PILOT PROJECT ON REGIONAL CO-OPERATION 
IN REFORMING HIGHER EDUCATION 

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SEMINAR I: QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION 
IN HIGHER EDUCATION 

Ljubljana, Slovenia 9 to 11 March 1994 
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The success of economic transition depends, among other factors, on popular support, and education and training are key areas for achieving this end. If the current trend of economic reform is to be successful, it will require a change in attitudes and development of management and decision-making skills. The pace and content of change can be accelerated if reforms of education are demand-led and include a wider use of competency-based learning systems that focus on achieving specific outcomes.

A long-standing activity of the Centre for Co-operation with the Economies in Transition has been focused on the interrelation between education and the economy in central and eastern Europe. This activity has been carried out in co-operation with the Directorate for Education, Employment, Labour and Social Affairs and has addressed specific short- and long-term problems identified by the CEECs, leading to a series of education reviews and follow-up seminars. The CEECs’ problems in changing their educational systems in order to meet the new needs of the economy are different from those of OECD and European Union Member countries, but there are some similarities in the approach. For instance, there is a need to clarify at the outset the policy agenda for reform and to bring about changes in institutions and patterns of thinking and behaviour.

This series of five seminars on higher education has been made possible by a grant from the European Commission PHARE on themes selected by the CEECs with the twin objectives of promoting the regional co-operation necessary for establishing viable systems and policy for higher education for the transitional and post-transitional periods; and discerning the areas in which PHARE can make a valuable investment in higher education programmes in 1995 and beyond.

I should like to thank the Ministry of Education and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia, the Ministry of Culture and Education of the Republic of Estonia, the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Romania, the Ministry of National Education of the Republic of Poland, and the Ministry of Education, Sport and Science of the Slovak Republic for their assistance in the realisation of this project. Further thanks are due to the many experts in the OECD, European Union and CEEC countries that have contributed papers to this series of seminars.

This is published on the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD.

Salvatore Zecchini
OECD Assistant Secretary-General
Director of the CCET
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Strategic Seminar on Quality Assurance
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RAPPORTEUR'S REPORT

Reports on each of the four workshops and on the seminar as a whole have been prepared by the seminar’s rapporteurs. The report on the seminar was written by Mr. John Brennan and the reports on each of the four workshops by Mr. Yu Kameoka, Ms. Jana Hendrichová, Mr. Raimo Konttinen and Mr. Liam Ryan. The workshop sessions dealt with the following topics:

-- legislative reforms and questions of quality assurance and accreditation;
-- accreditation and evaluation strategies and criteria;
-- quality assurance, employment and the economy;
-- the international dimension of accreditation and evaluation.

Legislative reforms and questions of quality assurance and accreditation

Issues discussed during the workshop were partly in response to the presentations from the international experts and partly a reflection of local and national problems. The former were inevitably interpreted in relation to local contexts and agendas. Accordingly, the discussion can be divided between (i) reflections on global developments in quality assurance seen from a central and eastern European perspective and (ii) special factors affecting one or more of the countries in the region.

Reflections on global developments

A set of fundamental questions concerned standards. How are standards for accreditation to be defined? Are there particular problems in defining standards in non-quantifiable areas like the humanities and social sciences? Are standards best seen as holistic, professional or functional?

There was a general view that quality assurance should not be linked to government funding. However, it was noted that internal quality assessment often leads to either an increase or a decrease in funding for particular programmes. Thus, even where linkage was not explicit, some form of indirect relationship between funding and the results of quality assessment could not be ruled out.

Other issues raised included:

-- evaluation of research, with almost every country present undertaking some kind of experiment or pilot study in research assessment;
-- the need in several countries to harmonise separate laws on higher education;
-- the importance of improved data collection and information services as an essential pre-condition of accreditation and good institutional management;

-- the value of transparency in accreditation processes.

Special factors in the region

The concept of accreditation was used by several participants to invoke a broad desire for and the means to achieve an "internationalising" of higher education within their own countries. Thus, accreditation was seen as providing an important means of achieving European integration, concerned with the recognition of diplomas and credits, and of joint European projects. Linked to this broad view of accreditation was the belief that accreditation could help bring about higher education reform in areas such as staffing policies, financial management and the redefinition of institutional roles. In contrast, some speakers preferred to maintain a narrow conception of accreditation as referring to the approval (on behalf of the state) of academic institutions, degrees and diplomas. According to this view, accreditation should not be seen as a substitute for or a spur towards educational reforms.

Special note was taken of the problems of small states, such as the Baltic States and Slovenia, in which the academic community is considered to be too small to permit peer review processes to be undertaken with sufficient objectivity. In such states there is a demand for regional, European and international co-operation in accreditation and quality assurance processes.

Accreditation and evaluation strategies and criteria

There was agreement that there was a need to clarify terminology. The term "accreditation" in particular was being used in a loose way during the seminar and needed to be distinguished from other concepts such as recognition, audit and evaluation.

The workshop identified tensions between national identity on the one hand and international comparability or harmonisation on the other. Thus, to what extent should standards be grounded in national educational philosophies and traditions and to what extent in terms of international criteria and norms? And where should authority on matters of quality and standard lie? Who is to define, agree, formulate and enforce academic standards? Who is to accredit the accreditors?

There was discussion of the different problems facing large and small countries. The question arose of whether the sole university of a small country needed to be "above average" in order to supply the nation's leadership needs. There was agreement that both the goals and the methods of quality assurance would to some extent differ between large and small countries.

In the context of increasing diversity of higher education, there was consideration given to the ways in which curricula should be determined. Should there be a common model or common core? Should students be involved in decision-making about quality and the curriculum? Should some universities specialise in certain fields? Was the current need for consolidation or innovation?

There was discussion about the sort of evidence of quality that should be admissible. There was agreement that the objective was not be seek one-to-one equivalence between institutions and between programmes but to identify a set of minimum requirements which should be met. There was also agreement that the first criterion should be the quality of the teaching staff, both in relation to teaching and research. However, the latter should be evaluated in terms of qualitative rather than quantitative criteria.
Quality assurance, employment and the economy

General issues

There was in all countries an increased pressure for access to higher education. In many cases half of each generation would soon have, or already have, some post-secondary experience. This was sometimes perceived as a threat to quality, identity, sense of purpose. In all countries a first response had been institutional diversification; how can quality assurance be seen in this wider framework?

The main issue was how to respond to increased demands and maintain quality in a context of limited resources. Institutional responses might not suffice, however; concerns for quality, relevance and efficiency were to be seen in a system-wide perspective.

It would also be useful to have a better knowledge or understanding of the needs of society and the economy. It should be recognised that some other factors, such as the absence of alternatives or youth unemployment, can still increase demand for higher education. Some indication of the main employment outlets could also be made and priorities for the further development of education identified.

Responses to the pressure of demand

There was a clear recognition of increased pressure of demand, sometimes from students with low motivation and not well prepared; the risk was a decrease in quality or high numbers of drop outs. Several responses were envisaged. The emphasis was first placed on diversification, the creation or development of courses parallel to the universities; the "promotion" of secondary schools providing two to three year courses at post-secondary level. Judging the quality of these new kinds of provision implied the use of different criteria.

There was also mention of restructuring and shortening existing courses, with a view to maintaining quality and reducing costs. This implied also changes to the curricula, and improvements in pedagogical methods and the training of teachers, particularly for the first years of study.

It was also felt that growing demand would mean increased "vocationalisation" of higher education. There were different views about this, however. Some would admit a search for occupational relevance within the university, only within the framework of traditional academic disciplines and their own methods and criteria. Others were rather in favour of developing "vocational" opportunities outside the universities, particularly short cycle courses.

Growth and diversification could have unfortunate consequences for subject choice by students. The fall in demand for engineering was an important example of this for which explanations needed to be sought in the school systems and in the social status accorded to engineers.

Adjusting to new needs

There was a concern about the difficulty of forecasting or identifying new needs or employment opportunities. There were also questions about how to translate this into structures, curriculum and methods. Freedom for institutions implied responsibilities. It was stressed that employers, government and the students themselves had their responsibilities and a dialogue should be opened, to strike a balance
between bureaucratic and market models. The place of private institutions was an issue of some concern in certain countries.

It was recognised that a choice can be made between different structural arrangements at post-secondary level, and that, within such arrangements, there was some flexibility for the universities to define their own role. This implied a large diversity of criteria for quality assurance and accreditation, among which were many factors that were neither internal nor academic, but related to outside factors and situations.

The international dimension of accreditation and evaluation

Differences in national developments

Some countries, notably the Czech Republic and Hungary, were actively developing systems of accreditation. Feasibility studies on the establishment of accreditation systems were being supported by TEMPUS in Poland, Albania, Hungary and Romania. However, the question was raised whether accreditation was really necessary, particularly in small countries. Certainly it was important not to equate quality assurance solely with accreditation.

