Discussion Groups

Discussion group meetings: The latest development in the system of higher education in Europe: Contribution to Salamanca Discussion presented by the representatives of the Czech and Swedish Rectors. Conferences.

Participants:

1. higher education representatives,
2. representatives of the government not involved in Ministers   meeting,
3. other participants

3 discussion groups

1. **Curricular content based on the articulation of studies into two main cycles**

   key words: _looking for convergence by keeping diversity - compatible qualifications - relevant higher education and professional networks at the European level - specifications of core constituents of qualifications and enhancement of their mutual acceptance - openness and transferability._

2. **Networking of higher education institutions . facilitating mobility**

   key words: _exploiting_ _advantages of existing European and national legislation in order to facilitate mutual recognition of study programme units , degrees and qualifications throughout Europe . credit accumulation and transfer scheme . credits obtained at institutions and in programmes outside higher education (seen from the perspective of lifelong learning)._

3. **Quality assessment, accreditation**

   key words: _internal and external evaluation (types of responsible bodies) - accreditation (responsible bodies, role of the state) - recognition of national processes in Bologna signatory countries (procedures, mechanisms etc.) - quality assurance mechanisms - European dimension - meta-accreditation on the European level ?_

   Each group session will be opened with a presentation of either a Swedish or Czech participants on the relevant topic, followed by a paper given by a European expert on the same issue. After the discussion rapporteurs will sum up the work in each group.

(Updated 17 May 2001)

1. Curricular content based on the articulation of studies into two main cycles - Structured Study and Curricula at European Institutes of Higher Education and Universities

Abstract

The integration process within European institutes of higher education and universities must not be directed towards their unification, but, on the contrary, in a certain sense, it should promote their certain diversification reflecting cultural and economic development of the country and diversification based on traditions and personalities belonging to the university. Introduction of structured study will require redevelopment of the existing curricula of classic study implemented at universities and institutes of higher education. The changes do not imply only a different time distribution, but also necessary interventions in the curricula of individual courses. There might even be a necessity of some intervention in the study programs at secondary schools. Special attention must be devoted to preserving the quality of study, namely due to its greater orientation on practically applicable knowledge to the detriment of purely theoretic courses on the first level. Increased pressure on the presence of practically relevant passages within the study orientation on the first level must not be accompanied by undesirable approaches and methods of instruction. The quality of study must, above all, imply the quality of the educational process itself; i.e. communication of knowledge, its explanation and verification, not only its amounts. The graduates must be equipped with a capability of not only applying, but also permanently developing one's own knowledge through study.

Introductory speaker:
Jiří Witzany
Prague, Czech Republic,
Czech Rectors Conference,
Rector of the Czech technical University in Prague

Co-speaker:
Bernd Wächter
Brussels, Belgium,
Academic Cooperation Association
Director

Moderator:
Ulrich Teichler
Kassel, Germany
Universität Gh. Kassel
Director of the Scientific Centre

Rapporteur:
Jan Sadlak
Bucarest, Romania
CEPES/UNESCO
Director

Introductory presentation by Mr. Jiří Witzany

Theses

- The reform of European institutes of higher education and universities has deeper and more objective causes, which must be sought in the on-going process of social, economic and political changes. The integration process within European IHE and universities must not be directed towards their unification, but, on the contrary, in a certain sense, it should promote certain diversification of European IHE and universities reflecting cultural and economic development of the respective country and diversification based on traditions and personalities belonging to the university,

- Compatibility of the structure, awarded degrees and transparency of educational systems at European institutes of higher education including certain diversification of the content, form and layout of educational processes may become a significant factor and support in facilitating not only students' mobility, but also inter-university cooperation,

- The study programmes, methods and form of instruction and courses of life-long education must be prepared by universities with regard to European, not only national educational space. European universities must adopt more distinct orientation on non-European students,

- Among fundamental reforms of European IHE and universities there is indisputably transition to a structured system of study and Europe-wide recognised degrees, awarded diplomas or qualifications and certificates. This transition must in no way interfere with the concept of university education. Solution of a number of problems connected with the implementation of this reform, overcoming traditions and customs, will probably need a longer time. But in no way can it be postponed. It is not a one-step solution, but a continuous process stimulating a wide dialogue within universities, as well as outside them, on education and potential measures aimed at assuring its quality,

- An optimum model seems to be structured study arranged in a series. In the case of parallel running of a structured and a present-day long system of study there appears, namely in the transitory period, a real danger of poorer quality of Bachelor's degree study programmes. The basic difference in the quality of university education and education implemented at non-university institutes of higher education must be rigorously respected. The graduates of universities must possess namely a wide scope of theoretic knowledge, e.g. in natural sciences, with a solid scientific background, which will allow for permanent renewal of professional knowledge in keeping with the development of science and technology,

- In order to ensure higher education of qualified experts applicable immediately in practice and students, who will continue in Master's degree programmes, Bachelor's degree programmes should not be shorter than 6 semesters. In the case that they include professional practice and a diploma thesis, the optimum length of Bachelor's degree courses seems to be 7 - 8 semesters,

- Introduction of structured study will require redevelopment of the existing curricula of classic study programmes implemented at universities and institutes of higher education. The changes do not imply only a different time distribution, but also

necessary interventions in the curricula of individual courses. There might even be a necessity of some intervention in the study programmes at secondary schools,

- The Bachelor's degree study level must contain the necessary amount of theoretic (generally applicable), as well as so-called preparatory courses. The total amount of theoretic and preparatory courses at the first and second study levels must not, in any case, fall behind their current proportion within the present study system,

