quality assurance process. This is also the case in countries with an "accreditation agency" responsible both for external quality assurance and for accreditation, e.g. in Hungary, Latvia, Estonia and Sweden. In other countries such as Denmark, Finland and Lithuania quality assurance agencies have no specific accreditation mission, or accreditation agencies have no specific role in quality assurance. (Even though their activities may have an important function in terms of quality evaluation and assurance at institutional level, as e.g. in the Czech and Slovak Republics). There are also examples of accreditation bodies

responsible for only certain disciplines (e.g. teacher education in Portugal or engineering studies in France) or certain types of institutions: Austria has two separate accreditation agencies for Fachhochschulen and for private universities (but none yet for public universities). In Poland the draft new law on higher education plans to unify the hitherto split accreditation bodies for universities and polytechnics. Since the adoption of the Bologna Declaration several countries have taken measures to introduce accreditation in their higher education system.

In Germany, the Netherlands and Flanders program accreditation is directly linked to the Bachelor/Master reform and aims at guaranteeing the quality, visibility and credibility of the new degrees. In Germany the National Accreditation Council created in 1999 does not directly accredit programmes (except under special circumstances); rather, it authorises regional or subject-based accreditation agencies organised by the higher education community to accredit new programmes and allow them to carry the quality label of the National Council.

This decentralised, indirect structure of accreditation, is sometimes referred to as "meta-accreditation. In the Netherlands an accreditation system should be in place by 2002 as a constituent part of the reform introducing Bachelor/Master degrees. It will be based on a single agency with two awarding bodies, for professional and scientific courses. It is interesting to point out that the dividing line does not formally depend on the type of institution undertaking the course (i.e. whether it is a university or a hogeschool) but on the content and orientation of the course. An accreditation agency is also in preparation in Flanders and close co-operation between the Dutch and Flemish agencies is foreseen. Switzerland is preparing a single agency for quality assurance and accreditation. Plans for an accreditation scheme and agency are also under consideration in Norway, Austria and Finland. Most of these projects have been inspired by the Bologna Declaration.

4. Local Dimensions – students involvement in QA

The aim of this chapter is to examine the concept of quality and quality assurance in education from the perspective of students and with a focus on student involvement. The focus of this chapter therefore will be based around the development of internal QA procedures. Some ideas and tools will be presented that can help students to get involved in the quality assurance of their own study programs and courses as well as institutions. There will be exploration of several methods of self-organisation within the QA process that will be followed by the outlining of various possible methods that can be utilised by students in becoming key actors in QA in their institutions. The corner stone of this chapter seeks to develop the following:

Why do students have to be involved in the QA process?
Students are the ones for which education has been primarily designed. They are the ones dealing with it day in day out over several years. This makes them real experts on QA; students know best how their (ideal) education and study environment should look like.

Organisation of students

In some countries, the committees that deal with QA are already part of the structure of HEI's. In many other countries, there is still no official place for these committees within the HEI's structure. Therefore, the possibilities that these committees have to achieve their objectives and the way in which students can take part in them also differ a lot. Despite this there are a lot of over-arching similarities between all kinds of 'organised groups of students that want to assure and improve the quality of their education.' Some of the key problems in setting up a QA committee need to be discussed and resolved to allow students to input successfully.

When they don't listen

In the ideal university or polytechnic, when you have a problem with the quality of your education, you can directly go to the responsible lecturer(s) and solve it together. Also, in an ideal situation, students will always be asked their opinion about the quality of their education and involved in existing or emergent QA schemes. But unfortunately, this ideal situation seldom exists.

Problem:

If nobody wants to listen to what you have to say and the more diplomatic avenues have been exhausted, it may become necessary to use opportunism 'he who screams the loudest often gets the most attention'. This approach can be quite simple to use. You identify one of the main annoying and frustrating problems in your program or faculty related to the quality of teaching, facilities etc. Everybody involved in the area will be aware that this problem exists and that nobody wants to take the action to resolve it. You've tried using the various committees or methods available to you to resolve the matter but nobody is willing to listen let alone take action.

Possible solution:

You do a short survey amongst your fellow students, preferably from different years and specialities and present the outcome to the director of the education. They can take a number of possible actions.
They can thank you for the effort and take the line that they will 'see what they can do with the outcomes at some other point in time.' If this is the situation, or even worse, you're not being taken seriously and are being accused of only complaining, then you're forced to put the problems into an open forum and involve a wider community.
There are many possibilities that you take use, e.g. your local university paper, a regional paper or even the national media. All those education correspondents and news

researchers can be reachable and will be interested, as long as you present them with issue in the right way. Getting attention for a problem is often the first step towards enforcing quality and student's involvement in QA.

Getting things done

It is also possible that the director agrees with you, admits that the problem exists and involves you in the search for a solution. In these scenarios you are in a positive position. You have the opportunity to take part in the problem solving process and demonstrate that you didn't only come up with the problem but also have thoughts on possible solutions. The opportunity to make evident to the institutions the advantages that can be gained by involving students in QA is vital in this scenario. After that, the only thing you still have to do is to organise the structural form of the student representation. You cannot always keep doing everything yourselves. Let other students know what you have accomplished and undertake more small surveys and look at setting up a group of students to help you. Initially look for contact persons in other years/classes and give them something practical to do. If after a while you find that you are working for a longer time and with a bigger group of people, it may be time to see if and how things should be structured (working groups, committee, meeting etc). You should be careful of course not to get overly structured or bureaucratic, since it is imperative that you stay flexible and practical, otherwise you may encounter similar problems as the structures in your institution: slow, bureaucratic and not capable of solving problems in the shot/medium term.

When you have managed to get around the table with the right person(s), you're ultimate goal should be to establish student involvement in the QA process on a structural basis. You should carry out a survey amongst students regarding the structure of the QA process and analyse the current obstacles and ways of solving them. While dealing with the present situation also remain aware of the QA evaluations and the implementation of recommendations.