Problems of implementation included the non-representation of industry and society on accreditation bodies and the lack of suitable data for comparative analysis.

The needs for quality assurance systems were variously seen as:

-- assisting in ensuring international credibility for the work of higher education institutions;
-- providing a basis for stratifying institutions between university and non-university sectors;
-- developing greater self-confidence and assurance within institutions;
-- providing a basis for legal status in the case of new institutions, including private institutions.

Different views existed about the importance of legislation in establishing quality assurance systems. In some cases it was felt that this was essential to enforce change. But others felt that legislation could be time-consuming and complex to produce and could serve to prevent change. Many felt that legislation should be minimal, particularly in the smaller countries in which institutional self-evaluation was likely to be the key to effective quality assurance.

Quality assurance and accreditation needed to be developed in the national contexts of general policies for higher education, in most cases would imply the creation of buffer organisations between the State and institutions, and should be introduced in such ways as to maintain institutional independence.

International co-operation

There was a generally felt need for international co-operation in quality assurance, particularly among the small countries. In part, it reflected feelings of recent isolation but also the reality of much greater interaction across borders through student and staff exchanges, joint projects and other collaborative activities. And pragmatically it was felt that development would be assisted through the maximum exchange of information, ideas and experience.
Among the priorities for international collaboration were:

-- the articulation of models for the achievement of academic excellence;
-- the creation of databases of recognised institutions and bibliographic information (the work of CEPES was noted in this respect);
-- studies of the international comparability of quality and standards of education;
-- some kind of control mechanism concerning courses provided by foreign universities;
-- the possible creation of a European Accreditation Agency which might set a lower limit for eligibility of institutions to be considered for international partnerships and exchanges;
-- pilot studies of the introduction of quality assurance systems in the region (possibly linked to existing studies by CRE, EU and OECD).

General conclusions and proposals for future work

Quality assurance in the regional context

Quality in higher education was a major concern to the central and eastern European countries represented at the seminar. Most of these countries are considering or have already introduced legislation or are taking other appropriate action to set up national systems of quality assurance. However, the detailed working out of policies and procedures at both national system and institutional levels has hardly begun.

The purposes of quality assurance systems in the region are strongly influenced by factors associated with the political and economic changes in the region. They form part of a broader agenda for change in higher education and a re-defining of relations between higher education and the state. Issues of access, of employment, of funding, of curricula were at the heart of many of the discussions during the seminar.

Because of the complexity and interconnectedness of the issues, the need for clarity of concepts and purposes remains. The seminar was about quality but it was also crucially about control and change. Quality issues were variously considered in terms of the standards achieved by graduates, the richness of the student experience, the up-to-datedness of curricula, and value for money. Control issues revolved around the balance of accountability to the State, to the consumer, to the market, or to the international academic community. The use of funding mechanisms in order to exercise control -- and by whom and for what purpose -- is a further aspect of the accountability issue. Pressures for change in higher education are largely reflections of the needs of societies for more and different kinds of graduates. But these needs are rarely articulated with any clarity. Can quality assurance systems help?

Quality assurance can be a means of change, innovation and development. To achieve this potential, quality assurance systems need to be created which take account of and build upon the educational traditions and political contexts of individual countries. Uncritical importation of systems and methods from elsewhere will be unlikely to achieve the maximum benefits of quality assurance.
Issues in setting up national systems of quality assurance

Internationally, the purposes of quality assurance have been to achieve (i) the assurance of threshold quality, (ii) the comparison of quality between programmes and institutions, (iii) the improvement or enhancement of quality or (iv) some combination thereof. The problem worldwide is how to achieve all three purposes. The emphasis of the countries represented at the seminar differed. Thus, within Poland there appeared to be considerable interest in using quality assurance to make internal comparative distinctions between types of institution. Countries with growing private sectors of institutions tended to place greater emphasis on ensuring threshold quality. Smaller countries were more interested in quality assurance acting as the motor of change and improvement.

Clarity of purpose is vital in establishing a national quality assurance system. Priorities are likely to differ between countries and these will need to be reflected in the legislation and machineries which are established. What can be achieved will in part be dependent on the relations between higher education and the state, both formal and informal and including the extent of the trust and goodwill between the two, and on the academic cultures and traditions within institutions, particularly concerning hierarchies and management.

Opinions differed at the seminar about the role of legislation. One view was that it should be minimal -- "one line" -- but others clearly envisaged a more elaborate approach. The difficulties in this field of "getting things right first time" suggest some advantages in the minimalist approach in facilitating modification in the light of experience.

Perhaps more important than legislation will be the establishment of machineries and processes of quality assurance at both system and institutional levels. Discussion during the seminar about the kinds of criteria and evidence of quality that were credible and available indicated some of the difficulties that would be involved. The importance of pilot schemes, of effective dissemination of information and good practice, and of evaluating the evaluators were stressed by many speakers.

If legislation, machineries and processes are all essential pre-requisites to the establishment of a quality assurance or accreditation system, it is people who are the key to its successful implementation. Here, several speakers spoke of the need to "change mentalities and attitudes", to address questions of "motivation and incentives". These were matters which would affect all academic staff and would impinge also on other kinds of staff and on students. Changes in culture were required but could not be achieved overnight. Importance would need to be attached to the preparation of briefing papers and guidelines and to providing conferences and workshops. Clarity of purpose in the quality assurance arrangements would be very important in gaining wide understanding and commitment to them.

The small country "problem"

This was referred to at many points during the seminar and the general consensus appeared to be that it was indeed a "problem", at least in the sense that systems used in countries with large numbers of institutions could not be copied unchanged into countries which had only one or two institutions.

The problem was two-fold:

i) the absence of internal comparability (if a country has only one physics department, what does it compare it with?);

ii) the absence of neutral and independent peer expertise (everyone knows everyone else).
The problem could, however, be over-stated. Internationally, increasing emphasis is being given to institutional self-evaluation and the effectiveness of this is largely independent of system size. Indeed, the development of self-evaluation coupled with some form of internationalisation in the peer review process could be particularly effective in a small country where accreditation as such, and the attendant bureaucratic machineries, might not be necessary.

**International issues**

These arose at several points in the seminar and concerned:

-- student and staff exchanges;

-- comparability of qualifications in increasingly international labour markets;

-- dissemination of information and good practice (ie learning from each other);

-- possible co-operation in developing national and regional quality assurance and accreditation systems.

The importance attached to international issues partly reflected the problems faced by the small countries but it was also a recognition of the relative isolation of countries during the cold war period. Whether real or not, there was a perception among many participants that there was a process of "catching up" to be achieved during which international collaboration would have a vital part to play.

The seminar heard of contributions from CEPES and the OECD in terms of the provision of information. But there was general agreement that much remains to be done and that quality assurance should be the subject of further work under the PHARE and other programmes.

**Quality assurance and diversity in higher education**

Linked to the desire for greater internationalism in higher education was the complexity and diversity of new forms of institution and programmes of study which, if not properly recognised and understood, could act as barriers to exchange and co-operation.

Diversity in higher education poses major questions for quality assurance. Should quality be viewed in terms of universal criteria and standards or should it be mission-related? The answer has major implications for the kinds of quality assurance system to be established and for their likely impact upon and reception by institutions.

Where diversity is a policy objective, its achievement may be effected in contrasting ways: through legislation or through the operation of a market. In the latter case, institutions require maximum freedom in order to develop distinctive missions to meet changing market needs. Unless external quality assurance can take account of institutional missions, it runs the danger of undermining institutional purposes by evaluating them against inappropriate criteria. Where legislation is employed to create diversity, quality assurance can serve to ‘police’ it by ensuring that institutions operate within externally set criteria of mission. The implications here for the achievement of other purposes of quality assurance -- in particular, improvement and enhancement -- are considerable.
As well as institutional and programme diversity within countries, there is the issues of the diversity of national higher education systems themselves. This raises questions about the extent to which international comparability or harmonisation can or should be sought in higher education standards and qualifications. In an age of national identity there are few voices to be heard in favour of solely international or regional quality assurance and accreditation. However, the issue of comparability is a live one and need not be taken to imply a call for harmonisation.

There was debate during the seminar about how far standards should be grounded in national educational philosophies or whether we should be striving to achieve international standards and criteria. The answer was probably 'some of both' although the seminar was reminded of the essentially international nature of academic work ("there is no local science") with the implication that international standards could not be ignored completely. Thus, many of the further actions proposed during the seminar concerned ways of achieving effective international collaboration.