- In a number of cases it is necessary to do away with the still existing dogma that the study programme must be comprised of every specialisation and professional and research field of the studied branch, avoiding thus strict training of students, unjustifiable expansion of instruction and reduction of extended and deepened study according to individual interests, limitation of students' participation in the work of institutions and departments and to a passive approach to study,

- Special importance must be attributed to preserving the quality of study, namely due to its greater orientation on practically applicable knowledge to the detriment of purely theoretic courses on the first level. Increased pressure on the presence of practically relevant passages within the study orientation on the first level must not be accompanied by undesirable approaches and methods of instruction,

- Emphasis must be placed on understanding causal relations, on perceiving the "depth" of a given problem, on educating towards critical thinking. The quality of study must, above all, imply the quality of the educational process itself; i.e. communication of knowledge, its explanation and verification, not only its amount. The graduates must be equipped with a capability of not only applying, but also permanently developing one's own knowledge through study. Already at the first stage of study, students should be given a good theoretic background, so that they are able to make further contributions to it within the framework of the higher, Master's degree study programme. Premature overspecialisation must be avoided in the interest of deep knowledge of the substance of given problems and looking for solutions,

- Bachelor's degree study programmes must also include a group (module) of optional courses of theoretic and preparatory orientation, which will allow individual profiling of the students oriented on practical careers after the completion of the Bachelor's level as well as those who intend to continue their study at the Master's level,

- Master's degree programmes, if they are to meet the demands for mobility, should be relatively short (12-18 months, but no longer than 24 months),

- The restructuring scheme should not produce only formal reforms, subdividing long study programmes into two stages presuming that the absolute majority of students will, after completing the previous study level, continue their study in the same branch and at the same IHE or university. On the other hand, however, moving to the higher study level should not imply only changing schools, but a possibility of a choice among a series of alternative follow-up Master's degree programmes, differing by specialisation and internal content,

- A number of branches and study specialisation often represent a mere sum of individual theoretic and professional disciplines without direct integration and conditionality. Responsibility for instruction and its efficiency and standards are frequently limited to individual disciplines and courses, while overall responsibility for the branch of study is insufficient. Students' guidance, information and feedback are not always of adequate quality,

- The European environment perceives universities namely as institutions handing over the learning and knowledge, reached by mankind in the previous stages of development, to a new generation, as facilities for educating a new generation – intelligentsia, which shall extend this knowledge further in the near future, being able

to assimilate and interpret all that "has happened" and has been revealed by science. The funds invested in R&D at IHE and universities are invested twice. Apart from supporting their own research, through teaching new knowledge is immediately passed over to students, who successively transfer it into practice. At the same time, students become familiar with the basic methods of research activity. Formulation of even partial results of a research project becomes a significant stimulator affecting positively advances in research. It lets the students look behind the scenes of research activity, teaching them how to ask themselves questions casting doubt on facts and how to seek answers to them. This seeming by-product of scientific and research work at institutes of higher education is not only inspiring, but often equally important, and sometimes even of greater significance than the actual achievements. It is an indispensable part of education of independently thinking and creative individuals, who are able to listen, critically think and lead an open dialogue, not only passively accept facts,

- Universities must be quite autonomous in decision-making with regard to required knowledge, study arrangement and conditions for granting the respective degrees and certificates.

Introductory presentation by Mr. Ulrich Teichler

CURRICULAR REFORM AND THE STAGE/CYCLE MODEL OF PROGRAMMES AND DEGREES IN EUROPE

KEY ISSUES

Recent European debates on the need of reforming curricula in higher education (on the content of programmes, teaching and learning, expected competences as outcomes, job requirements and other needs of the economy and society) also address *quantitative and structural dimensions* of higher education. Seven issues tend to be discussed:

1. Quantitative development of student enrolment,
2. Diversity versus uniformity in higher education,
3. Shaping and helping to understand higher education,
4. Key targets of curricular reform (academic quality, personality/cultural enhancement, relevance, employability),
5. Major competences expected,
6. Curricular content,
7. Serving the student.

QUANTITATIVE DEVELOPMENT

The critique of „over-education" and „under-employment", which dominated the debate in Europe on the relationships between higher education and the world of work in the 1970s and

1980s, has gradually faded in the 1990s. Instead, expansion of student enrolment is advocated widely as desirable on the way to the knowledge society.

The discussions related to Sorbonne, Bologna and Prague, however, do *not indicate any convergent* view about

- the desirable overall *quantity of students* (entry quota, graduation quota, etc.),
- the desirable *distribution of graduates according to levels of programmes* (doctorates, masters, bachelors, others),
- the *future of the sector of tertiary education* which traditionally is not considered „higher education").

DIVERSITY VERSUS UNIFORMITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Diversity of higher education tends to grow for three *reasons*:
- Expansion: the higher the number of students, the more diverse are they in terms of talents, motives and job prospects.
- *Market forces*: the growing role of incentive components and market mechanisms in the steering systems of higher education are expected to encourage a certain degree of diversity.
- *De-nationalisation*: increasing student and graduate mobility, growing transnational education, declining detailed national steering, and growing European and international cooperation relativise national characteristics of curricula.