Composition of the QA committee

For the formation of a committee which is to deal with QA, whether institutionalised in the HEI or not, it is very important to give enough attention to the composition of the committee. At least two aspects of the composition have to be taken into account: the way of deciding on the actual members of the committee and the continuity of the committee.

When you're planning to set up a new committee or are already a member of one and trying to find more people to join it, there are several ways to do this. Of course, the easiest way would be just looking around in your immediate environment of classmates and staff and making them enthusiastic about been involved. The positive thing about this is that it's likely that the committee will consist of people who know each other well and are able to work together. But the negative implications are that the committee probably will not be seen as very representative, neither by the academics, nor by the students of the educational program. This may become an obstacle when the committee is not taken seriously and can allow people the excuse of not to listen to what you have to say. Therefore, it would be beneficial to make sure that all the different groups involved in the study program are represented the committee should reflect the educational community that it serves. To be even more representatives, or at least get recognition as being the official representatives of the students in the study program, the members of the QA committee should be chosen directly by those they represent. Besides recognition, this form of selection can also increase the relationship between students and staff, since those interested would have to present themselves in order to get votes.

Despite the positive aspects of diversity of the members of the committee and a democratic way of composing it, it can have a negative influence on the unity within the committee. The members can be often be open to difference and have opposing ideals and interests, which hinders the development of a strong committee.

Besides the way of finding and choosing members of a QA committee, also its continuity is something that must be given some attention. It's important to find answers for essential questions: how often should the members of the committee change? Should the total committee change at once or gradually? How long should a member stay in the committee? How should knowledge and information be kept in the committee and transferred to new members? Is it possible to build an archive? Is it possible to get some kind of (external) training and other support?

Tasks of QA committee

Although it might seem straightforward, the tasks of a QA committee have to be thought about carefully by its members. It depends on the members of the committee, on the time and energy they have, on the atmosphere in which they (want to) operate, co-operation of teachers, professors, directors and administration staff what the actual tasks will be. Of course, the main idea of QA is evaluation of the quality of education. The committee can assess the strengths and weaknesses of courses and/or entire study programs and even institution. This can be based on surveys which provide an analysis of the problems students face in their studies and/or opinions about it.

Besides this key task, a QA committee can decide to go a step further; it may suggest and initiate changes of courses and study programs that lead to improvements. Of course one should take care that this does not distract from the QA assessments. One should avoid the impression that the QA assessment is done in a subjective way, with the aim of implementing changes.

Another task the QA committee might take upon it is to critically look at possible effects of changes in education that directors or professors intend to implement. This can be seen as a pre-emptive kind of QA. Although most people cannot see into the future and therefore it's often hard to predict what the effect of changes will be, it's always beneficial to take time to think about possible effects it can have.

Evaluation of education

Having a selection of evaluation methodologies is an essential element of a functioning internal QA system. It gives necessary information about actual and perceived strengths and weaknesses of education programs and/or courses. But before just collecting a bunch of information, it's good to consider a few choices that have to be made, based on the following questions:

- When is it useful for students to start evaluating themselves?
- What should always be taken into account with evaluations?
- What different ways of collecting information exist, depending on the purpose of it?

Considering the possibilities and goals of students, three different functions of evaluating seem logical:

1) *Signalling problems in the quality of education.*
   If it is not possible for a group of students to get attention for their questions, problems and complaints, a signalling action might be useful to get this attention. The main goal of the evaluation is signalling problems or to get a broad overview of positive and negative aspects of an educational program. This can also be seen as an attempt to change the culture of the faculty/education. This would move towards a situation where students can get attention for their experiences with their own education. An evaluation and actions following it can open the eyes of teachers and create an atmosphere where students need to get attention for their problems.

   These kinds of evaluations are mainly useful at HEI's without a culture of QA. Where quality of education is not being discussed and where there is no willingness to change this systematically. In these cases, evaluations should obtain basic information about obstacles and positive aspects of an educational

program. In these cases neither students, nor the institution have a direct need for very detailed studies about education. First of all the evaluation should be aimed at getting an overview of some general problems, which should trigger discussions with lecturers. In other words, the evaluation should have the function of starting up discussions about the quality of education programs. About what's desired and what isn't.

2) *Finding out the origins of the problems in order to improve education.*
This function of evaluating aims at investigating the backgrounds and causes of already ascertained problems. The results of the investigation can be used to directly improve aspects of education, like for example the way of teaching, available resources, the study schedule, the study load or the construction of the curriculum.

Evaluations aimed at finding out the origins of problems is especially useful for students in situations where some kind of QA already exists, but not in a way where the student interests are enough taken into account. One can envisage a situation in which evaluations take place within the institution, but students aren't being involved in it. Or if information is being gathered but not published and it remains unclear what happens with it. In these situations, the main concern of students will be to get involved in the process of QA.

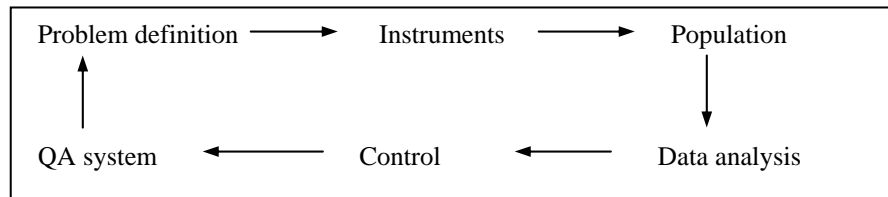3) *Checking if the HEI gives enough attention to assuring quality.*
This function is about evaluating the evaluations of the institution or faculty. It's about finding out how QA actually works, how evaluations are being undertaken, how the complaints of students are being dealt with, how the outcomes of evaluations are being used and what's the role of students in the process.

The question when it's useful for students to actually do an evaluation themselves depends of what already has been done in the past by the HEI. It doesn't make sense to put much time and effort into an evaluation which already has been done in some way in

the past, or when the obstacles you want to detect are already widely known. Therefore, before starting up an evaluation it's wise to find out what information is already available and usable.