**Proposals for future work**

These can be divided between work connected with the establishment of national quality assurance and accreditation systems and work to support international co-operation, although the two are related.

Most countries in the region will soon be embarking on the construction of machineries and processes to support quality assurance. They will need to explain (and to 'sell') the concept of quality assurance throughout their universities and institutes of higher education in order to achieve acceptance and "ownership" by the higher education community as a whole. This will take time and work through seminars, workshops and briefing papers, and countries could do much to assist each other and might wish to obtain assistance from international networks and consortia. Recognition of the international trends involved and the value of external experience might assist in gaining acceptance of quality assurance among the academic communities of particular countries. However, initiation of actions in this area will be primarily the responsibility of bodies within individual countries.

Future international collaboration in the field of quality assurance and accreditation might take a number of forms:

-- **international experts in peer review.** Many existing quality assurance bodies in Western Europe use foreign experts as part of their peer review teams. This would be especially useful in the establishment of new quality assurance systems and, in particular, would meet some of the needs of the smaller countries for independent and objective expertise. It was also suggested that academics from central and eastern Europe might take part in evaluation visits conducted by existing agencies in the West, to the benefit of both.

-- **It is proposed, therefore, that consideration be given to the establishment of a network, with appropriate links to existing networks of quality assurance agencies, to support the international exchange of experts to support peer review.**

-- **joint research and development work.** At several points during the seminar, a need for joint project work was identified. In general, there was a recognition that joint projects could speed up the development process in individual countries. Additionally, the importance attached to gaining improved knowledge of the comparability of systems and qualifications suggested a specific need for comparative projects on higher education quality.
Specific project proposals were not drawn up at the seminar but suggestions were made for (i) pilot studies of the implementation of quality assurance in the central and eastern European Countries, preferably linked to existing projects being undertaken under the auspices of OECD, EU and CRE; (ii) projects examining the comparability of programmes and qualifications between countries.

Support might be sought from the PHARE programme for collaborative project work in this area, to involve the several higher education research centres represented at the seminar, in association with centres working on similar projects in western Europe.

Information services. Several speakers at the seminar emphasised the information needs of quality assurance -- both for information about systems and methods of quality assurance and benchmark data on quality and standards for comparative purposes. Work is being undertaken by CEPES and OECD in this area and there are also projects in individual countries.

It is proposed, therefore, that further support be sought for the establishment of information services for quality assurance in the region, to include the co-ordination of existing activities in this area.

The importance of developing effective systems of quality assurance in higher education was stressed at many times during the conference. The potential benefits include:

-- a greater self-knowledge leading to improvement within institutions;
-- dissemination of information about standards and educational developments;
-- greater confidence in and understanding of higher education from governments and other external bodies.

Issues of quality could not be divorced from the general policy and developmental issues facing higher education in central and eastern Europe. The seminar emphasised the interconnectedness of issues and the importance of international collaboration in addressing them.
Part I

Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education
Ljubljana, Slovenia, 9 to 11 March 1994

Seminar Papers
DEVELOPMENTS IN QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

John Brennan

Introduction

New arrangements for the assurance of quality in British higher education were introduced just over a year ago. They reflect a changing relationship between higher education and the state and they encompass a higher education system which has undergone considerable expansion and diversification in recent years.

The aim of this paper is to relate the new quality assurance arrangements in Britain to the wider context of historical and political factors influencing higher education in that country. The central point will be that quality assurance cannot be context free. Arrangements which work with one set of consequences in one context will have different outcomes if transplanted to another context. A second point that will be central to the argument will be that debates about quality in higher education are increasingly debates about control: who controls? by what means? with what consequences?

The context

To begin with one should look at the context provided by the British higher education system. (it should be mentioned at the outset that there are certain differences in the higher education systems operated in the constituent countries of the United Kingdom. However, although important in some respects, they do not materially affect the argument of this paper.)

The introduction of new system-wide quality assurance arrangements at the end of 1992 coincided with other major developments in higher education which were themselves the culmination of changes in structure, management and financing that had been taking place since the arrival of the Conservative Government led by Margaret Thatcher in 1979. Chief among the changes which occurred in 1992 was the creation of an additional 40 universities out of the polytechnics and a few other major colleges. By the time of their change in status in 1992, these institutions accounted for over half of the undergraduate student population. Their characteristics and history, therefore, have played an important part in shaping the new system, and in particular its quality assurance arrangements.

However, before looking at some of the distinguishing characteristics of the former non-university sector, some of the features which characterise British higher education as a whole, particularly in relation to the kinds of system found in continental Europe should be described. Firstly, higher education in Britain has generally been depicted as possessing high levels of institutional autonomy. Matters of curricula, examination, admission and staff appointments have been for individual institutions to determine. Academic staff are employees of their own universities. The State has no role in their appointment or in their promotion. The State provides no regulations or even guidance on curricula matters. And although it is the prime source of funding to higher education, until recently such funding was largely "without strings", its deployment being entirely a matter for the individual university to determine against institutionally-set priorities.
Against this characteristic of institutional autonomy, until recently British higher education has been regarded as small and elitist by comparison with other industrial countries. As such, it has traditionally received quite generous levels of funding permitting student/staff ratios in the order of 8:1.

British higher education might then be characterised in the mid-1960s as small, elitist and not subject to direct public control. It was, however, by all accounts -- of reputation if not by more direct evidence -- of high quality.

Successive governments since the 1960s have set out to expand higher education massively, to do so at greatly reduced unit costs, and to increase higher education’s responsiveness to perceived social and economic needs.

An early policy instrument towards this end was the creation of a strong tier of non-university institutions to challenge the hegemony of the universities. The polytechnics were created at the end of the 1960s out of mergers of existing regional colleges. (The sense in which the “new” universities, created out of the polytechnics, are new institutions is thus very limited. Many of them have existed under previous institutional titles for longer than many “old” universities.) The creation of the polytechnics can be seen as an attempt by government to by-pass the powerful and conservative interests of the universities. Over 25 years, the polytechnics became major vehicles for change and innovation in British higher education, pioneering new forms of curricula and curriculum organisation, extending access to previously under-represented social groups, making new links with employment through work-placements and other means, expanding part-time provision and so on.

The polytechnics also pioneered new forms of (more managerial) decision-making and were subject to many kinds of external control, initially through local education authorities who exercised detailed budgetary supervision and who owned the institutions and employed the staff. More significant, however, were the external controls over the quality of academic provision in the former polytechnics as these constitute the main precursors of the quality assurance arrangements which have recently been introduced for the system as a whole.

The polytechnics were subject to major forms of external quality control that were not found in the university sector. Like the school system to which they were linked through local authority ownership and control, they were subject to visits from Her Majesty’s Inspectorate (HMI). The Inspectors -- ex-teachers employed by the State -- played a generally benign advisory role until the mid-1980s. They visited institutions, observed classes, gave advice to departmental heads and college principals and to the employing local authorities. Their work was low-key and largely behind-the-scenes. Its purposes and outcomes were not transparent to ordinary teaching staff and rarely came to the attention of wider publics. However, from the mid-1980s, HMI assumed an additional and controversial role in advising funding bodies on the relative quality of institutions’ courses. In addition, their reports were made public.

The second form of external quality control rested with the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA), set up by Royal Charter in 1964 as the degree-awarding body for the non-university institutions. Students who successfully completed courses of study at polytechnics received degrees from the CNAA, not from the polytechnic they had attended. The CNAA was therefore responsible for the academic standard of the degrees awarded by the polytechnics and was required by the terms of its original Royal Charter to ensure that these standards were the equivalent of degrees awarded by the universities (each of which had its own degree awarding powers).

The CNAA, which was constituted as a body independent of both the State and the institutions, exercised its responsibilities for academic standards through a process of peer review of courses and institutions, drawing on expertise from across all of higher education, including the universities. All new
courses had to be submitted to CNAA for approval and courses were subject to review every five years or so. Approval and review were carried out by subject boards and committees comprising academic peers from United Kingdom higher education institutions and the professions who would examine detailed course documentation and visit institutions for discussion with staff and students. The system of course review was complemented by a system of institutional review following roughly similar principles. For most of its lifetime, well over 2,000 academics would be involved as "members" of the CNAA in any one year, scrutinising courses in institutions other than their own. Far larger numbers of academic staff would experience CNAA from the "receiving end", at visits and in preparing documentation and receiving comments on it. At the height of its powers, the CNAA operation was sometimes likened to the Spanish Inquisition but during the 1980s it evolved more of a partnership model with its institutions and gradually devolved many of its powers and responsibilities to the institutions themselves.