National systems of higher education in Europe vary according to the *degree of diversity or uniformity* with respect to four *dimensions*:
- „*Inter-institutional diversity*": according to types of institutions (single type, binary type, multi-type system),
- „*Intra-institutional diversity*": according to types and levels of programmes within institutions (single short or long programmes vs. bachelor-master stage model),
- *Status diversity* (degree of difference according to reputation, quality etc.: „ranking"),
- *Substantive diversity* (degree of difference of the major aims of the programmes: „profiles").

The recent European discussion focuses on three questions:
- What *degree of diversity vs. uniformity* is desirable?
- What measures should be undertaken to *shape the system*, i.e. move it to a certain position on the diversity vs. uniformity spectrum?
- What measures should be taken to *help understand* the higher education system in the existing extent of diversity or uniformity?

HELPING UNDERSTAND AND SHAPING THE EXISTING DEGREE OF DIVERSITY VS. UNIFORMITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The more the diversity of higher education grows, the more difficulties the actors, the students and the society face in understanding the higher education system. Therefore, measures are considered necessary to increase the „transparency" of higher education.

Measures widely advocated for *transparency* are
- Diploma supplements,
- „Fitness for purpose"-evaluation.

A need is felt as well of describing the existing degree of diversity and uniformity with the help of common yardsticks. „*Comparability*" is advocated, for example, through
- reporting study achievements in terms of „credits" (accounting dimension of ECTS).

Some steps are advocated towards increased „*complementarity*" in higher education, notably
- recognition based on „mutual trust",
- creation of networks among similar departments and institutions (among others for joint curriculum development or for recognition/credit transfer agreements).

Select steps are advocated for *standardization and convergence* amidst diversity, most prominently
- introduction of a common system of stages/cycles of programmes and degrees,
- establishing joint rationales of quality assurance/evaluation,
- accreditation.

KEY TARGETS OF CURRICULAR REFORM

The major targets of higher education programmes are often described with the help of terms such as the following:
- academic quality,
- personality/cultural enhancement,
- relevance,
- employability (in terms of fostering competences likely to be used on the job).

The current European debate suggests that
- higher education should put *more emphasis* on relevance and employability *than in the past*,
- a need remains of *keeping a balance*, i.e. not giving up concern for academic quality and personality and cultural enhancement,
- relevance and employability should *not be understood merely as a call for adaptation* to the prevalent demands of the employment system, but also for critical, pro-active and innovative perspectives,
- relevance and employability should not only be strived for through closely gearing curricula to specialized occupational areas, but also through fostering a *broad range of additional competences*,

- relevance and employability should be viewed *in a European and global setting.*

MAJOR COMPETENCES EXPECTED

The European debates about the competences needed by the economy and society and thus on the competences higher education should foster call for a more complex pattern than in the past. Graduates from higher education institutions continue to acquire specific expertise in a certain knowledge area corresponding to certain professional areas of expertise. In addition, higher education is expected to contribute to

- knowledge and understanding of *other disciplines* and professional areas (cross-disciplinarity),
- the ability of *transferring* academic knowledge to professional practice (problem-solving abilities, etc.),
- *learning to learn*,
- *values and attitudes* relevant for good job performance,
- *socio-communicative* skills,
- competences of *managing one's own career* (employability in terms of being prepared for job search self-employment, handling labour market risks and flexibilities, entrepreneural spirit, etc.)
- prepare the student to act as a professional and a citizen *in a European, international and global setting.*

The consensus of rhetoric notwithstanding, questions remain open in the European debates about priorities, compatibilities and tensions between the range of competences called for and the way how these competences can be fostered successfully.

CURRICULAR CONTENT

The „Sorbonne and Bologna Process" calls for a detailed and thorough reform in curricular terms of the *„logic" of the new two stage/cycle model* (a first 3-4 years and a second 1-2 years stage/cycle). This implies issues such as
- changing role and duration of propaedeutic learning,
- extent of general or specific emphasis of the first stage/cycle,
- disciplinary or cross-disciplinary emphasis of the second stage/cycle,
- etc.

At the same time, however, curricular reforms addressing the logic of a stage/cycle model have to take on board the *other reform imperatives* called for in Europe:
- serving a larger number of students,
- defining an appropriate space of diversity,
- making curricula transparent, comparative, complementary and to some extent standardized,
- reinforcing a higher degree of relevance and employability,

- preparing students beyond professional expertise for cross-disciplinarity, knowledge transfer, learning to learn, improved working values and attitudes, socio-communicative tasks, for managing their own careers, and action in European and international settings.

As far as preparation for growing *Europeanisation, internationalisation and globalisation* is concerned, curricular debates address notably
- the role of physical student mobility, virtual mobility and international learning at the home institution should play,
- the role of the European or international dimension for various fields of study,
- the role of specific international programmes as compared to international dimensions of regular programme,
- the role of add-on international learning (e.g. foreign languages).

The task of curriculum development is demanding, and steps taken since Bologna are by no means complete.

SERVING THE STUDENT

Most experts in Europe call for an improvement of the various services in higher education addressing students in order to help them cope with the growing demands. Services most frequently discussed and actually employed are:
- Academic and personal counselling service,
- Financial and livelihood services,
- Extracurricular services and provisions,
- Career counselling and placement service,
- Assistance for international mobility.

New concepts of the „service university" suggest that curriculum development should reflect more thoroughly than in the past *what service concept the curricular concepts imply* and how a closer link could be established between curricula and the services provided to the students.

(Updated 17 May 2001)

2. Networking of higher education institutions.
How to make mobility easier?
Combine the implementation of EHEA (European Higher Education Area) with the implementation of ERA (European Research Area)!

