

Vortrag Petzina

Titel: European Perspectives of Quality Assurance – the Contribution of Accreditation

Ladies and Gentleman,

thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. The Berlin conference has recently confirmed the vital role of quality assurance in the Bologna process by giving intermediate priority to the promotion of effective quality assurance systems. I would like to bring to your attention some thoughts on how accreditation can contribute towards quality assurance on a European level.

1. Let me first state that I think that accreditation is a “must” in the effort to create a European area of higher education. There are other forms of quality assurance beside accreditation (e.g. evaluation, internal quality assurance of higher education institutions), but it is our experience from the past years that accreditation is – at least within the current framework in Germany – best suited to safeguard transparency and comparability of degree programmes. Accreditation is able to guarantee the academic quality of degree programmes and to ensure the equivalence of higher education standards throughout Europe.
2. Where do we stand at the moment? Accreditation is still a fairly recent development in most European countries. Some are building up national accreditation systems, others are still considering whether or not other quality assurance instruments are more suitable to their (national) needs. Accreditation procedures are still being developed. There are different objects of accreditation, eg. degree programmes and / or higher education institutions. In the process of establishing accreditation on a national scale countries move at different speeds.
3. In this early phase accreditation mainly strives to gain national acceptance. There is still (widespread) doubt as to whether accreditation can accomplish the task it was set up for. So it is of utmost importance that accreditation will soon prove itself a reliable instrument to achieve quality assurance in higher education on a national scale. Its procedures and results must gain credibility and thus gain the confidence of higher education institutions, the state, future students, the labour market and the public at large.
4. However, with a European area of higher education before our eyes, it is evident that accreditation cannot end at national borders. Even now the number of joint degrees and degree programmes that require substantial studies abroad is increasing. And the Berlin conference has once more underlined that a European area of higher education needs more programmes that include studies abroad. AQAS receives more and more requests whether such accreditation processes can be undertaken and we are of course very interested to do so. It is, of course, a prerequisite that as soon as degree programmes transcend national boundaries a quality assurance instrument must be available that is recognized by all partners involved.

5. So, while national accreditation procedures are being developed, accreditation is moving towards a European dimension with a high degree of momentum. The need of a coordinated European action arises. As a first result accreditation networks like ENQA (European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) and ECA (European Consortium of Accreditation Agencies) have been founded to promote the European dimension of quality assurance and accreditation. They serve the mutual understanding of accreditation systems and procedures and they will play a vital role in developing accreditations procedures that will be acceptable in the countries that signed the Bologna declaration. It is encouraging that a recent survey carried out by ECA revealed rather more similarities among national accreditation procedures than differences.
6. A European ability to act with respect to accreditation necessarily requires that national authorities and key players in higher education must open up towards international concerns of accreditation. Therefore AQAS has eg. secured cooperation of international experts in the work of its accreditation commission and if possible in the review teams that visit the higher education institution in the accreditation process.