When there are still clear obstacles that have to be evaluated, the question should be asked if automatically students should take up the task. QA actually should be the responsibility of the HEI and it's therefore logical to try to convince them to take that responsibility. Of course, only if you can be sure they will do it the way it should be done. If the information you need is not available yet and it's impossible to convince the HEI do a proper evaluation, there's no other option than to do it yourselves. Some things that should be taken into account in every evaluation are described in the following part.

The process of evaluating normally consists of some steps that always come back. It can be seen as a circular process, which can be put in a diagram.

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Problem definition ──────▶ Instruments ──────▶ Population
        ▲                                          │
        │                                          ▼
   QA system  ◀────────── Control  ◀────────── Data analysis
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Problem definition: What do you want to evaluate and with which purpose? Here the three functions of evaluation come back. To get to the purpose of the evaluation and define a clear 'research question' one should consider what the reason was for the evaluation, if there's a concrete definable problem or a general feeling of dissatisfaction. Furthermore, one should decide on which elements of the education the evaluation should focus, like the curriculum, certain courses, educational resources, way of teaching, access to courses, etc.

Instruments: how can you evaluate it? Different kinds of instruments exist, linked with the different functions of evaluations. That is, signalling instruments, diagnostic instruments and procedures aiming at the attention for QA. The instruments can hereby also differ in accuracy, the way in which information will be collected and the sources of

information. Generally speaking, with signalling instruments rough information about the education program is being collected with the goal to bring the quality of education into discussion. Diagnostic instruments aim to give detailed information at course level. Procedures focussing attention on QA analyse to what extent the system of QA in an HEI has been developed properly.

Population: essential questions that has to be answered when a decision about the population has to be taken, are:
-From whom will the information be collected? This has an important influence on the representativity of the collected data.
-What quality should it have? The accountability and validity of data depends considerably on the quality of the population.

Data analysis: how will the data be processed and analysed? When composing an evaluation one should think of the way in which the information produced by will be processed and analysed, like in any other research. Basically the question(s) in the evaluation should be formulated in a clear way, the outcomes of the evaluation should give an answer to the defined problem and it must be possible to process and analyse the data with the available resources, which can vary from manpower to fancy statistical programs.

Control: Are the outcomes/advises of the evaluation implemented in policies or ignored?

QA system: Does (the motive for) the evaluation give ground for changing the existing QA system or even creating one?

There is a wide range of possible methods and procedures that can be used for collecting information. Some of themes are easier to use then others. Some demand a lot of organisation, others much less. Hereafter a few practical examples will be presented, varying in different functions, difficulty and usefulness.

Some examples

Education award

The education award consists of a small questionnaire in which students are simply asked their opinion about the best teacher, course, department, etc. Concrete questions might be:

-Name the three best teachers of your study program.

-Name the three most interesting courses you have followed the last year.

-Name the three departments that have put most effort into education last year.

As many students as possible, from different years, gender, etc should anonymously fill in this questionnaire. Students can put the filled in questionnaire in a box at a central location in the institution. The results can be presented in the paper of the institution or study club, in order to get as much attention as possible.

This instrument is especially suitable for situations where students want to stimulate discussions about the quality of education and where the relations between students and teachers are reasonable. The goal of the education award is to rank teachers, courses or teaching methods.

Complaint box

A complaint box gives students the opportunity to express their complaints, problems and frustrations about their education in an anonymous and easy way. The initiators of the complaint box can use this information to make an inventory of the obstacles within education, give attention to it by publishing regular reports and confront responsible professors or education directors with it. The successful functioning of a complaint box basically depends on two factors:

-The extent in which teachers can be reached. Partly this depends on the attitude of teachers towards critique but also on how periodical and in which way this critique is being presented.

-The extent to which students are being stimulated to post their complaints. Students will only use the complaint box if their complaints are treated seriously and anonymously and if it becomes clear that something happens with these complaints.

Questionnaire

The most common instrument to evaluate education in order to improve the quality of it is an (extended) questionnaire that has to be filled in by students. Questionnaires can be used for a quick inventory of obstacles as well as for further in depth exploration of problems that are detected in earlier evaluations.

The use of questionnaires as an evaluation tool seems logical in the following circumstances:

-If the number of people from whom information is needed is relatively big. (More than 20 people).

-If the number of questions that have to be asked is big.

-If the investigation aims at getting information about quality of education, motives for study choices, plans for specialisation, opinions about teachers, etc.

-If anonymity is essential and cannot be guaranteed via other methods.

-If the answers have to be quantified because of comparisons that have to be made between e.g. courses or teachers.

In a questionnaire questions can be asked in different ways; open questions, yes/no questions, six-point scales, multiple choice questions, etc. In order to reach the desired amount of students, the questionnaires can be sent by post, given to students after courses or filled in during direct interviews. To avoid evaluation results not being taken serious by teachers and directors, much attention should be given to the quality of the questionnaires and the separate questions. Important aspects of any questionnaire are representatively and validity.

Evaluation, and then?

Just implementing an evaluation normally isn't enough to actually realise the goals that lay behind the evaluation. To actually realise these goals, further activities have to be undertaken. Many evaluations end with presentation of the results. And those results find a nice place somewhere on a big pile of reports in a cosy archive. The result of this for students that undertook the evaluation is mainly frustration and a diminishing willingness to put effort in QA of education, as the results are not used. Therefore, in the process of making evaluations you have to think at an early stage about what you want to do with the results of the evaluation. What should be taken into account when undertaking these activities?

Besides knowing what's wrong and some possible solutions, you also have to find the right way to convince teachers and administration to act. Basic skills that might be necessary in this process are the ability to lobby and negotiate. You have to find your way in the informal circuit, the place where many decisions are taken or prepared regarding education. This paragraph deals with the art of governing in this informal circuit and tries to give some ideas about how students can influence this.