Abstract

To some extent mobility is a "déjà vu". Nevertheless, there is still much to do. During the Salamanca 2001 Convention the central value of mobility to the EHEA has been confirmed. Low participation of students in the mobility makes of mobility a prestigious privilege. The majority of mobility problems cannot be solved by universities themselves. Where, for instance, universities can participate effectively in fostering the mobility is the linguistic support in providing complete curricula in an European "LINGUA FRANCA" in all branches of university studies. EHEA and ERA as EU philosophies in the fields of higher education and research should be implemented in parallel.

Introductory speaker:
Josef Koubek
Prague, Czech Republic,
Czech Rectors Conference,
Rector of the Institute of Chemical Technology, Prague

Co-speaker:
Sérgio Machado dos Santos
Braga, Portugal,
Universidade do Minho
Former President of the Confederation of European Union Rectors Conferences

Moderator:
Luc Weber
Geneva, Switzerland
Former rector of the University of Geneva and president of the working group EU Research policy of the Confederation of European Union Rectors Conferences, member of the EUA Board

Rapporteur:
Inge Knudsen
Brussels, Belgium
EUA Office Brussels

Introductory presentation by Mr. Josef Koubek

Theses

- In the recent past, mobility of students and university staff has been underlined as an integral part of the development of EHEA. At the same time, the creation of networks of excellence has been coined as one of the principles in the development of the ERA.
- During the Salamanca 2001 Convention the central value of mobility to EHEA has been confirmed. The crucial role of mobility as one of the pillars of EHEA has been

acknowledged and reiterated together with the demand for recognition of the key role of higher education institutions in the creation and development of the EHEA. Moreover, the more intensive implementation of existing systems of recognition has been recommended (especially ECTS extended to accumulation and life long learning, the Lisbon Convention, Diploma Supplement and ENIC and NARIC activities).

- To some extent mobility is a "déjà vu" and a well-developed area. Nevertheless, there is still much to do.

- In spite of the positive results achieved in the recent past, several difficulties still persist.

- Low participation of students in the mobility (about 5 % of all enrolled students in EU countries, and about 1 % in applicant countries) makes mobility a prestigious privilege.

- In Nice 2000 the European Council approved a resolution for a Mobility Action Plan, focused on removing remaining barriers to mobility. The importance of co-ordination between EU Member States to increase and democratise mobility in Europe has been underlined. Governments and ministries can tackle some problems like unequal access to information, financial constraints, inadequate social security cover and career hindrances.

- Among other obstacles to mobility and trans-national education, first of all, the complex national educational structures should be mentioned, followed by incompatible qualifications, linguistic barriers, financial insufficiency of both universities and students, imbalance and lack of reciprocity in the number of exchanged persons from certain countries, and, last but not least, legislative and administrative obstacles.

- A simple analysis of this list of obstacles leads to the conclusion that the universities cannot solve the majority of problems regarding mobility themselves. Even the apparently simple problem of incentives to and benefits of mobility to students and staff is not a trivial question in the academic arena. Both incentives and benefit are closely connected to European legislation and to the level of the European economy.

- Universities can participate effectively in fostering mobility by offering linguistic support and providing complete curricula in a "LINGUA FRANCA" in all areas of university studies - "lingua franca" in the sense of only one European working language. Linguistic benefits of studies performed in the "lesser used" languages can be a heavy obstacle to almost all disciplines of study, including technical, natural sciences, medicine or even socio-humanities, where a high level of language proficiency is of great importance. The question of an appropriate working language is not only a problem of the studies, but a problem of further activities of the graduates in practical life, if they do not stay in the country where the language of their studies is spoken.

- ERA as an EU initiative in the field of research started in January 2000, one year after the Bologna Declaration. It is obvious that mobility is less complicated at PhD level and maybe at Master level. Combining research with university studies at Bachelor level is clearly less profitable for both the visiting student and the host university, because of the students' lack of research skills. A sophisticated system of not too complex **research projects for bachelor students could be offered in advance** to enable the students to **participate in projects both "at home" and "abroad"** and could provide support to mobility as well as a clear contribution to the creation of research links within the networks of excellence of the ERA.

Presentation by Mr. Sérgio Machado dos Santos

Theses

SATELLITE ACADEMIC PROGRAMME ON HIGHER EDUCATION
NETWORKING OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

1.   As a complement to Prof. Koubek's opening speech, in which a comprehensive diagnosis on the landscape of mobility in Europe and the difficulties still remaining were presented, I intend to stress a few points in order to try to fuel the debate both on the practical and the policy levels.

2.   Mobility in higher education is most of the times regarded as the mobility of people (students, staff and graduates). However, there is another important side to consider – the mobility of programmes, which can take different forms such as virtual mobility (open and distance learning, e-learning), the export of programmes (transnational education) or the establishment of transnational partnerships (joint programmes, 'European degrees'). The mobility of programmes is a powerful way to promote the virtual mobility of students and it can be seen as business (selling educational programmes) or as an academic joint initiative (joint degrees). A question worth debating is the possible contribution of these commonly recognised joint transnational degrees to a more open and general acceptance of the recognition of degrees and studies taken abroad.

