

REFLECTIONS ON QA IN THE EHEA

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- 1 Introduction
- 2 General Remarks on the Introduction of QA
- 3 Actual Situation of QA in HE
 - 3.1 QA in Governance and Management
 - 3.2 QA in Research
 - 3.3 QA in Teaching and the Bologna Process
 - 3.4 Some Suggestions for the Implementation of QA Systems
- 4 Two Current European Evaluation Procedures
 - 4.1 The Institutional Evaluation Programme of the EUA
 - 4.2 The External Institutional Evaluation of ARACIS
- 5 Conclusions

1 Introduction

- Late 1990s Council of the European Union has required QA in HE
- 1999 European Ministers of Education adopted the Bologna Declaration
 - HE in Europe should be more comparable and better visible from outside
 - Student and staff mobility should be facilitated
 - European HE system should be compatible with the cultural diversity of European countries and also respect the tradition of university autonomy and academic freedom such as recognized by the Magna Charta Universitatum 1988
- Point of view of this presentation: experience from 20 evaluations in Europe and Columbia, former rector of the University of Klagenfurt

Impact Factors on HE Institutions in Europe 2007-2010

(Andrée Sursock (EUA), 1st October 2010, Copenhagen)

- Bologna Process 78%
- QA reforms 63%
- Internationalization 61%
- Governance reforms 49%
- Funding reforms 45%
- European research and innovation policies 43%
- Demographic changes 26%
- Rankings 23%

2 General Remarks on the Introduction of QA

- For a successful introduction of QA in HE institutions the procedures should be balanced between improvement, support mechanisms and bureaucracy;
- Up to now the support part seems not to be sufficiently realized at many institutions; Hence critical people see only the additional bureaucratic load;
- QA cannot be considered as an isolated task of an institution or only as a national task. It is a European and global challenge. Hence, the introduction of QA should be based on national and international experiences.
- HE institutions in small countries should not practice only national accreditations and not undergo only national evaluations. Countries like Austria loose a big chance with respect to internationalization by the installation of pure national quality agencies.

- QA should always be a central concern of the whole institution.
- QA has to cover all aspects of actions in the institution, namely teaching, research, relations with the environment as well as governance and administration.
- QA usually starts with a commitment of the leadership and a top-down process to all members of the institution.
- There should be also room for bottom-up initiatives.
- The result should be a quality culture of the institution and not different quality cultures of faculties and departments.
- The institution's community should be informed on the outcomes of the installed QA systems.
- QA systems have to be linked to strategic planning and decision making bodies.

3 Actual Situation of QA in HE

Activities Covered by QA Processes (ongoing EUA-Project) (Henrik Toft Jensen (EUA), 2nd October 2010, Copenhagen)

- Teaching and learning 100%
- Research 80%
- Service to society 50%
- Student support services 75%
- Governance and administration of the institution 66%

3.1 QA in Governance and Management

- All HE have started with quality management procedures.
- Enormous amounts of data with respect to quality and scientific output are collected and stored.
- There are nearly no functioning QA systems.
- Missing links to strategic planning and decision making bodies.
- No support mechanisms for staff and students.
- Teachers, students, administrative staff and external stakeholders should be involved.
- Homogenous rules for student admission, staff recruitment and staff development.
- Problem of missing corporate identity in many institutions.

3.2 QA in Research

- Many of the European HE institutions are teaching institutions. Nearly all institutions want to move in the direction of a teaching institution with research or even want to become a research institution.
- Especially for smaller institutions there are not enough financial resources to create their independent research units.
- Hence it is absolutely necessary to focus research in order to become visible and to enforce co-operations with other institutions in order to form critical masses.

3.3 QA in Teaching and the Bologna Process

- University-teaching should be student centered and research based.
- Severe problems with respect to undergraduate teaching in HE institutions in many European countries.
- Implementation of the three-cycle Bologna system with Bachelor, Master and Doctoral studies has been realized in many countries under enormous time pressure.
- First implementation resulted in a school-similar system without any time for autonomous student work and self learning parts.
- Former careers of 4 and even 5 years have been pressed into the new 3 year bachelor programmes.
- Overloaded bachelor programmes also obstruct student mobility.
- Bachelor- and master-programmes have to be evaluated with respect to contents, employability, internationalization and mobility.

3.4 Some Suggestions for Successful Implementation of QA Systems

- Include teachers, students, administrative staff and external stakeholders;
- Be open for alternative suggestions and bottom-up procedures;
- Support creativity and do not over-formalize procedures;
- Encourage internal quality discussions and reflections;
- Define measurable indicators and criteria for quality;
- Set up consequences and install procedures of consulting and assistance based on the results of evaluations and quality monitoring;
- Install incentives for quality;
- Introduce evaluation procedures – if convenient on a voluntary basis – but do not overkill of evaluations;
- Keep information on QA actions and results going.

4 Two Current European Evaluation Procedures

4.1 Institutional Evaluation Programme of EUA

The **Institutional Evaluation Programme** (IEP) of EUA has been running for 16 years. The total number of universities that have participated in the Programme until now is more than 250, located in 35 **European countries**, in four **Latin American countries**, in **South Africa** and in **Japan**.

- Strong emphasis on the self-evaluation phase
- A European and international perspective
- A peer-review approach
- Improvement oriented
- Focus on institution as a whole

Objectives of the EUA Evaluation

- What is the Institution trying to do?
- How is the Institution trying to do it?
- How does the Institution know it works?
- How does the Institution change in order to improve itself?

IEP is not accrediting, ranking or comparing institutions.

4.2 External Institutional Evaluation of ARACIS

ARACIS-evaluations are strictly conducted in correspondence with the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and have a clear focus on the evaluation of study programmes. The ARACIS external evaluation of academic quality in accredited higher education institutions is carried out for the periodical certification, every five years, of the academic quality of the educational and research services as part of the educational process within an accredited university.

Accreditation and evaluation procedures like the ARACIS-process guarantee certain standards of teaching and research to be fulfilled. Hence these procedures are very important to assure quality in HE, especially in HE systems with high autonomy.

By my opinion the IEP- and the ARACIS-procedures complement each other.

5 Conclusions

- QA in HE has become an important concern for policy-makers and institutions;
- QA is pointed out as a strategic goal of nearly all institutions and all try to prove their daily commitment to permanent quality improvement;
- Many institutions still have not installed functioning QA systems;
- Procedures like the IEP- or ARACIS-evaluations assist HE institutions implementing QA;
- Strategic planning and a development plan are essential for the introduction of a functioning QA system;
- “Small can also be beautiful” – “quality instead of quantity”;

The advantage of HE in Europe is that there are many excellent, enthusiastic and highly motivated people working within the institutions.