Governing as a theatre

The Dutch anthropologist Verweel uses the metaphor of a theatre to explain the way decisions in organisations like HEI's are being made. He compares the different levels of governing with the stage, the backstage and the dressing rooms of a theatre.

The stage

The first and most visible level were governing takes place, is the official circuit. These are for example the institution and faculty board or directors and in some countries existing official advisory committees. Institutionalised QA committees can be part of the official circuit. In these official bodies policy-making regarding education are prepared

and decisions are takes. The official rules that play a role in these bodies and the roles of the people in it are clear to everybody. Therefore Verweel compares this with the stage in a theatre, since also there the roles are being divided beforehand and everybody can see what happens. People on the stage play their role; their own personality doesn't matter too much. The main topics of discussion therefore are completely 'professional'. It would be considered strange if someone for example starts talking about the well being of his sick parrot.

The Backstage

Besides the official circuit (the stage), Verweel distinguishes the semi-official circuit. He calls this the backstage, where in changing compositions several pre-discussions take place with for example teachers, students and administrators. Here the decisions on the stage are being prepared in a more or less structured and somehow open way. Nevertheless, not everybody will be invited to take part in it. This depends on your official role in the decision taking process and your individual status. Because of your role in an official QA committee or student union or because of your personal knowledge or influence on other students, your opinion might have enough importance for such discussions to get 'invited' for them.

Of course it is also possible to take the initiative for such meetings yourself. Especially for topics that are very important for students, like QA issues, this can be very useful to get things done. In these kinds of meetings you can for example find out how other people think about your ideas and complaints or present a first draft of a proposal. It is good to realise that in these kinds of meetings and discussions part of the final decisions are being taken. With your presence you can influence (new) plans in an early stage. The way of working in the backstage is less 'professional' than at the stage. Partly, here also more personal aspects of the decision taking process plays a role and also the way of discussion is less formal than in the official circuit.

The dressing rooms

The least formal and least structured meetings take place in what Verweel call 'the dressing rooms'. These meetings take place in a friendly atmosphere and there is no clear outcome in the form of a concrete plan or policy paper. In the dressing rooms mainly ideas are formed and exchanged, strategies are discussed and sometimes compromises are made. In order to make use of the dressing rooms, it is necessary that people know and trust each other. The way in which the dressing rooms work, often seems to be like an Old Boys Network, with a lot of middle aged, grey man who went to university together when they were young. Therefore, a big part of the discussions are about that shared past, about the shared interest in a certain situation or about a shared conviction. In order to play a role in the dressing rooms, it is necessary to have something in common with the other actors. Confidential information can be exchanged in the dressing rooms, but besides professional topics also a lot of gossip and personal interests and hobbies are being discussed. These discussion topics enhance a strengthening of the confidential band between the discussion partners. In order to conquer a starting position in the dressing rooms, a position at the stage or in the backstage is very helpful. When you have already proved yourself in the backstage, it is easier to get access to the more confidential and personal networks.

Negotiating

According to Professor Mastenbroek in a negotiating process a couple of things have to be taken into account. The most important issues for students dealing with QA, are:

      1) The dilemma of negotiating, fighting or co-operating.

      2) Influencing the balance of power.

      3) Influencing your supporters/electorate.

The dilemma of negotiating, fighting or co-operation

Interdependence is the core of the negotiation process. Without interdependence there is no solid ground for a negotiation. In order to negotiate in a fruitful way, the negotiating partners should have something in common. The different sides of the table should both have an interest in reaching a deal. This interest might a certain quality level of education with which everybody can be satisfied. But besides a common interest of reaching some kind of compromise, there are of course also different points of views, different opinions and different interests. The, somewhat opposite, strategies one can choose are co-operating, negotiating or fighting.

Co-operating is the best option when the two parties depend a lot on each other. The parties have broadly the same opinions and the same objectives. By co-operating in the whole process of decision taking the parties come to a shared optimal result. The interests and desires of both parties are being respected.

Negotiating takes place when there are clear opposite interests between the two parties. But despite that, negotiating can only take place when there are also shared interests. Without certain shared interests, there won't be an incentive to come to an agreement.

Fighting can be used to conquer a stronger position on the 'balance of power'. It can be used when there are no (recognised) shared interests. Fighting is a strategy that in many cases seems to be the most logical and useful. Especially when parties are insecure about there position on the 'balance of power'.

The boundaries between the three ways of behaviour are not very clear. They are part of a continuum.

Influencing the balance of power
One of the most important aspects in negotiations is the balance of power. The balance of power can be described as the relationship between dependence and independence of the different actors involved. In situations where the independency is bigger than the dependency, you can often see strange behaviour occurs; manipulating and exploiting

behaviour versus humble and pliable behaviour. But one should recognise each other's interests and each other's position. One should have the feeling to gain by negotiating on a somewhat equal level.

The balance of power can be influenced by:

1) *Fighting*

Certain aggressive/fighting behaviour might give the opponent the impression that the negotiator believes strongly in her own standpoint and is therefore difficult to convince otherwise. The other party has to put more effort in winning the discussion on the basis of arguments. Fighting behaviour might however lead to a win-lose strategy, with the danger that the opponent will refuse to negotiate at all.

2) *Manipulation*

By manipulation, it is sometimes possible to gain more influence in the negotiation. This is a subtle strategy, very dependent on the individual characteristics of the negotiator. Manipulation is a special kind of pressure tool, because with it you can aim at someone's norms and values, her relation with the people she represents, personal characteristics as intelligence and integrity and the way she behaves as a negotiator.

The risk of this strategy is substantial. Manipulation means someone submitting without them being aware of it. With a naïve opponent this might be possible, but even then there is a real chance that they will get a negative feeling, that will trouble future negotiations.