3.   The European diversity in terms of language is simultaneously a sign of the richness of European culture and an obstacle to mobility. This raises a difficult dilemma for higher education institutions: should the Universities, which are above all 'temples of culture', follow the (easy) path to provide complete curricula in a 'lingua franca' in all branches of studies and at all levels, or should they foster the cultural diversity and provide all the possible ways and incentives for the students to learn more languages? For a number of reasons, this is not a straightforward question: (i) some European languages other than the modern 'lingua franca' are spoken widely outside Europe and represent important links to other world regions; (ii) the main objective of physical mobility – the immersion into the local culture – can hardly be achieved if the student does not speak the local language; (iii) cultural diversity, as a value in itself, should be preserved.

4.   The former Confederation of European Union Rectors' Conferences has argued strongly in favour of some integration between the Bologna process and the European Research Area initiative (I believe that EUA is keeping the same stand). Indeed, there are two obvious links between the two processes: Universities are essential actors and partners for both and the ERA priority on the training of young researchers clearly relates to post-graduate studies. But I would like to raise a more central policy issue: research is a core element for the European concept of University, providing the background for a research-based learning environment and therefore the best way to develop in the students the capacity of 'learning to learn', which is for sure the best methodological tool to prepare students for lifelong learning. As a consequence, it is important for the Universities that the European policies on education and training and on research are considered in an articulated way. In this way it will be possible to create synergies and promote the scholarship environment that represent the strongest added-value of 'life on campus' as compared with the programmes offered by the multitude of new providers who, sometimes, excel on contents but can not compete on the

methodological training essential for the acquisition of the required new horizontal/transferable graduate skills.

5.   The solutions to promote virtual or physical mobility can be developed at system level only to a certain degree. The experience so far shows that the sounder developments on mobility have taken place within networks, where the institutional/local level proved to be crucial for trust building and the consequent search for flexible solutions.

(Updated 17 May 2001)

3. Quality evaluation, accreditation

Abstract

An overview of Swedish quality evaluation is presented, focusing on quality audits, quality assessments and accreditation. One experience is that a quality evaluation system should be "owned" by two sides, both by the Government or its agencies and by the higher education institutions. The legitimacy of the system is all-important; quality evaluation cannot be imposed from above. The control dimension must be combined with developmental aspects. The risks for higher education institutions to be overburdened with too many assessments must be taken seriously. More meta-evaluations should be initiated. A European quality evaluation structure must build on existing national systems.

Introductory speaker:
Lars Ekholm
Stockholm, Sweden
Association of Swedish Higher Education,
Secretary General of Association of Swedish Higher Education

Co-speaker:
Ossi Lindqvist
Kuopio, Finland
University of Kuopio, Director of Institute of Applied Biotechnology
Chairman of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council

Moderator:
Christina Ullenius
Karlstad, Sweden
Rector of Karlstad University
President of the Association of Swedish Higher Education

Rapporteur:
Tove Bull
Tromsö, Norway
Rector of the University of Tromsö
President of the Norwegian Council for Higher Education

Introductory presentation by Mr. Lars Ekholm

Theses

This is the first presentation in the discussion group, based on Swedish experiences of quality evaluation. It will be followed by another presentation, giving a European perspective to the themes under discussion. How can we draw upon each other´s experiences now that we need to build a European structure for quality assessments and accreditation?

Some Background Facts about Swedish Higher Education

The quality evaluation system of a country must be examined and understood in a national context. Some factors that must be taken into account studying the Swedish system are as follows.

- Swedish higher education has moved from a strictly centralised system to a more decentralised one.
- It has expanded during the 90´s; the taxpayers put more money at the disposal of higher education than earlier.
- Sweden has a comprehensive or unitary higher education system (as opposed to binary system). There are universities, university colleges and colleges of art. The quality evaluation applies to all institutions.
- They are all public institutions, with a few exceptions.
- The funding system is result-oriented.
- The quality evaluation is conducted by a buffer organisation, the National Agency for Higher Education. This is a semi-independent, governmental body. The responsibility for higher education quality rests with the individual universities and university colleges.

Various Components of Swedish Quality Evaluation in Higher Education

Research has always been subjected to quality assessments; this has been a natural task for the research councils. During the 70´s assessments of education started, and a theoretical basis was laid (theory-oriented approach, frame factor theory). In the early 90´s audits and assessments were inaugurated on a larger and more systematic scale. The reasons were those indicated in the previous paragraph. A more decentralised higher education system called for more "control" from above. The students wanted "consumer protection". The higher education institutions were responsive to external demands from politicians and stakeholders.

i) Quality evaluation has up till now had an emphasis on *audits*. What has been assessed is not the quality of various programmes but the organisation that each higher education institution has set up to promote quality. The procedure has been based on self-evaluation, a peer review team, site visit, reports and follow-up. Members of the team have been academic teachers or administrators, students and external participants. In principle each institution has been audited on its own merits. No ranking has been done.

ii) In Sweden *accreditation* has taken the form of control of minimum standards of higher education institutions that apply for the right to award a certain degree (typically a university college that wants to start a Master´s Degree program in a specific field). Another accreditation activity has been to check the quality of a number of university colleges that have applied for the right to award PhDs in one of the so-called subject areas (for instance natural sciences). Finally, accreditation procedures have been used when a few university colleges have applied for university status.

iii) During the 90´s *quality assessments* were given less priority. They covered certain programmes and certain aspects (such as examination procedures, student participation and ethnicity policies). However, as from this year the quality assessments are high on the agenda. They focus on programmes, not institutions. In fact, all programmes at all higher education institutions will be assessed during a period of six years. Post graduate studies will be included. The same procedure is followed as has been done with the audits. There is a

component of accreditation in this new approach, since unconvincing results can lead to a "warning" that the right to award a specific degree can be revoked.