The combined effect of the work of HMI and the CNAA was that, at the time of their re-designation as universities in 1992, the polytechnics had evolved institutional cultures of which the explicit monitoring and review of courses was a central feature. Their academic staff were used to being accountable, both within and outside their institutions. Although some would criticise the review procedures as "time-wasting bureaucracy", many others would value the opportunities they provided for re-thinking current practices, for the exchange of views and experiences with colleagues and the wider exchange of information and intelligence that the system of external peer review and related activities brought about.

Other quality assurance procedures in the polytechnics were also shared by the universities. Many courses required external accreditation by professional bodies in order to ensure that their graduates would be "recognised" by the labour market. And the assessment processes on all courses were subject to the moderation of external examiners, drawn mainly from other higher education institutions, whose brief concerned comparability of standards as well as justice to individual students.

Government concerns about efficiency and standards in the public services in general and higher education in particular led to increasing criticism of the above arrangements during the 1980s. In particular, the government was anxious to link funding to quality of provision, something it achieved in the polytechnic sector from 1987 with the support of HMI (although not the CNAA). It was in this context that the continued absence of external quality assurance arrangements for the universities appeared increasingly untenable and, in order to attempt to prevent its imposition by government, in 1990 the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP) of the universities established the Academic Audit Unit. The introduction of academic audit -- as a voluntary process which autonomous universities, if they so wished, might "invite" -- followed a decision by CVCP that:

"universities’ structures and mechanisms for the assurance of the quality of the provision of their programmes of study and the maintenance and enhancement of their academic standards should be examined by a body, independent of individual institutions, but owned and managed by the universities as a whole"

CVCP, 1992

The Audit Unit was scarcely operational when the 1991 White Paper was published and the new quality assurance arrangements were announced. The process of academic audit was continued as "quality audit" under the new arrangements and will be described in a later section of this paper.

The above represent the main external quality assurance mechanisms which existed in Britain prior to the 1992 reforms. They do not, however, constitute the entire story. Institutions themselves operated a variety of internal quality control procedures. In the polytechnics, these tended to reflect the external
requirements of the CNAA. The universities had traditionally placed greater store by the regulation of "inputs", i.e. in setting high entry standards for enrolling students and in recruiting academic staff with the highest possible qualifications. Thus, a proxy measure of course quality had long been the degree of difficulty of gaining admission to it. Such approaches to quality reflected the values of a relatively elitist system.

The reasons for change

The reasons for the many changes introduced in the 1992 Bill are complex, a product of many agendas, accidents and ideologies. The reasons for the decision to end the so-called "binary" divide between universities and polytechnics lie beyond the scope of this paper. But the decision inevitably held consequences for the quality assurance arrangements to be adopted in the unified system. The Government’s White Paper announcing the reforms devoted several pages to the issue of quality. Why was this so?

Part of the interest was undoubtedly a reflection of wider trends connected with the creation of mass systems of higher education. The increased costs of such systems, the greater visibility in society of both students and graduates -- including the increasing complexities of relationships with the labour market -- coupled with pressures on public spending after the oil crisis all contributed to an emphasis on "value for money", both in efficiency and in quality terms. Managerialism was a response to the former, external quality assessment a response to the latter. But in the United Kingdom, these factors were accentuated by the government’s ideological suspicion of the public services in general and of higher education in particular. This saw cuts in funding and a variety of attempts to interfere with curricula and teaching, both in individual institutions and in the system as a whole.

The traditional autonomy of UK universities could be construed by government as publicly-funded institutions "out of control" and throughout the 1980s a succession of reforms were introduced to subject academic work to more stringent managerial control, both within individual institutions and within the system as a whole. There was, in short, a lack of trust and a mutual suspicion between higher education and the government that provides the essential backdrop both for the introduction of the new quality assurance arrangements and for their likely consequences within higher education.

Arrangements for quality post 1992

The present arrangements for quality assurance in the United Kingdom established by the 1992 legislation involve two parallel processes: quality audit and quality assessment. Quality audit was defined in the White Paper as "external scrutiny aimed at providing guarantees that institutions have suitable quality control mechanisms in place". The focus is on institutions’ internal procedures for the maintenance and enhancement of quality. Quality assessment, on the other hand, attempts to look directly at the quality of educational provision. It was defined by the White Paper as the "external review of, and judgements about, the quality of teaching and learning in institutions". Quality audit and quality assessment are the responsibilities of two quite separate bodies. Audits are carried out by the Higher Education Quality Council, a body established and wholly owned by the higher education institutions themselves. Quality assessments are carried out by the Quality Assessment Divisions of the higher Education Funding Councils -- separate ones for England, Scotland and Wales -- and the results are fed into the funding process.

Both quality audit and quality assessment recognise and build upon institutions’ own quality assurance arrangements. Integral to the external processes are institutional self-evaluations and peer review visits, the latter usually taking three days and undertaken by academic staff from other higher education
institutions. Such staff are trained for the purpose and contracted to the relevant quality agency. Audit always involves a visit whereas, in England at least, assessment visits only occur in a proportion of cases. The focus of these visits is intended to differ radically between audit and assessment although in practice there seem to be overlaps. In particular, in order to discover whether internal quality procedures are effective, audit must address questions at the subject or course levels which are the more direct focus of assessment.

The reports of audit and assessment visits are published and one of the objectives of both processes is to inform broader publics -- employers, intending students, schools -- about the quality of higher education provision. It is here that one of the many dilemmas in the new arrangements arises in that the external uses of quality reports for decision purposes imply a concern with the relative quality of institutions and courses whereas institutions are deeply suspicious of any suggestion of ranking. The different ways in which audit and assessment approach this dilemma is revealing, both of the different objectives of the two processes and of the intensely political contexts of their operation. An examination of them can also help explain why Britain has two quite separate bodies and processes of quality assurance.

The contextual factors can be summarised as follows:

- a suspicious government generally perceived by higher education institutions to be hostile to their interests;
- a government ideologically committed to "market forces" and therefore to competition between institutions;
- a much expanded and diversified higher education system of institutions and courses;
- a recently unified higher education system bringing together two quite different traditions of quality assurance.

The key differences between audit and assessment reflect the old adage that "you don’t bite the hand that feeds you". For quality assessment, this hand is the government. For quality audit, it is the institutions.

Quality assessment reports inform the public of the quality of higher education by a ranking of courses on a three point scale. Courses are either excellent, satisfactory or unsatisfactory. (Scotland allows a fourth category of "highly satisfactory"). The public is informed of the quality of higher education through quality audit reports which have been described in a recent review by management consultants as strong on description and explanation and weak on judgement. In particular, the report criticises:

- the coded language of report "recommendations" and conclusions;
- the fact that reports do not identify the relative importance of comments made.

But the review also concedes that a high priority for the authors of audit reports is that the institutions, their paymasters, should not be offended by what they write. The practical value of audit reports to external publics is thereby limited.

Both audit and assessment must strike a balance in meeting the conflicting requirements of government and institutions. The former wants an effective quality assessment system which has "teeth", which involves sanctions that punish the "bad" and rewards the "good", and which provides higher education’s many customers with information on which "market" decisions can be made. Higher education
institutions want to preserve as much of their traditional autonomies as they possibly can. They want the minimum of outside interference in their affairs and seek to maximise the institutional benefits from it while minimising the costs. In striking the appropriate balance, quality audit must look first towards the attitudes of its institutions whereas quality assessment must look first towards the attitudes of government. Institutions undoubtedly saw audit as a defence against external interference. By their voluntary decision to introduce audit in 1990, they sought to limit the extent of external scrutiny on CNAA or HMI lines. They did not succeed in convincing government that audit was sufficiently strong for purposes of public accountability. Accordingly, external quality assessment has been introduced and institutions now face two forms of external scrutiny.

**The impact on institutions**

Recently undertaken reviews of quality assessment and quality audit commissioned by the funding councils and the quality council respectively provide a few points to the impact of the new quality arrangements on institutions. Many institutions report beneficial changes arising out of the new arrangements, though less from the assessments and audits themselves than from the actions taken by institutions in preparation for them. There are complaints about paperwork and other costs but apparently few fundamental criticisms of the validity of the processes and their outcomes. There is little evidence, however, from these reviews that the new quality arrangements have done anything, one way or another, to affect the actual quality of educational provision in British universities and colleges.

It is perhaps too early and too complex a task to identify impact on quality and it must be remembered in any case that, from the outside at least, improvement is seen as secondary to accountability in the objectives of quality audit and assessment. But another way of looking at impact on institutions is in terms of the organisational structures and distribution of power within institutions. These affect and in turn are affected by quality assurance processes, both internal and external. More than anything else quality assurance is about power and control.