3) *Facts and expert knowledge*

'New facts' or things that are presented in that way and have a direct relation with the balance of power, should be in some way true and believable and presented as factual as possible. Examples of 'new facts' are the birth of a stronger coalition or the coming into existence of alternatives for the current relation of interdependence. Especially the existence of alternatives can have quite some weight.

4) Exploring

Exploring means taking a certain initiative; ask questions, present information, do a proposal, create a possible package deal. With relatively a lot of these initiatives your strategic room of manoeuvre expands. Furthermore, exploring means trying to act in the interests of the both parties. It gives you the possibility to show your best intentions for getting shared solutions, which provides your behaviour legitimisation.

5) *Strengthen relationship*

The relationship with the opponent can be strengthened by development of acceptation and trust. Other ways can be the development of a stronger common interest and enlargement of the amount of topics for which you invent and realise outcomes that are interesting for both parties.

6) *Convincing power*

Elements of convincing power are:

-A clear, well-structured way of expressing the own opinion.

-A rather relaxed, but not careless, attitude.

-Variation in tone and tempo of speaking; examples and structure in the story, simple facts and catching metaphors; use of visual tools.

-A somewhat 'emotional' connection with your vision, without being rhetoric and dogmatic.

Influencing your supporters/electorate

Possibly the most important, but also most neglected, aspect of a negotiation is the negotiation with the people you (try to) represent. The people who negotiate with each other need to have some room for manoeuvre. Some room to compromise and also room to come to a final result that is acceptable and feasible for their supporters/electorate.

There are a number of obstacles and problems one can face regarding the relation with the people you represent:

- The relationship with the supporters is not been considered as a negotiation-relationship. The negotiators always do exactly what their supporters want, which limits their room of manoeuvre in the negotiations substantially.

- The supporters have chosen the negotiators because of the promises they have made. Possibly many of these promises they cannot fulfil.

- The negotiating-delegation has a very precise and limited mandate, which limits the variation in possible outcomes and the creativity of the negotiation to a minimum.

- The supporters have pushed the negotiating-delegation to strive for a result, which is unreachable.

In the relationship with the supporters/electorate should be enough room for manoeuvre. Not only regarding the final outcome of the negotiation, but also regarding the way in which the final outcome will be presented.

5. The Future Development of Quality Assurance

All the chapters thus far have alluded in some part to the future of quality assurance with regards their different areas whether that is internationalisation, student involvement or policy changes within QA. The developments of Quality Assurance like the process itself are continuous and thus a periodic review of development needs to be carried out by all those involved in the process. This does not however preclude us from examining the possible development over the next five years especially within the context of the Bologna process that is set to achieve its goals in 2010. It is clear that there are certain developments that are more likely to dominate this period of time and this chapter seeks to explore these themes and pose some of the major questions, which will have to be dealt with in the continuing Bologna process. Indeed, with the run up to the Berlin conference in late 2003 the new targets for higher education will be laid out.

There are three major thematic areas, which seem to be worthy of particular examination in the run up to the Berlin Conference and future of the quality assurance in higher education. These three areas are Quality Culture, Global Quality Label and QA within the growing TNE area. These future areas are dealt with in the following manner. First there is a brief introduction to the them, explanation of what is involved in the implementation, then follows an analysis of benefits and problems which may occur and some possible areas of criticism and praise of the themes.

Quality Culture:

"The issue of internal quality was presented as a central priority to both the development of individual institutions and the European Higher Education Area."

The term Quality Culture (QC) has recently gained considerable ground within QA circles and is currently the focus of a joint EUA-European Commission project that is

seeking to examine the establishment of quality culture within several Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) in a variety of countries. Indeed the emphasis that the EUA and European Commission are placing on quality culture can be seen in the guidelines for the project, which states, "*The past decade has seen an explosion of national quality assurance systems in Europe. These have been developed to assure stakeholders that higher education institutions are fulfilling their role and functions in society. As important as these external processes are, however, EUA considers essential that HEI's develop an internal quality culture to ensure and monitor enhancement of their activities and services in a way that is congruent to core academic values.*"

A possible definition of Quality Culture is:

"*An organic internal rather legislated external approach by institutions and departments towards dealing with the deliver of quality courses. Quality Culture is based around a internal system of continuous quality which seeks to establish quality higher education through a holistic approach on a day to day basis*"

Quality Culture envisages methods of evaluating and establishing high levels of quality which can be undertaken by the institution or department itself and which, if correctly managed, can increase the quality of the education without requiring the over involvement of external Quality Assurance procedures. The EUA project which is currently underway clearly outlines some of the added advantages for institutions for establishing a strong organic and holistic quality culture as well as the growing importance that Quality Culture is viewed by HEI's. The high number of applications (137 at the end of 2002), clearly shows, there is growing awareness of the need to strengthen an internal quality culture that has its origin in a range of factors that have prompted universities to become more pro-active in this area. Specifically:

- increased autonomy from governments

- increased demands for accountability linked to the massification of higher education and its concomitant rising costs on the public purse

- increased need to diversify income sources as government funding stagnates or declines

- the rise of the "knowledge society" and the heightened expectations of higher education's contribution to the national and regional economy

- the on-going creation of the European higher education and research area

- increased internationalisation (e.g., student and staff mobility, cross-border partnerships) which – through comparisons – raises expectations about quality

- increased globalisation, which is leading to the emergence of competitors in hitherto safe national "markets" as well as trend toward the "marketisation" of higher education.

While the above are clearly advantageous for the institution there are certain aspects of quality culture that students need to be critical of. These relate primarily to the level relations between the institution, staff and students. Indeed the student perspective on Quality Culture could be outlined in the reply to above points.

- While institutional autonomy from the state, has undoubted benefits there is a need for the state to exercise some level of control over higher education, both for the good of the state and of the students. Regardless the level of institutional autonomy, strong student involvement in all processes of quality assurance must always be guaranteed.

- The increased demand for HE and the pressure of numbers would represent a good case for the development of a good quality culture, which would function on a more "grass-roots" level.