Some Lessons Learnt from Swedish Quality Evaluation

- A quality evaluation system must be "owned" by both sides, the Government (and its agencies) and academia itself. The legitimacy of the system is all-important.

- It is important that the students take part in the quality evaluation activities, as partners at their institutions and also as "consumers".

- It is possible to combine the control aspect with a developmental approach. A system based on control only will lose in credibility.

- "The rules of the game" must be open and transparent, if the system is to keep its legitimacy with academia.

- Ranking is no end in itself. The inclination of media to publish ranking lists can only be neutralised by institutional engagement in serious quality evaluation projects.

- The risk that too much assessment lead to a standardisation of higher education can be counteracted by strong emphasis being laid on the developmental aspects (a programme is assessed not to punish the institution but to support its efforts to improve or create a special profile).

- There is a risk that the institutions are overburdened with quality assessments and audits. These risks must be taken seriously. A moderate approach that stimulates co-operation and even enthusiasm must be preferred to an all-embracing system but with academia against it.

- It is high time that more energy be devoted to meta-evaluations. Does all this activity pay, after all?

The challenge now is to create a European structure for evaluation, building on the experiences of different national systems. Trust from those concerned will be decisive for the success of these efforts. This means that a European central agency cannot be the solution. Instead, national systems for quality evaluations must be further developed and form the basis for mutual recognition. The discussion has just started.

Full Presentation

Quality Evaluation and Accreditation

This is the first presentation in the discussion group, based on Swedish experiences of quality evaluation. It will be followed by another presentation, giving a European perspective to the themes under discussion. How can we draw upon the experiences of all our countries now that we need to build a European structure for quality assessments and accreditation?

The quality work system of a country must be examined and understood in a national context. We all have different quality cultures and traditions. To some extent this can be explained by different structures of higher education. Another reason can be varying experiences of quality work – some countries have been engaged in this kind of activity for a longer period than other countries.

I will introduce one country, Sweden. This is done as one of many examples. After this description I will try do draw a number of conclusions, which hopefully are of a more general character, thus serving as a basis for a common discussion.

Some Background Facts about Swedish Higher Education

Some factors that must be taken into account studying and understanding the Swedish system are as follows.

- The degree of *decentralisation* in higher education is important. One could argue that the more higher education is decentralised, the more emphasis must be laid on quality evaluation. At least, this is the Swedish case. A coherent quality evaluation policy was initiated when, in the early 1990´s, decentralisation became one of the keywords in higher education policy.

- When higher education *expanded* and needed more public resources it became more urgent for the Government to safeguard "value for money". The taxpayers put money at the disposal of higher education institutions, and they wanted - and want - to know the results. With an increasing economic, social, cultural and regional role for higher education institutions they have met with new demands – various stakeholders want to know what happens in this field.

- The role of the *students* in Swedish higher education is crucial. They are - or should be - both integral members of the academic community and consumers of the goods that these offer. They sit on various boards and are thus in a way responsible for upholding quality. They are also young people wanting to conduct studies of good quality that leads them on to the labour market. In theory they are even part of the funding system, with their feet voting institutions with a reputation for good quality, leaving the less good ones to their fate.

- A major characteristic of Swedish higher education is that it is a *comprehensive system*. It comprises universities, university colleges and colleges of art. The same Higher Education Law applies to all institutions. The distinction between universities and university colleges is that the universities are research and education driven, whereas university colleges are more education-oriented, which does not exclude them from research activities. A nationwide undergraduate program can be given either at a university or at a university college. What is said in this presentation about evaluations and accreditation applies to all kinds of higher education institutions. When, e.g., programs for business administration now are under assessment this concerns both the universities and the university colleges.

- For natural reasons it is important for any discussion about quality evaluation and accreditation if we talk about a system that has both *public institutions* and private ones. In Sweden almost all institutions are public. Out of a total of 39 institutions 36 are public (state run) and three are private. The economic basis of these three is private or semi-private foundations.

- As in most European countries the Swedish funding system is *result-oriented*. Quality assurance was put on the agenda when this funding system was introduced. The question was – and still is: Can one initiate result-orientated funding of education, based on quantitative terms, without losing in quality?

- What *agent* is best suited to conduct quality evaluation and accreditation – the Government and its agencies and/or the institutions themselves? In Sweden it is a semi-independent governmental agency – the National Agency for Higher Education – that is authorised to perform this task. However, Sweden is a country of co-operation and "middle-of-the-road". The Agency co-operates with the institutions, and these accept the role that this Agency has got in this field. I will later comment on the importance of legitimacy of the quality evaluation and accreditation.

How It Started

Research has always been subjected to quality assessments. In Sweden research councils were set up in after World War II. Research projects were funded on individual applications that were decided upon by other researchers through a peer-review system. This was the beginning of evaluation.

Evaluation in education started in the 1970´s. Evaluation programs were started when enrolment figures soared in the 1970´s and the Government seemed to lose control over developments. Their focus was on the system as a whole, or a major part of it, and on efficiency and productivity. This period helped the Swedes to become fairly conscious of the methods to be used in evaluation. Among other things the researchers in charge developed a so-called frame factor theory. It means that an assessment has to take into account all relevant factors, such as prerequisites, processes and results. The results must be seen in relation to the prerequisites. I say this because still this basic approach is a characteristic of Swedish evaluation in higher education.