British universities have been typified as examples of "guild" or collegial decision-making arrangements. Autonomy of institutions from the rest of society has been matched, in theory at least, by autonomy of individual academics within institutions. Decision-making, therefore, has traditionally been democratic with considerable powers and influence held at the basic units, generally departments, of the institutions. Compared with North American practice, the powers of institutional heads -- vice chancellors or principals -- have been weak. Compared with practice in continental Europe, the powers of full professors have also been relatively weak.

Viewed from the outside such arrangements have been regarded as reflecting weak forms of control -- thus fuelling government suspicion of higher education -- and through a variety of strategies greater managerialism has been introduced into the system. This, however, can easily be exaggerated and democratic forms still predominate in many universities. It is worth noting that a frequently cited reason for the need for greater managerialism within institutions is the growing requirement to respond to outside agencies, often at short notice, of which the quality bodies are important examples.

External quality bodies deal with institutions through institutional heads. And thus, within the institution, quality issues can no longer be left to individual departments, still less to individual academics. To some extent at least, internal forms of accountability for quality must be established if the institution is to be able to deal safely with the external agencies. As evidence of this, many institutions have appointed directors of quality, set up central quality units and revised committee terms of reference and job descriptions of academic and administrative staff to take account of quality as an issue. This is often commented upon in terms of costs and bureaucracy. But perhaps its more significant impact is on power.
and control. That which has traditionally been private and the defining characteristic of the academic’s claim to competence and professional autonomy is now public and subject to external comment and scrutiny. This brings about changed relationships within institutions, both between individual staff members, between the separate parts or basic units of the institutions and between the basic units and the centre.

The exact impact on these relationships is not uni-directional in terms of greater managerialism from the centre. In the United Kingdom, although audit -- with its emphasis on institution-wide quality control procedures -- tends to empower the centre, assessment by bestowing special status on individual subjects can greatly increase the power of particular basic units, at least against other basic units if not against the centre.

The former polytechnics have had much greater experience of all of this in dealing with a variety of external demands. Their response was a steady growth of managerialism with more and more powers shifting to the centre. Institutional heads became de facto chief executives. Powers of basic units were steadily reduced by organisational and curricular reorganisation. Interestingly, however, such trends do not appear to be directly related to the ability of institutions to provide the highest quality of education. It is believed that the quality assessments to date have accorded many more “excellent” grades to the “old” universities than to the former polytechnics.

Lessons from the British experience

There has so far been no systematic evaluation of the impact of external quality assurance systems on British higher education. Recent reviews of assessment and audit undertaken on behalf of the respective Councils had limited objectives and terms of reference and too restricted a timescale -- both reviews undertaken in a matter of weeks -- to seriously address questions of impact. Over its 28 year history, the Council for National Academic Awards was the subject of two government-sponsored inquiries as well as a history written by Harold Silver. All tell something about the CNAA and its relationships with the polytechnics and colleges but all fall short of a systematic evaluation of impact.

That said, experience of quality assurance in British higher education is substantial, both in relation to the introduction of the 1992 arrangements and the much longer polytechnic and college history. What then has been learned?

On the basis of British experience the introduction of system of external quality assurance outlined in this paper is likely to have the following effects:

-- to increase attention to quality issues at all levels in higher education institutions;

-- to disseminate, with greater or lesser effectiveness, information and good practice within institutions;

-- to change relationships and alter the distribution of power and control within institutions.

In addition, quality assurance systems may, depending on their nature and the political and institutional contexts in which they operate, have the following additional effects:

-- lead to greater external confidence and support for higher education, including its funding (although the United Kingdom only has only had direct experience of the converse);
-- inform and hence change the attitude and behaviour of the various clients of higher education (e.g. student applications and graduate employment);

-- encourage networking and co-operation between institutions with the effect of producing better system-wide information;

-- encourage competition between institutions and between individual departments;

-- divert academic staff time away from teaching and research;

-- increase bureaucracy within institutions;

-- enable the higher education community to understand better the effects of their actions.

Thus, the potential effects of the introduction of external quality assurance in higher education are a mixture of threats and promises. There is now considerable international experience on matters such as the conduct of peer review, procedures for self-evaluation, the role of performance indicators, the style, content and publication of reports, to help to design quality assurance systems that achieve the promises and avoid the threats. But the circumstances in which quality assurance systems are introduced and operate, including principally the political context of higher education-state relationships, will in the end determine the nature of their impact.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


QUALITY IMPROVEMENT AND ACCREDITATION IN
EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Johanna Crighton

Introduction

The focus for this short presentation is the increasing importance of accreditation/recognition of educational credentials, both within the European Union itself and within the wider European context. The venerable Convention 15 -- with us since 1953 -- has to a large extent been overtaken by history; rather than amending and re-amending it, we are now aiming at a new Convention which takes account of:

-- the radically changed situation in all of Europe, west as well as central and east;

-- the emphasis now placed on mutual trust and recognition of credentials, rather than on one-to-one correspondence and "equivalence";

-- the obvious need to widen the scope of the 1953 Convention and its subsequent Declarations, from application only to three year university degrees to a much greater variety of qualifications, diplomas, and credentials of various kinds; and

-- the emphasis now placed -- not only in the Maastricht Treaty itself but in the new Association Agreements between the EU and (some) central European countries -- on the teaching, learning, and certification of language proficiency.

We will pay special attention to this last point, because foreign languages provide a useful focus for the larger issues of accredited examinations and qualifications, and their mutual acceptance between countries.

"European Standards"

In all the central and eastern European countries where we have worked since 1990, colleagues expressed a desire for their national systems to be "comparable to European standards". While it is not clear what "European standards" are -- A-Levels, Abitur, Matura and Baccalaureate are all quite different, and are all, themselves, in a state of revision and change -- the desire for comparability is genuine, and should be addressed.

Within the institutions of the European Union itself, there have been dramatic changes. Most obvious is the increase in the number of Member states, from the original three of post-war BeNeLux, to the six of 1951 (adding Germany, Italy and France), to the 12 of 1986 (adding Ireland, Greece, Portugal, Spain, Denmark, and Great Britain), now possibly doubling to an eventual total of 25 Member countries.

Nor is this merely a matter of numerical expansion. These 25 countries present a much greater diversity in traditions, cultures, and languages which will need to be accommodated. And matters are moving fast. Already there are "Europe Agreements" (or "Association Agreements") signed in 1991 with
Poland, Hungary, and the Czech and Slovak republics, and more recently with Romania and Bulgaria as well. These are now well on their way to ratification; as of December 1993, seven of the 12 EU Member states had ratified the first group.

Clearly, these changes and new directions mean that earlier Conventions on the recognition of qualifications -- the oldest and most important of which, Convention 15, was adopted 40 years ago -- have to be reviewed and widened if the basic principles of academic mobility, recognition, and convergence on a "European standard" are to become a reality.

The Present Framework

The following texts are the foundation of Council of Europe policy regarding recognition:

-- **No. 15** European Convention of the Equivalence of Diplomas (1953).

-- **No. 49** Protocol to Convention 15 (1964).

-- **No. 21** European Convention on the Equivalence of Periods of University Study (1956).

-- **No. 32** European Convention on the Academic Recognition of University Qualifications (1959).

plus additional agreements, conventions and declarations relating to Convention 15, dated up to 1992.

Basic Principles

All these documents reflect four important principles which will continue to guide the renewal of policy:

-- Conventions are legally binding on States that have acceded to them;

-- The education systems of all signatory States are considered to be "essentially equal";

-- "Mutual trust" is a pre-condition: Qualifications certified by one State are accepted by all others;

-- The decisive factor is the **level** of the diploma, not the **time of study** required to obtain it.

Terminology

"Equivalence" is an old expression; it has never been defined, either nationally or internationally, and its interpretation can vary from "some similarity" to "complete equity". We have come to see that there is no true "equi-valence" among qualifications, not even within the same institution or university. Therefore, at least in higher education within the European Union, the notion of "equivalence" has been replaced by the notion of "recognition".
Recognition is given for three types of purposes:

A Academic

-- mostly by educational institutions, often internally (e.g., between university departments; or sometimes by admissions officers or via NARICs⁷).

B Professional

-- of qualifications for professional purposes, e.g., medical, legal, or teaching qualifications (mostly by States/Ministries, employers, or professional organisations).

C Vocational

-- of non-academic, vocational qualifications e.g. for technical or skilled workers moving within the EU (mostly by employers and/or trade unions, guilds, certifying agencies).

There is no internationally -- or even nationally -- agreed methodology for establishing a basis for recognition; methods vary, even within the same university, but the three main criteria used are **time spent; content covered; and quality of teaching and resources**. Additional considerations relate to the place of the qualification in the national education system; any academic or professional "rights" or titles linked with the qualification; and the content/quality of the teaching programme, methods of assessment, practice requirements etc.