- A major area of concern for students with regards to Quality Culture is that it is not used to maintain the status quo in HEI's, which have poor standards of quality. Quality Culture must be assessed by an external body to ensure that HEI's are not merely using the premise of QC to avoid the rigors of an external Quality Assurance system. Trust between the student body, staff and management is a basic element of quality culture.

- The successful implementation of a Quality Culture which is holistic should have major side benefits for the HEI's involved. The relationships between staff, students and the institution should be strengthened as well as the reputation of the HEI to provide not only good education but also a good environment and support system for the students to live and learn in.

Students may also benefit from a good quality culture in so far as areas, which are identified as been below standard, should in theory be more easily brought up to standard through the grass-roots approach of Quality Culture.

Global/World Quality Label:

Introduction

There is a wide variety of Quality Assurance Agencies (QAA) worldwide. There is currently little uniformity or harmonisation of quality assurance agencies and their procedures. Indeed many countries, regions and cultures are developing their own approaches to academic quality assurance. Some agencies are state-driven; others are private, with many intermediate forms. Some are embedded in the higher education sector, but many are not and are imposed on the higher education sector by states, professions or other bodies. Some agencies are working as real accreditors of programmes or institutions, others organise merely quality assurance procedures with no clear standards, benchmarking or final statements. Although there is some convergence towards a global quality model, there still is great divergence in methodologies, protocols, assessment techniques and outcomes. The consequences of evaluations can be manifold and therefore all the functions or quality assurance and accreditation differ to a high degree.

A possible definition for the GQL is:

"A Quality Label that is given to internationally trustworthy quality assurance and accreditation agencies (QAAAs), under the legitimacy of a consortium formed by international groups (International Association of Universities Presidents (IAUP) ,the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and UNESCO). The GQL awarded to an agency guarantees that this agency meets the internationally defined standards for trustworthy quality assurance. These include clear commitment to develop international standards of academic quality among the institutions and programmes evaluated by it, fair and appropriate quality assessment procedures, well developed and publicly available protocols, published reports, etc. As a

consequence, the quality mark of the QAAA signifies that the institutions and programmes evaluated by this agency meet trustworthy standards of academic quality. Students, academic staff, programmes and institutions wishing to cooperate with these programmes and institutions in the context of various forms of internationalisation of higher education, can have a reasonable confidence in their academic quality."

Opportunities and benefits

The opportunities and benefits for HE institutions under a GQL would be the guarantee that institutions or programmes evaluated or accredited by these QAAAs have a reliable and trustworthy quality. This would have implications for matters such as student mobility, credit transfer, recognition and equivalence of degrees. Benefits for students and learners worldwide is that the GQL will have an stimulating effect on the quality of HE provision worldwide, will help to assure that HE institutions worldwide strive for the highest academic quality possible in a certain environment.

Requirements of QAA seeking the GQL:

- Activities of the agency concern external quality assurance or accreditation; this means a sufficiently autonomous position towards institutions.

- The quality assurance or accreditation covers mainly the educational function of HE institutions, namely teaching and learning activities.

- Activities of the agency can be defined as quality evaluation, review, audit, assessment or accreditation. The interval between successive quality assessments of programs or institutions is maximum ten years, but preferably shorter.

- The range of institutions evaluated or accredited by the agency can be public and private, national or transnational, confined to one discipline or covering many disciplines, etc., but the majority of the institutions or programs covered must be granting officially recognised degrees.

- There is some kind of formal recognition of the agency at regional, national or international level.

- The agency must have a certain experience in the field of external quality assurance or accreditation. The minimum period of operation is 2 years.

- The agency should have a quality assurance policy itself, with a continuous reassessment of quality assurance and accreditation practices

Criteria related to methodology, protocols and quality assessment procedures:

- First of all full independence must be guaranteed in the quality assessment practices and in the decisions-making processes, even if the agency itself is linked to the institutional higher education sector 'sufficiently autonomous position'.

- The agency must have publicly available protocols or manuals. These describe in a transparent way the procedures and standards used in quality assessment processes.

- The agency applying for a GQL should describe the minimum standards used in its quality assessment or accreditation processes, and the way in which these standards have been subject to international benchmarking.

- In case of accreditation agencies, it must be clear that accreditation is given on the basis of external quality assessment.

The EQUIS Initiative

A different type of bottom-up initiative is the European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS), a process through which provision in Business Schools is accredited. The process has the aim not only of improving quality but also of creating transparency to assist and inform (future) students and enhance recognition. An increasing number of Business Schools from Europe, and some from beyond, have been accredited.

However, the EQUIS accreditation process is not the only label for international recognition in management education. Other accreditation processes include the AMBA accreditation of MBAs and accreditation by the AACSB. Indeed several of the best known Business Schools have sought and been awarded accreditation by more than one accreditation body which poses questions about transparency. Although no top-down process is intended, this type of approach would at some point put pressure on countries where quality assurance systems do not yet exist, or where they are not sufficiently transparent. If they respond positively, by establishing or improving such systems, this would contribute to the desired convergence.

However, if this would not be the case, an undesired division would be created in Europe, with possible negative consequences for the competitiveness of these non-convergent systems and for the flows of students from these particular systems to others, which better guarantee the quality and thus the recognition of qualifications. Finally, it should be emphasized that in general the role of governments, and thus that of national recognition agencies, in recognition of qualifications is being marginalised by bottom-up developments at other levels

Critic on GQL:

- When the INQAAHE was first formed it was understood that it would guard against becoming an "international bureaucracy". The primary function of the INQAAHE was to create a network for informal, mutual support by exchange of information and possibly personnel. Many actors in HE are concerned that any formal international system would be over bureaucratic.

- The need for the type of GQL that is outlined above i.e. a body, which accredits the accreditors to an international standard is not in itself a reason to implement such a system. The development of a GQL should be based on an analyses of various QAAA from a 'users' perspective. It should be clear to both the QAAA and the 'users' of the QAAA what problems would be solved by the formation of GQL.

