

Dr. Birger Hendriks

KMK

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The European dimension of Quality Assurance (QA) touches upon delicate as well important matters and challenges. QA is not only at the heart of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) but also perhaps at a decisive crossroad where we should check the systems and guidelines in place. We also should better communicate the necessities and advantages of QA.

The universities take the main responsibility for QA. The legal and financial impact on QA from the national level (governments) is also strong whereas the European dimension seems still to be limited. This is why ministers in the Leuven Communiqué asked for further developing this European dimension of QA.

This seminar can give important impulses and recommendations to the Bologna Process as well as to the next ministerial conference in 2012 on this topic.

Therefore I am very grateful for the invitation to welcome you on behalf of the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Culture in Germany (KMK). We are most interested in the results of this conference.

QA at the European level has or at least should have several impacts and is important for several areas.

1. Mutual reliability and trust of the European countries and their HEIs require a common frame of standards and guidelines that should have an impact on the national rules and systems of QA. The ESG have been adopted by the Bologna Ministerial Conference in 2005.
2. The European level of QA should develop solutions for better QA procedures, for cross-border study programs, for transnational education as well as for functioning cross-border recognition.
3. European universities need a national and international infrastructure of QA agencies and of authorities that is fit for purpose.
4. QA at the European level should contribute to stronger competitiveness of our HE systems towards other parts of the world, in particular the USA and Asia.

Several of these aspects will be discussed today. I would like to comment on some of them briefly:

1. The ESG, mainly developed by the E 4-Group were and are still a milestone in European QA. They are the basis for rules at the national level as well as for the decisions on agencies that apply for the register eqar. It is thanks to the ESG that we have standards for the structure of QA concerning the agencies, the processes of and in the HEIs and at the national level. But the ESG need to be further developed. When adopted in the Bologna Conference in 2005 in Bergen the ESG were not in full compliance with EQF EHEA, because also the EQF was brand new as well. They did not encompass the Bologna goals such as employability and mobility. In several European countries we have discussions about the methods and contents of QA. Many people, for example in Germany, complain about QA accreditations and audits to be just bureaucratic monsters. For all of these reasons the ESG could now be further developed and modified in terms of defining improved frames for QA at the national and HEI level. But ESG should leave enough space to the different developments in the European countries.

To establish a full correspondence between ESG and QF EHEA may probably be not easy, in particular when it comes to the third cycle (doctorates and PhD's). In Germany QA for the third cycle is right now under discussion. We can see for example that the requirements for doctoral degrees are different from one Bologna member state to the other and from discipline to discipline. The EUA ha adopted an improved set of standards on that. The HEI's need to discuss special procedures for QA in the third cycle that give room to specific solutions but that on the other hand guarantee transparency and reliability of the quality.

It is interesting to hear that the E 4 with the financial help of the European Commission are developing a project how to revise and to improve the ESG.

2. Recognition is another part that is important for improving mobility of students and for enabling them to be mobile without losing time. Most of the Bologna member states have signed and ratified the Lisbon Convention. But

nevertheless we can still find as a European reality even the demand of nostrification or of equality of parts of studies in the foreign country. These requirements are not in line with the Lisbon Convention and they prevent students from studying abroad. The question is whether and how the QA agencies can contribute to improving these procedures. This cross-border question should be solved at the European level as far as possible, apart from improving the practical handling of recognition of foreign study periods by the home university.

QA for the cross-border study programmes is another difficult matter. An increasing number of those study programmes that are offered by up to four or five universities from different countries represent the real European spirit. Bilateral or multilateral cooperation between not only the universities but also the QA agencies should make it easier to get successful accreditations or audits for these study programmes.

Transnational education – that means the export of study programs in different ways - is under discussion for years. OECD and UNESCO elaborated a resolution in particular concerning aspects of quality assurance. Although transnational education by definition is an international matter it might be in particular up to the exporting country to assure the quality standards and procedures for the respective study programmes.

3. A further point is the infrastructure for QA at the European level. ENQA as well as eqar and other associations are very active in improving QA by cooperation and transparency and by guaranteeing the high quality of the agencies themselves. Eqar has now 24 agencies on the register. Nevertheless we still feel that the situation of institutional infrastructure for QA in Europe can be further developed. It is indeed a point of further discussion enabling universities to ask a foreign agency to do the accreditation of study programmes or an institutional accreditation. This requires the agencies to apply for an admission in a foreign country and/or to allow the universities to directly hire the foreign agency.
4. A last point refers to the competitive situation of European QA compared with other parts of the world. In this context one idea of the European Commission has not been discussed sufficiently: to introduce a European seal for high level quality of a university. Such a seal could improve the competitive situation of

European universities and European QA towards other parts of the world. It would bring a new dimension into the QA procedure because in general accreditations or audits normally express that a study programme fulfils the necessary standards. Another point is the ranking matter. In particular the European Commission initiated a feasibility study on the development of a ranking, be it worldwide or a European one. Mr. van Ijperen from The Commission will perhaps give us some interesting information on that. Several international events and discussions like for example within ASEM have shown to me that QA plays a crucial role in the cooperation with Asian or American universities. What these countries are essentially interested in is QA. This should give us even more motivation and impulses to improve QA also at the European level rather than concentrating on the national and the HEIs systems.

Several of these different aspects will be discussed today thanks to the preparatory activities of the German Rectors Conference and the German Accreditation Council. They are both highly profiled in the QA matter. But also the lecturers from The European Commission, from EUA and ESU, from different European countries and across the different disciplines will bring new ideas and proposals that can be fed into the Bologna Process. I would like to thank all of you and look forward to the next hours.

Thank you very much for you attention.