The central/eastern Europe connection

Central and eastern European countries, too, are creating their own widening networks. For example, TEMPUS now includes the three Baltic States, plus Albania, Poland, Hungary, the Czech and Slovak Republics, Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovakia, with a 1992-93 budget of 104 million ecus. Some countries are keen to join Europe-wide efforts to establish internationally agreed levels, standards and codes of practice in language teaching and testing, e.g. through voluntary frameworks such as that proposed by the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE).

In general education, all countries in the C/E Europe region share serious concerns about educational standards in rapidly diversifying and decentralizing systems.² As education systems move from INPUT control (centralised curricula, organisation, textbooks and materials, timetables, teaching sequence and methods etc.) to OUTPUT control (establishing standards and monitoring levels of achievement), examinations and other ways to certify OUTPUT will increase in importance.
Quality Assurance and Accreditation

The notion of educational quality has three main components:

-- quality of input (resources, materials, context);

-- quality of process (curriculum, teaching methods);

-- quality of output (achievement; student learning).

In central and eastern Europe’s difficult economic and social circumstances, it is only natural that most of our efforts are directed at improving input and process. For one thing, these are more easily observed and measured, and improvements are quicker and more obvious: a new school building, an attractive set of new textbooks, a new course on computer applications, new teaching methods, new types of schools (e.g. private or specialised schooling) all excite the imagination and give new zest and motivation to teachers and students. No wonder that most international project money is aimed at improving the quality of educational input and process, with the implied expectation that quality of educational output will automatically follow.

However, this approach ignores a unique power. Educational assessment of outcomes can be used not only to measure but to influence and reinforce the quality of input and process. This power is known as the "backwash" effect of educational assessment: traditionally much lamented, but now increasingly recognised by national (and international) bodies as an effective lever to actively affect the quality of educational provision, both in the State and private sectors. Where the State has direct control, we can think of this power as "quality assurance"; where a more diffuse, indirect model of control is appropriate, as in the private sector, the notion of "recognition" or "accreditation" arises.

Accreditation

Comments in this section will be based on the following working definition:

"Accreditation is any arrangement whereby an authorised body or agency makes a public statement approving the standards of an examination, test, or scheme of assessment administered by an independent organisation."

The significant components of this definition are:

"arrangement": this can be a set of procedures whereby the accreditation-seeker submits specified types of evidence at specified times, and whereby the accreditation-granter issues a response based on explicit criteria.

"authorised body": this refers to a committee, group, or agency of experts designated, either by Ministerial decree or by mutual consent of accreditation-seekers, to give such a response, based on professional expertise applied to the evidence submitted.

"public statement": any response issued by the authorised body (supported by explicit reasons for either granting or withholding accreditation) must be made publicly available, to guide potential users of the examination, test, or learner assessment in question.
"standards" are those features or qualities which have been assessed according to explicit criteria and codes of practice, formulated in collaboration with the education community; disseminated widely; applied -- fairly and without exception -- to all accreditation seekers equally; and subscribed to voluntarily by those wishing to receive or maintain accredited status.

"examination, test or scheme of assessment": this refers to each written or oral examination, test, or other form of learner assessment for which accreditation is sought, and for which the accreditation seeker submits appropriate supporting evidence according to the agreed arrangement (see above).

"independent organisation": this means that the accreditation seeker must be financially and organisationally independent of the accreditation granting body.

Two Main Principles Implicit in this Definition

(i) We believe that accreditation should be given to specific examinations, not to institutions which offer them; (ii) Therefore we view accreditation as a matter of technical judgement, to be carried out by experienced examinations professionals on the basis of evidence judged against agreed criteria and codes of practice.

These principles have important implications for the nature of the accreditation process. First, they avoid the pitfall of institutional accreditation, whereby a general or "blanket" stamp of approval is given to a test-providing institution merely on the basis of the institution’s general reputation, academic excellence, or national prestige.

Second, only a professionally respected body with technical knowledge and experience in educational measurement can provide leadership and credibility to any national (or international) accreditation process.

The Pre-Requisites for Accreditation

Confidence in the Applicant Institution’s Integrity/Security.

The accreditation-granting body must be confident that the applicant institution is bona fide. In the case of an established national body, such as a university or a national language testing board, this should not be difficult. But where the applicant is a commercial or private institution, further checks, references, and investigation may be necessary.

The applicant must also be able to show that security is maintained at all key stages of the examination process. This may require on-site observation as well as written details of all processes which cannot be monitored directly. Key issues would include:

-- Physical security of all places where examination materials are kept;
-- Controlled access to sensitive areas;
-- Confidentiality of paper setting procedures;
-- Secure question paper printing, storage, and distribution;
-- Secure conduct of the exams themselves (eg, supervision);
-- Collection, storage, and processing control of answer scripts;
-- Security of certificates and other confidential papers;
-- Security of data processing systems.

-- Adequate administrative capacity
-- Appropriate data processing resources and systems

-- Satisfactory professional elements, e.g., syllabus, question papers, marking schemes of a sufficient and consistent quality to warrant accreditation of the exam. For example, if the accredited exam is to be linked to the standards of -- say -- ALTE Level 3, or Goethe Institut’s Zentrale Mittelstufenprüfung, the syllabuses and question papers must allow similar behaviours (content, skills) to be assessed at similar levels.

In some cases it may be necessary for the granting body to exercise a certain level of control in these matters, or even to intervene; such monitoring procedures should be formalized and carried out on a firmly professional and fair basis. 3

Standards

The notion of "accreditation" implies a set of agreed standards of quality, standards which are "guaranteed" by the accrediting body’s stamp of approval on the certificate.

Standards for national examinations are clearly a matter for each country to decide for itself, and the formulation of these standards would be the first -- and crucial -- task of the kind of professional accrediting body we envisage.

However, there are a number of useful models, in particular in the field of foreign language testing. First, several central and eastern European countries already possess a national framework which specifies, for example, the languages for which examinations may be set (often including living foreign languages, classical, and artificial languages); levels (beginners, intermediate, advanced); and technical areas for language use, such as business German, scientific English, technical French, horticultural Dutch, legal Latin etc. Secondly, there are the Council of Europe’s modern language specifications, the Waystage and Threshold levels. A number of examination-providing European agencies have developed examinations based on these specifications; other exams are accepted nationally or internationally as proof of a level of language required for educational purposes or in the workplace; or as entry requirements to educational establishments. Depending upon the purpose of an examination, national accrediting bodies could look to these European models for a framework of standards, syllabus content, and behaviours to be assessed.

Thirdly, some examination agencies (including the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate) adhere to certain procedures in the accreditation of specific syllabuses and related question papers. These go through a series of stringent screening procedures during which they are checked against specified criteria related to scope, objectives, content, level of difficulty; the scheme of assessment, in terms of objectives, appropriateness, coverage, differentiation, reliability, validity, methods and techniques of assessment, and the use of coursework; coherence of the overall package, in terms of guidance to teachers and learners, supporting materials, etc. "Sample" question papers are scrutinised for clarity, presentation,
Fourthly, there are existing **Codes of Practice** for examination providers which could serve as a starting point for any national accreditation procedure. Examples are the Code of Practice of the Association of Language Testing in Europe (ALTE), and the Code of Practice of the Association of British ESOL Examining Boards (ABEEB). Such Codes typically spell out the rights and responsibilities of examination providers, examination users, and examination takers in four main areas: (1) examination development, and examination choice/use; (2) interpretation of examination results; (3) fairness, and (4) provision and use of information. Again, national accreditation experts could work with national and international colleagues to formulate and agree such a Code of Practice as a basis for accreditation. Whether such a Code should be a purely national one, or should seek from the start to incorporate wider European practice, is a matter for each country to decide.

**Other Issues**

A number of important issues remain to be resolved, each in its specific national context.

**Institutional**

-- What kind of (legal?) status should the accrediting body have? Is special legislation or a Ministerial decree needed? How "autonomous" should it be, and what would "autonomy" consist of, in practice?

-- Where will the accreditation function fit within the educational framework, and within public, private, and commercial test provision in each country?

-- How will it be organised, staffed, housed, serviced?

-- Will it be the **only** accreditation body for the country, or will there be several?

-- Will accreditation be compulsory or voluntary for test providers in each country?

**Financial**

-- How will the accreditation function be financed?

-- What degree of financial self-determination will the accrediting body have? For example, will it have its own budget? Can it hire and fire staff? Can it charge accreditation fees?

-- Will employees be civil servants, or will they be contract employees?
Procedural

-- Will accreditation need to be granted for each separate examination offered by each participating institution, each year?

-- If this is considered impractical, what should the scope and frequency of (re-) accreditation be?

-- How can candidates be best protected, if there are lapses in quality which might result in accreditation being withdrawn or suspended?

