

QUALITY ASSURANCE, A SERIOUS CHALLENGE FOR UNIVERSITIES

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I would like to convey three messages: that....

1.Quality assurance (or better, quality improvement) have become a must for universities
2.Quality assurance (generic term) is in a state of flux or in a stage of “mid adolescence” in Europe
3.it is crucial that universities remain the principal actor of quality improvement efforts?

Angle of view: European research university leader



**Quality assurance
(or better, improvement)
have become a must for
universities!**

Universities are very much concerned by the fast changing environment

- Causes:
 - Globalization
 - Scientific and technological progress (knowledge society)
- Consequence: **increasing competition**
 - For financial resources
 - From other traditional universities or from new types of HE institutions
 - Moreover,
 - the sector is becoming more transparent and
 - is suffering from increasing costs (research)

Each universities should respond to these changes; otherwise, they will fall into mediocrity and eventually disappear!

- Better governance and leadership
- Better medium and long term visions and strategies
- Improved daily management
- Increased transparency and accountability
- **Development of an effective internal quality culture geared to improvement (whatever their level of quality)**

In Europe, the regional agendas are reinforcing these general pressures

- Europe is....50 sovereign countries (25 in the EU) and 800 millions inhabitants
- Two strong political initiatives
 - European higher education area (Sorbonne-Bologna process, 1998)
 - European research area (Lisbon agenda, 2000)
- Quality (assessment or improvement) has a key position in these processes, as well as recognition of diplomas



**Quality assurance
(generic term) is in a
state of flux or in a stage
of “mid adolescence” in
Europe**

In Europe, “Quality” has become the object of numerous initiatives

- Several countries set up evaluation agencies 10-20 years ago (England, The Netherlands, France, ...)
- 1994: EUA (formerly CRE) launched a program of **institutional evaluation** of universities (140 universities in 35 countries)
- 1998: **European Network of Quality Assurance** (key player for preparing some general European standards of quality evaluation)
- 2003: **European Consortium for Accreditation**

Quality assurance is in a state of flux; the most controversial questions are:

- What is the purpose:
 - To guarantee a minimum or a specific standard (accreditation)?
 - Quality improvement (quality culture)?
- What has to be evaluated: faculties-departments, programs, disciplines, internal quality assurance processes?
- Should the evaluation be formative (supportive) or summative?
- Should the evaluation be done according to pre-set standards or be mainly qualitative?
- Should it be a State “owned” or university “owned” process, or a joint venture?

- Some of the most practical issues are:
 - Who decides about the evaluation?
 - Who makes the evaluation?
 - What is being evaluated?
 - How is it done?
 - What is being done with the evaluation results?
- Moreover, burgeoning terminology: accreditation, certification, licensing, assessment, audit, quality assurance, quality culture, quality improvement, ranking, benchmarking, and many others.....



**Universities must remain
the principal actor of quality
improvement efforts?**

Any quality assurance process should respond to a set of reasonable principles

- To respect the **subsidiarity principle**
- To respect the autonomy and diversity of HE institutions
- To evaluate with respect to the mission statement (objectives) of each institution
- To manipulate preset standards and checklists with great prudence
- To be “cost-benefit” efficient
- To make sure that the evaluators are capable and independent
- To make sure that the results of an evaluation are followed by measures

Universities, in general, should be more proactive regarding quality improvement (should develop a rigorous quality culture)

- Setup a system of internal evaluation of academic and administrative units (for ex. Irish system)
 - Self-evaluation report
 - Report by peers
 - Follow-up process to the peers' recommendations
- Benchmarking
- Students evaluation of courses

Independent agencies should be setup to support the quality improvement efforts of institutions

- Evaluation of internal quality assurance methods
- Evaluation of the capacity for change of an institution (EUA program)
- Benchmarking of similar institutions
- Accreditation of a specific level of professional training: engineers (ABET), medical studies, management (EQUIS)

The State should encourage and support universities

- Measures of internal evaluation should be made compulsory
- Evaluation agencies should be regulated (in Europe, project to create a **register**; also a IAUP recommendation)
- Evaluation of the state of a discipline
- Development of a typology of universities (Carnegie)
- Introduction of a system of accreditation of private institutions, LLL and trans-national programs

To conclude

- Quality improvement is a must for each university
- Quality assurance processes is an important tool to reach this objective
- Universities should take quality improvement very seriously and be the main “owners” of the process
- The State should make sure it happens and support the process among others
 - In setting up and regulating independent evaluation agencies
 - In commissioning specific evaluations at country level