It was not until the early 1990´s that systematic evaluation became a keyword in higher education political debate and practice. Why did this occur some ten years ago? One reason was the efforts to decentralise higher education at this time. Management by setting targets became the official creed, leaving the previous ideology of management by rules behind. When the centre loosens its grip, it needs other mechanisms to safeguard its interests. Also, at this time Swedish higher education was in a state of heavy expansion in terms of student places, and the Government wanted value for money. The students had become more conscious, and they wanted "consumer protection".

Components of Swedish Evaluation

i) Quality Audits

Quality evaluation has up till now had an emphasis on audits. What has been assessed is not the quality of various programs but the organisation that universities and university colleges have set up to promote quality. The procedure has been based on self-evaluation, a peer review team, site visit, reports and follow-up. Members of the team have been academic teachers, administrators, students and external participants. In principle each institution has been audited on its own merits. No ranking has been done. The idea has been evaluation for improvement. Aspects that have been assessed are strategies, plans, goals, methods, organisation etc. The auditors have had a "map" to judge by, qualities which characterise a good institution. It might be interesting to know which these are: Self-regulation and learning, long-range planning, an international perspective, good leadership, interaction with stakeholders, equality and focusing on the student. All Swedish universities and university colleges have been audited, and now a second round has started.

ii) Accreditation

In Sweden accreditation has taken the form of control of minimum standards at three levels. The controlling body is the National Agency for Higher Education. The basic work pattern is the same: Self-evaluation, a peer-review team, a report and decision. The criteria for the accreditation are open and discussed with those that are active in the field.

The most common kind of accreditation in the Swedish system is when a university college applies for the right to award a Master´s Degree (four year programme, the student has to devote half the time to a major subject). Accreditation for this purpose has been done frequently. Another type of accreditation is when a university college applies for the right to award doctorates in a subject area, by which Swedes mean natural sciences, technical sciences etc. For natural reasons they occur less often. The third type of accreditation is when a university college applies for university status. In such cases the scrutiny is sharper, and it is the Government that takes the final decision.

Two questions might be interesting to answer here: What are the criteria and do failures occur?

A basic set of criteria is as follows: Teacher competence and competence development, research activity, educational content and organisation, subject depth and breadth, the possibility to go on to post graduate studies, evaluation and quality assurance, student participation, equality, internationalisation, quality and availability of library and other sources of information, premises and equipment, eligibility and enrolment, finances and governance, long-term stability and a critical and creative environment.

Yes, failures do occur. Not all university colleges that have applied have been given university status. Not all university colleges reach their goal to "get a subject field". Important to know is also, that existing master-awarding rights have been revoked. Certain rules apply to this procedure, since the students must not suffer from such a drastic measure.

iii) Quality Assessments

During the 1990's quality assessments were given less priority. They covered specific programs. Also, certain aspects were assessed. Examples are examination procedures, student participation and social and ethnical diversity policies. However, recently the Government has put assessments high on the agenda and has asked the National Agency for Higher Education to assess all higher education programmes over a period of six years. This is an ambitious program. It covers undergraduate studies and also postgraduate studies. One could possibly have thought that our universities and university colleges did not like it. In fact it was clear to many institutional leaders that the sympathetic, but fairly "weak" quality audit approach would not in the long run be accepted by politicians and other stakeholders. So we were mentally ready for this further step, even if we did not think that it should be so comprehensive.

There is a component of accreditation in this new approach, since unconvincing results can lead to a "warning" that the right to award a specific degree can be revoked. On the other hand, the control approach will be counterbalanced with development aspects. Uniformity will not be a goal, uniqueness is at least said to be a positive criterion.

The same pattern comes back as to the way the assessments will be carried out: Self-evaluation, peer-review team, site visit, report, decisions.

Some Conclusions

I will try to summarise experiences from this work under eight headlines. As indicated, I hope you will find them to be of a more general character, that is that they go beyond the Swedish horizon and can be used in a discussion on quality evaluation and accreditation in Europe.

1   Double ownership

I think that the most important experience from what I have presented is that a quality evaluation and accreditation system must have a double ownership, in real terms even if not formally. Even if imposed from above it must be accepted from below. It is top-down, but at the same time - and perhaps essentially - bottom-up. The control aspect is given its due. It is legitimate that taxpayers, students and outside stakeholders ask for information about the quality of the activities at our universities and university colleges. At the same time development and promotion approaches have been given room enough. If not, academia would not have been interested in contributing so actively in audits and assessments. In other words, the legitimacy of evaluation and accreditation is all-important.

2   Student participation

As indicated the students are partners at their institutions, but they are also consumers. It is important to include them in the quality evaluation activities. In a country like Sweden an overarching goal is that the provision of education should be of the same quality all over the country. If this as a guiding star it follows that a student has a right to know about the standards of an institution they consider studying at. I have referred to peer-review teams. They have all student members. In the bill that initiated the new assessment programme the students were very much pushed in the forefront.

3   Control and development

One might think that control and development must be opposites. The question is: Is there a risk that control leads to uniformity and standardisation? I think it is fair to say that so far we have avoided it, but the risks will increase when the new comprehensive assessment program starts. If, I say if, controlling our institutions will be seen as the only goal the assessments will lose in credibility.

4   Transparency

If a quality evaluation system is to keep this credibility all players must know the rules of the game. Openness and transparency are keywords. It is all the more important, since the criteria that are used in some respects must change over time. I have referred to a number of such criteria. They have been discussed with those concerned, that is within academia.