-- How will accreditation be made manifest - eg, will certificates bear some type of logo or stamp of approval? How can certificates be controlled to prevent abuse?

Professional

-- Will the accreditation-granting body also have jurisdiction over teaching quality and other institutional (rather than strictly examination-related) arrangements and resources?

-- In addition to accrediting duties, will the accreditation-granting body have other functions, eg, research and development, compilation of statistics for the Ministry of Education, training of testing specialists, liaison with other accrediting bodies within and outside Europe?

Conclusion

In Europe’s changing environment, where the unhindered movement of workers and students has become an important objective, the mutual recognition and accreditation of qualifications must receive renewed and urgent attention. As the new version of Convention 15 is worked out, each nation also has a parallel obligation to set its own national standards in education; and to link those standards -- insofar as possible -- to a common, European model, which respects cultural and linguistic diversity but ensures that those who wish to work or study in another country are not disadvantaged by non- or sub-"standard" qualifications. Quality assurance in education is a goal shared by all of us. Responsible models for recognition and accreditation can not only serve, but drive, our efforts towards reliable quality and comparable standards of educational provision throughout Europe.
NOTES

1. All EC countries have central recognition offices. These are networked through "NARICs" (National Academic Recognition Information Centres) created in 1984.


3. We accept that the issue of control is a sensitive one, because it seems to go against the widely expressed wish for institutional autonomy. But if there are to be credible standards, there must also be controls, as long as these are fair, based on clearly established requirements, and applied equally to all.
THE ROLE OF AN INDIVIDUAL UNIVERSITY IN EVALUATION
INSTITUTIONAL SELF-EVALUATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

Raimo Konttinen

Evaluation and assessment have always been used at the universities to assure quality and to strive for excellence. The recent emphasis on evaluation is based on several contemporary trends. First, self-regulation, as a general innovation strategy in the higher education sector, replaces the control of inputs and use of resources with the evaluation of outcomes. Second, the growth and diversification of the higher education sector raise questions on its efficiency and accountability. Third, increased international co-operation has created a need for comparability.

All the factors relate to system level higher education in general. Consequently, many of the recent major evaluation procedures have been designed on the basis of the government’s initiative or as an activity within an organisation which represents several universities. Still, the object of evaluation is an individual university or part of it. However, the experiences gained so far, relate to the functioning of the evaluation system in general. There is less analysis of the evaluation from the point of view of the university being assessed.

The present paper describes an institutional self-evaluation pilot at one university, i.e. the University of Jyväskylä in Finland. The evaluation pilot was launched in the context of national evaluation. However, it is not presented as an example of national evaluations, but from the point of view of a single university. The purpose is to present and reflect the case of a university in the context of national developments. The paper attempts to illuminate the university of as a subject -- not merely as an object -- of a national evaluation system.

The process of self-evaluation at the University of Jyväskylä has also been described in Konttinen and Panhelainen (1993) and by Sallinen, Konttinen and Panhelainen (1993) in an article submitted for publication in the Higher Education Management (probably Vol 6, No. 3, 1994). In the same issue of the Higher Education Management, Kogan (1993) discusses the self-evaluation from the point of view of the external expert group. The present paper gives also an account of the procedures, but they are discussed from the point of view of an individual university in the national context.

Background of the national evaluation strategy in Finland

General trends in Finnish higher education are similar to those in many other European countries, but what is typical of the development in the Finnish society as a whole during the last 50 years is that education has been seen as an important factor in building the Scandinavian welfare state (Panhelainen and Konttinen, 1993). There are at the moment 21 higher education institutions in the country, whose population is about 5 million. The total number of students is about 120 000, 25 per cent of the 20-25 age cohorts, and the total number of teachers and researchers is 7 900, i.e. one per 15 students. There has been strong consensus of the need to develop Higher Education, and its resources have been guaranteed from 1967 to about 1985 by a law passed by the Parliament.
A completely new strategy in the higher education sector was adopted by the government in the 1987 Higher Education Law. The main component in the strategy is that of self-regulation, i.e. deregulation, increased freedom to decide on the use of resources and on the university’s management, and the development of more systematic evaluation (Jäppinen, 1988; Hölttä, 1988; Hölttä and Pulliainen, 1991). On the basis of the law, the Ministry of Education formulated its new national evaluation strategy. It consisted initially of three components of evaluation: strengthening the role of the national buffer organisation, the Council of Higher Education, in the evaluation proper to initiate reviews of individual disciplines, as well as reviews of individual universities. However, the forms of evaluation seem to be developing both with the experience gained from the pilots and with the pressure of the present economic recession.

The evaluation strategy of the Ministry of Education includes the following main forms of evaluation (Linna, 1993).

**Evaluation of research programmes**

Organised by the Academy of Sciences, since 1983, one research area at a time, based on national and foreign peers’ review (Stolte-Heiskanen, 1992). The only major evaluation system before the 1990s, which is mainly formative evaluation, aims at finding problems and promising areas and units.

**Evaluation of degree programmes, disciplinary evaluation**

Organised by the Ministry of Education, two disciplinary evaluation pilots (science and humanities) in 1991-1993, based on documents, national peer-review and on the visit and report of a foreign expert group. Aims at (a) formative evaluation and (b) preparation of proposals for structural changes and for developing instruction in the area in question.

**Institutional evaluation**

Organised by the Ministry of Education. Two pilots (University of Jyväskylä and University of Oulu) in 1991-1993 and three others starting in 1994, based on self-evaluation and on the visit and report of a foreign expert group. Aims at creating quality assurance mechanisms within individual universities.

**Excellent research units**

Organised for the first time by the Council of Higher Education in 1993, now mandated to the Academy of Sciences. Aims at (a) summative assessment, partly based on performance indicators, partly on policy decision, (b) the creation of a new incentive structure, a new resource allocation mechanism and tools for restructuring the universities.

**Excellence in education**

Organised for the first time by the Council of Higher Education in 1993-94. Aims at (a) summative assessment of instructional programmes and innovative institutions proposed by the universities, (b) the creation of a new incentive structure, a new resource allocation mechanism and tools for restructuring the universities.
Annual negotiation on each university’s outcomes at the Ministry of Education

Organised by the Ministry of Education, for the first time in 1983. Aims at (a) formulating and transmitting the Ministry’s evaluative comments on mainly quantitative, but also qualitative aspects of the university’s plans and activities, (b) writing a contract on the university’s outcomes, on mutually agreed reforms and on a general budget frame to be included in the Ministry’s plans.

The multitude of evaluative efforts reflects uncertainty on the appropriate system, but it also indicates that the Ministry has assumed a tentative strategy for developing evaluation. At the moment, there is no such strong, detailed and explicit policy for higher education, which would require building a massive evaluation system. There are trends, like the growth of polytechnics and probably permanent decrease of resources, which can cause major changes in a few years. However, the present situation makes room also for the initiatives of individual universities and cooperative efforts to develop various evaluative procedures.

INSTITUTIONAL SELF-EVALUATION. THE PILOT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

The Ministry’s evaluation pilot at an university?

The Ministry of Education launched an experiment on institutional self-evaluation in 1991. The pilot evaluations were started at two middle-sized universities, Jyväskylä and Oulu, on the basis of their declared interest (the Oulu University evaluations, see Report on the Self-assessment of the University of Oulu 1993, Davies et al., 1993). The Ministry of Education organised the pilots and set up a national steering group, but the pilots were carried out by the universities themselves.

From the point of view of the Ministry of Education, the pilots were an attempt to create such a national quality assurance system that would have a direct impact on the institutions rather than serve as a means of the Ministry’s resource allocation. From the standpoint of the University of Jyväskylä, the pilot aimed at creating an effective self-improvement instrument. At the University, the idea was accepted, although in the present economic situation it also aroused doubts and uncertainty.

It is important to note that in a university’s evaluation which is at the same time part of a wider national evaluation strategy, the views and interests of the Ministry and the university in question may be conflicting (Kells and van Vught, 1988). Some examples of the potential conflicts are as follows:

-- From the Ministry’s point of view, the piloting university is a test site and object, but the university may not be willing to be satisfied with the role of an object, but, rather, would like to strive for the role of a subject and to develop its own activities in the pilot.

-- The Ministry has its own plan for the pilot, in order to being able to answer the questions that are important for the Ministry. However, the university may have a completely different set of questions and developmental tasks in mind.

-- Especially during a time of recession, budget cuts and restructuring, the aims and applications of the evaluation may be interpreted in a completely different way at the Ministry and at the university.
Furthermore it should be pointed out that the conflicting interests do not need to give rise to open conflict between the organisations in question. However, both parties, the Ministry and the piloting universities, have to accept and assume a negotiative relation towards each other, which in turn may require some changes in attitudes. During the course of the present pilot, it became evident that there were no such questions which could not have been reconciled.