- The issues of regulation of the QAAA are separate to the creation of a GQL. Indeed it may be more feasible to protect the higher education sector against any untrustworthy or disreputable QAAAs that exist through innovations on a national or regional level. There is also the problem that emerges with the QAAA's that do not apply for recognition under the GQL that their ability to award accreditation would be untrustworthy.

- The matter of mutual recognition and co-operation between QAAAs, is of obvious benefits to institutions, staff and students. The question is whether this co-operation can be achieved by bilateral, multilateral or regional in/formal agreements rather than by trying to establish formal global arrangements.

- The wide diversity of QAAAs which exist for numerous reasons (political, social, cultural etc.) would be restricted by the GQL model which may not take account of the reasons for diversity. Further to this the instance that common standards of quality be defined and decisions taken in accordance with them may 1-lead to very

weak standards (due to global agreement) and 2- would fail to recognize non-standardized courses

- Finally the GQL may just become another bureaucratic burden as ensuring that the 'level' or 'type' of quality that is recognized in the QAAA may not be the same in HEIs it evaluates. There could also be a lack of consistency between QAAAs on how the GQL label is assigned or its benefits allocated to an HEI.

Internationalisation, TNE and QA:

Introduction

Internationalisation and quality of higher education have always been closely linked together, at least at the conceptual level. This is based on the strong belief that internationalisation enhances the quality of higher education. Many policy documents, especially those published in the 1980s and early 1990s, consider internationalisation as a means to improving quality, rather than an end in itself. Examples include OECD and EU documents, statements on national policies for internationalisation, and also many institutional-level policy plans for internationalization.

From these various initiatives, it became clear that, although internationalisation and quality may be closely linked at a conceptual level, they were not so much linked at the level of practice and policy. Furthermore, it was found that:

a) it is very difficult to evaluate the contribution of internationalisation to the quality of education

b) that the quality of internationalisation itself was in general not monitored or assessed systematically

c) that the link between quality assurance and the international recognition of higher education qualifications is often unclear

d) that actors and agencies involved in internationalisation and those involved in quality assurance represent quite different and unconnected groups and organizations.

Internationalisation is not fully covered by quality assurance procedures dealing primarily with the core functions in education and research. The lack of coordination between quality assurance bodies on the one hand and those that promote internationalisation does not only exist in Europe, but was also reported from elsewhere, notably the US. At the same time, an internationalisation process was going on in the field of quality assurance, whereas in earlier years factors related to internationalisation, (increased international competitiveness, international academic and professional mobility) only had a marginal impact on the quality debates, which were situated at the level of national policy-making.

Increasingly, quality assurance actors and agencies became involved in international networks and associations, e.g. the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), through which they ex-changed information and experiences. It was acknowledged that also in education, taking an international approach could strengthen quality assurance processes and outcomes, as had been the case for a time already in research reviews. Both external and internal pressures motivated the demand for international quality assurance. Internal pressures include the enhanced international mobility of students and the overseas marketing of higher education systems, i.e. the export of higher education, and external pressures come from the globalisation of the professions, regional trade agreements, and international organisations.

Internationalisation of QA

The internationalisation of quality assurance did not in all cases automatically lead to an increased focus on quality assurance of the increasingly important international dimension in higher education itself. The main reasons for this included:

a) internationalisation was in some cases still seen as a marginal activity

b) national processes for assuring quality were not intended to serve an international purpose

c) the diverse nature and spread of internationalisation activities within individual institutions and across institutions within a higher education system

d) the above-mentioned lack of coordination between quality assurance and internationalisation actors and agencies.

The latter also include the agencies responsible for the international recognition of credentials and qualifications, the European Network of Information Centers (ENICs) and National Academic Recognition and Information Centers (NARICs). This re-inforced the often weak connection between quality assurance and international recognition.

Transnational education: international quality assurance initiatives

Under the auspices of UNESCO (Europe region) and the Council of Europe, following the approval of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications, concerning Higher Education in the European region (the Lisbon Convention). A Working Group on Transnational Education was set up (in 1998), to develop a Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education. The composition of the Working Group reflected a mix of the education exporters, the USA, UK and Australia, countries where transnational education was delivered such as Israel, Slovakia and Spain, and countries that both receive and provide transnational education such as Russia and Latvia. The Code (which is still in draft) includes a set of principles that should be respected by institutions involved in the provision of educational services through transnational arrangements. The Code will be complemented by a Recommendation on procedures and criteria for the assessment of foreign qualifications to be implemented by the network of recognition center in the Europe region.

Key issues for Quality Assurance agencies

Transnational education is not going to disappear while an enormous demand for learning and qualifications goes unmet in the developing world. To legislate it out of existence would be to deny access to education for many people. The fast pace of development of ICTs and the use of the Internet will provide one means of meeting increasingly diverse demands for flexible access to education and qualifications from those already in

employment. These developments pose serious challenges for quality assurance agencies, higher education institutions and students alike, as there will be a change in the way education is learnt and delivered. Indeed these points are now forming the focus of discussion at a ministerial and policy level and may start to become the focus of the Bologna Process in the run up to the next ministerial meeting in Berlin in 2003.

Implications for quality assurance in Europe

What kind of action can be expected from this dialogue between ministers, ministerial officials and higher education institutions? One could expect a series of national reforms, possibly taking inspiration from those countries that recently reformed their systems in line with the Bologna Declaration. They are likely to go for a two-tier degree structure (bachelor & master) through the introduction of shorter first degrees. The requirements of compatibility and comparability refer strongly to the transparency function of quality assurance systems, whereas quality assurance in the national context is typically geared towards accountability and improvement. This raises questions regarding the relationship between these various functions of quality assurance and between transparency and improvement in particular.