5   Ranking

The aim of quality evaluation is not to establish a ranking list, saying that institution A is better than institution B. Establishing a league table would be to simplify the outcomes of the system that I have described. On the

other hand, I am quite convinced that we have to live with ranking lists. Media will always be interested in rapid, oversimplified data, and they will not resist the temptation to publish ranking lists. The way to cope with this problem is to engage in serious quality evaluations to counterbalance such initiatives.

6   Does assessment lead to standardisation?

If one has a national system of quality evaluation there is a risk that it leads to uniformity and thus standardisation, that is effects that are contrary to what we find should characterise an academic approach. The way to avoid this is to put much emphasis on the development aspects. When a team assesses a program they should not do this with the aim to punish it or the institution in question, but to support its efforts to improve or to create a special profile. This task is more difficult, but more awarding.

7   A too heavy assessment burden

Over the last decade or so the evaluation and accreditation activities have increased considerably. This has caused a sound reaction, in particular in countries with comprehensive evaluation systems. A few weeks ago a well-known university leader in Germany wrote about the *Virus akkredititis* in terms of an illness that spreads without control. These reactions on the part of those being assessed must be taken seriously. It is better to adjust the ambitions down to the level where the institutions accept the amount of evaluation than having, in theory, a perfect and total system, but with the institutions working against it.

8   Does it pay - the need for meta-evaluations

All of us are, I suppose, engaged in evaluation and accreditation. Nevertheless, we all have to put the question: Do all these activities pay? Are all the efforts, be they direct or indirect ones, worth while when weighed against the outcomes? And could similar outcomes be reached in other ways? There is certainly a need for overarching studies on this theme. We need to evaluate the evaluators, to initiate meta-evaluations. And they have to be carried out at the international level.

Let me end this address by saying that the challenge now is to create a European structure for evaluation, building on the experiences of different national systems. The main message from what I have told you, based on our experiences, is that trust from those concerned will be decisive for success. There is a great need for building networks to overcome different national approaches and traditions. In this respect the discussion has just started.

Presentation by Mrs. Christina Ullenius

Theses

Some important current trends in the European higher education policies and quality assurance are a bit contradictory. For instance, there appears to be a move towards introduction of a bachelor-master degree system, but, at the same time, there is also an undercurrent for maintenance of the European diversity of curricular options. Yet calls for convergence and common standards are also gaining popularity. In this situation, a kind of risk analysis may be useful to guide us towards better and more responsible higher education system in Europe. The interest in institutional evaluations in Europe is increasing and at least in six countries they are performed regularly and systematically. The programme evaluations are however maybe the most common type. An essential feature in the follow-up of the Bologna declaration is that mere changing the structures is not sufficient, but particularly the HE curricula demand continuous developmental impacts.   In the future, programme evaluations and accreditation (if so be) could converge to some extent and serve the same purpose; running both policies side by side and value.

A common trend is also decentralisation of the HE institutions; this is expressed as increased freedom and autonomy but balanced with responsibility. A demand for a high degree of

autonomy alone follows from the rapid pace of scientific and technological developments that the universities should be able to handle best in situ. Maintenance of a proper balance between autonomy and responsibility also implies and requires a degree of mutual trust between governments and the HEI's.

Careful consideration is needed to see whether this new emphasis on convergence and standardisation is really serving the purposes that have been expressed and hoped for. It may serve towards increased transparency that helps the student, but it could also homogenise the European HE field without any other visible improvements. There are rather numerous current and historical indications that furthering the diversity serves the students as well as the economy and the labour market better than a strict systemic standardisation. Diversity should not mean lack of quality. And quality as such may not be equal to standards! Rather, the HE sector is and should be always in a dynamic and creative state, in the move!

In Europe, we may not need more control in HE, but further development of policies at all levels (European, national, regional, etc.) to support the good developments and to build fertile grounds for new educational etc. innovations. And good innovation generally tend to create further diversity, and they also get quickly copied.

Yet, we may also find cases where standardisation serves good developmental although it generally defines only the minimum or the yes-no situation. In several professional academic fields such 'standards' are already a kind of required tradition. In this respect, different European countries may be in a different position, and at least the Nordic countries have a HE system that already has several built-in quality assurance features. Often competition (for resources, staff, students, etc.) as such may be a positive driving force in creating quality, if quality is defined as 'fit-for-purpose'! Also, the labour market itself may directly or indirectly impose certain educational standards.

A new feature or 'task' recognised with the HEI's is their service function and impact to the region where they exist; in many cases this mostly mean positive economic influences. This again emphasises diversity because this kind of impact is actually created through an interplay between the HEI and its environments and partners, and those 'environments' are very diverse indeed in different parts of Europe.

Considering the diverse European situation, it seems advisable that every country carries the primary responsibility for its HE evaluations, quality assurance, and possible accreditation, but there is certainly a need for common European lines of action, principles and policies: a European meta-policy or meta-evaluations may serve a good purpose if especially directed to the study of HE and its further enrichment.

Europe is not a closed system but is in a competitive situation with the rest of the world: thus it is important that the system keeps learning and developing all the time. A common European action may be called a 'platform', and there already exist organisations with which such an active platform could be built. Such are e.g. the European University Association (EUA)(= former CRE), and the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). The latter one has been established in 1999 to promote European co-operation in quality assessment and assurance. But the European field again is so diverse that any common action should be defined as co-operative rather than 'monopolistic'. Building on the existing organisations, rather than creating new ones, is also a matter of keeping down the costs at a realistic level.