The Bologna Declaration includes a phrase on the promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies. In this context, it is only proposed so far that a common framework of reference for qualifications will be worked out. It is said that this should not introduce a new category of European degrees or qualifications, but a common framework for existing ones. Some recent reactions on the Bologna initiative from the side of the higher education institutions demonstrate an agreement on the need to guarantee the quality of programmes, credits and degrees. Accreditation is seen as a means to guarantee such minimum standards of quality in favor of students, employers and society. It was emphasised, however, that this should refer to content and not lead to the labeling of quantitative factors. The question on how a European-wide accreditation system and quality assurance system should operate was answered in the following ways. It would be

the responsibility of the higher education system itself to develop a continental-wide system, based upon self-regulation schemes, which would use the national systems of quality assurance as a reference point or benchmark.

Therefore there should be close liaison between the higher education system on the one hand, and governments on the other. As a step forward is often seen to guarantee minimum quality by a national accreditation agency and to recognize the results of national accreditation procedures in a multilateral agreement, establishing a common but, to a certain extent, flexible frame of reference for joining to all universities concerned and willing. It was made clear that this procedure should include representatives of the higher education community and future employers of graduates, and that it should observe expertise of the individual discipline or profession, guarantee internationally competitive quality by the contribution of experts of peers from other countries.

It is clear that there is no body or platform with the necessary competence in this field that could operate at a European level and also that this idea would not be acceptable for the higher education institutions, as much as for most governments.

Conclusion:

This handbook has sought to gather together a large range of information on all aspect of quality assurance within higher education. The first chapter dealt with the basic concept and history of quality assurance and its application in the field of education. The second chapter which dealt with European and International developments, moving onto the third chapter, which is perhaps the pivotal section, sought to compare and contrast different QA and accreditation systems in Europe. The fourth chapter which is aimed in particular for student representatives dealing with QA in a "hands-on" manner and the final chapter which aimed to highlight three of the main areas which are now under discussion in the higher education. In the appendix there is a list of questions, which as student representatives we need to begin answering in order to deal with the future of Quality Assurance and its effect on students. There is also a list of reference books and papers

and websites which can provide more information with regard to the topics in each chapter.

Finally, ESIB- the National Unions of Students in Europe has been very glad to have been given the opportunity to work on this topic, which is of key importance to students and would like to take this opportunity to thank the European Commission again for their help and support throughout the project.

Index:

1. Websites

ESIB – the National Unions of Students in Europe: www.esib.org

European Commission – Education and Culture DG:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/index_n.html

LSVb – Dutch National Union of Students: www.lsvb.nl

SFS – National Union of Students in Sweden: www.sfs.se

UNESCO – Education Department: www.unesco.org/education/

EUA - European University Association: www.unige.ch/eua

ENIC-NARIC Networks: http://www.enic-naric.net/

ENQA - European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education:

www.enqa.net

INQAAHE - International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher

Education: www.inqaahe.nl/

OECD – Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development: www.oecd.org

NCQA – National Committee for Quality Assurance (USA): www.nsqa.org

QAA – Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (UK): www.qaa.ac.uk

HSV – Högskoleverket, Swedish National Agency of Higher Education: www.hsv.se

2. Reference Books and Papers

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Quality Assurance in the Nordic Higher Education- accreditation like practices; ENQA occasional papers 2

Institutional Evaluations in Europe; ENQA Workshop reports 1

International Initiatives and Trends in QA for European Higher education; ENQA Exploratory Trend Reports

Apendix: Further questions:

Despite the comprehensive nature of this handbook it is not exhaustive and these are some issues that you should also consider when dealing with Quality Assurance:

1. What is the optimal way of assuring the quality of transnational education provision to protect the interests of students while ensuring that the objective of widening access to higher education is achieved?

2. Given different philosophies about the purposes and aims of higher education and the diversity of transnational education provision can there be a single solution to the quality assurance dilemma?

3. Given the challenges of managing new modes of delivery such as on-line distance learning and transnational education provision, is there a need for greater focus by quality assurance agencies on institutional quality management processes?

4. Do the new modes of delivery and study imply some re-thinking about the use of duration of study or contact hours i.e. input factors as any kind of measure of learning or descriptor for academic qualifications?

5. Should the focus shift to clearer definition of outputs: learning outcomes and competences?

6. Without clearer definition of outcomes and academic standards at national level is international comparison possible?

7. Should quality assurance agencies seek greater participation of a wider group of stakeholders in higher education in their processes and governance to tackle the review of new provision and providers? For example, how many actively involve employers, recent graduates and/or students?

8. Is there is a tension between the fact that while higher education is becoming more international its quality is still mainly being assessed in the national context?

9. How can quality assurance contribute to improving the international comparability of higher education and the recognition of diplomas and degrees, in the first instance in the European context, but also in the wider international context?

10. Which methods and mechanisms for quality assurance and accreditation will best facilitate such international comparability and can be linked with recognition measures such as credit transfer and accumulation, including lifelong learning tracks?

11. How can quality assurance systems address the quality of programmes offered by new types of higher education providers, including commercial and virtual institutions?

12. This is even more complex where these providers may be offering transnational provision. What then is the responsibility of national-level or other actors for the quality assurance of transnational education and related issues such as consumer information and protection?

13. How can the international dimension of higher education be better integrated in quality assurance systems and methods?

14. How can coordination between actors and agencies in the field of quality assurance and those involved in internationalisation including recognition agencies be improved?

15. Will there be a shift in the functions of quality assurance systems as a result of stronger international influences and applications?

16. While quality assurance in the national context is typically geared towards accountability and improvement, in the international context there seems to be a need for an increased focus on transparency and consumer information for students?

17. At what level should initiatives in this area be undertaken, and by whom?

18. Will Networks and multiple accreditation initiatives contribute to quality improvement and transparency other than identify minimum threshold levels of quality?

19. How artificial will common international qualification frameworks be if they have to cover o include all the existing national frameworks?

20. Is there a need for convergence of terminology?

21. Is there a role for the EQNA in working towards proposing (and using) a common terminology for quality and standards?