**University’s evaluation pilot in the national context?**

From the universities’ viewpoint, recent national developments in evaluation raise several questions related to the universities’ autonomy (Berg, 1993). Any evaluation system developed on the basis of an external initiative can increase control from outside the university. Under unfavourable economic circumstances the Ministry’s activity in evaluation can be preparation for major restructuring. The Ministry’s initiative can also be seen to reflect mistrust in the universities’ own evaluation. On the other hand, several recent decisions of the Finnish government have increased self-regulation and enhanced the universities’ autonomy, and suggest closer interaction with society on the universities’ own initiative.

Participation in the Ministry’s evaluation pilot can be seen most problematic. Is it safest just to wait and see? Would it be profitable to participate, for tactical reasons, in the experiment but not in any development and changes of evaluation, and to restrict the experimentation to some formalities which do not cause any real impact and harm for the university? Or should the university admit the facts and do exactly what the Ministry wants, when this can be done among the first universities and without sanctions?

The above discourse can be called the defence of autonomy discourse. It admits that autonomy is seen as questionable and the discourse is bound to be only a struggle for the amount of autonomy. The University of Jyväskylä sought a solution for the dilemma outside this discourse, taking relative autonomy as a granted property of a university and expecting equality and partnership as to the evaluation pilot. From the University’s point of view, participation was not seen as a tactical move, but, rather as a strategic choice. The pilot institutional self-evaluation was seen by the University’s top management as a critical success factor and as an opportunity to obtain tools for developing the University’s main activities.

**The approach of evaluation: interactive self-developing model**

The Ministry and the national steering group prepared a list of the activities and issues to be reported in the self-report. The task was assumed, at the University of Jyväskylä, to imply some kind of an institutional research approach with a series of studies and a compilation of a report. The approach was found problematic in several ways: in creating ownership and commitment in the University community, in motivating discussion on the report, and in involving the departments and faculties in the changes and reforms which the study might call for.

Quite a different approach was adopted at the University of Jyväskylä (Sallinen, Konttinen and Panhelainen, 1993). It was called an interactive self-developing model of the university’s quality assurance. The differences between this model and institutional research are described in Table 1. It was realized that the adopted approach may produce a more inaccurate and defensive picture of the University’s activities than does the institutional research approach. In choosing the interactive self-developing approach, emphasis was laid on what might be expected, anyway, after institutional research: i.e. communication and development. Committing communication within the University community was seen as a vital element in institutional self-evaluation. It was also considered important to associate the evaluation with planning and development as a design principle in the evaluation, rather than as follow-up activity.
Table 1. Differences between interactive evaluation and institutional research/special studies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interactive evaluation</th>
<th>Institutional research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>more indefinite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coverage</td>
<td>selective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accuracy</td>
<td>subjective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>extensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ownership</td>
<td>genuine, strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>great</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Sallinen, Konttinen, Panhelayinen (1993)

The process of self-evaluation at the University of Jyväskylä

The self-evaluation covered all the activities of the University and it was called total or institutional self-evaluation of the University. It included (a) the University’s self-evaluation and (b) the evaluation by the external visiting group. The evaluation proceeded at the University as follows (Sallinen, Konttinen, Panhelayinen, 1993):

a) Outline of the topics to be covered by the institutes’ assessment reports. Given by the University of Jyväskylä task force;
b) Self-assessment reports from all the institutes and faculties at the University (about 700 pages, Spring/Summer 1992);
c) The University’s self-assessment report (about 250 pages) prepared by a task force and based on the institutes’ reports (Autumn 1992-March 1993). The report was also published in English (Self-evaluation Report 1993);
d) One week’s visit of the expert group and their report (April 1993);
e) The report of the external visiting group (April 1993, Kogan et al., 1993);
f) A national seminar discussing the University’s report and the report of the external visiting group (May 1993).

The pilot evaluation was carried out at the University by a steering group set up by the Rector and by its secretariat, which was responsible for most of the reporting. The evaluation Secretariat was chaired by one of the two Vice-rectors and the members were secretaries of the faculties, experts and students, but they were not, however, selected as representatives of their institutes or organisations.

Instructions for Self-evaluation

The evaluation secretary devised a list of themes to be covered in the reports of the departments, faculties, and other units. Every unit and person of the University community, including the students’ organisations, and individual staff members were encouraged to write a report, to write directly to the Secretariat, or to contribute in other ways to the University’s self-report.
In its instructions, the Secretariat set certain expectations on the reporting; a) the main activities (teaching, research, administration and services) should be covered in the reports, but within the above broad areas only the points that were felt most important could be chosen; b) the reports were to deal with the unit’s strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities. The idea was that the departments and faculties would create their reports on their own, rather by answering to a set of questions. The institutions were given **full responsibility for constructing the unit’s image**.

The Secretariat also prepared an extensive statistical database on the students, resources, degrees etc. for the departments. The data was used in writing the reports at the departments and faculties. However, it became obvious that routinely collected statistics probably serve better various administrative purposes than the needs of self-evaluation.

**Reports from the Institutions and Faculties**

The reports of the departments, faculties and other units contained much information, but much of it was descriptive, rather than evaluative, by nature. The reports can be characterised as accountability reports, which described the functioning and results of the institution. However, there were differences in tone and emphasis, and the reports could be classified as follows (Konttinen and Panhelainen, 1993; Sallinen, Konttinen, Panhelainen, 1993):

-- Descriptive reports. Most of the reports were of this type;

-- Analytic reports. About 10 per cent of the reports were of this type. In these reports issues were raised and discussed, and alternative solutions were considered;

-- Defensive reports. In a few reports, there was, in addition to description, indications of an awareness of problems, but the problems were accounted for by external factors and circumstances or they were considered to have been already solved;

-- Speculative reports. A few of the reports took already into consideration the possible consequences of the evaluation by suggesting restructuring measures within the University.

The role of the faculties was surprisingly weak both in directing the reporting of the basic units and in compiling the faculty’s report from the reports of the basic units. Faculty meetings mainly made some additions, such as data on student selection, and on the activities of the faculty office. The faculty meetings did not contribute much to the analysis or criticism within its area of study.

Students have representatives in every official body of the University and were consequently heard in them. In addition, the students’ subject area organisations made an ambitious attempt to chart the students’ experience of learning, studying and living in the University community. The resulting report was full of details without clear conclusions. Furthermore, the departments and faculties also commented on some details in the report, and were not able to form a general view of the state of affairs, which was regrettable considering the amount of work involved in the students’ report.

**The Secretariat’s Report**

The contribution of the Secretariat turned out be an essential part of the self-evaluation. It prepared the University’s report, but, more importantly, also made a peer-review of the University’s activities. The departments accounted for their activities, the faculty meetings showed solidarity to the
departments, and in the University’s self-reporting it was only the secretariat that took the role of an outsider, even that of a judge. The Secretariat saw its position as an independent evaluation group, at least for the sake of maintaining its credibility. From this point of view, it seems important that the Secretariat is allowed the freedom to take a role of a relatively autonomous body. If the Secretariat had consisted of ‘official’ representatives of faculties, teacher groups etc., the report would probably have been a compromise, perhaps even a voted summary of the institutions’ reports. This is not a statement of the quality of the Secretariat’s work, only of its role and approach.

The ordinary bodies at the University did not see as their duty to make a critical analysis of the fields of study. It seems to be difficult, if not impossible, to write an open self-evaluation report about one’s own unit and at the same time analyse and criticise it. This observation supports the idea of organising a mutual peer review, which was proposed by the chairperson of the external visiting group (Kogan, 1993). In the mutual peer-review, two units (two universities, faculties or departments) would, each in turn, prepare a self-report and peer-review. It was also suggested by Kogan (1993) that a mutual peer-review might benefit of an external expert group’s monitoring of the quality of self-reports and peer-reviews.

Visit and report of the external expert group

The University’s external visiting group consisted of four foreign and one Finnish expert, Maurice Kogan (Chairperson, UK), Erik Allardt (Finland), Robert Kirkwood (USA), Eigil Praestgaard (Denmark), and Ulrich Teichler (Germany). The expertise of the group was of exceptional international and scholarly standard and it is not likely that all the other universities will be able to draw on similar expertise for their evaluation.

The task of the external visiting group was twofold. After discussing the task at the Ministry, it took as its main focus the University’s awareness of its mission, its organisation and administrative arrangements, and its capacity to report on and to evaluate itself (Kogan et. al. 1993, 5). In addition, it reported on the nature and usefulness of the self-evaluation and evaluation in general.

The Chairperson, Maurice Kogan, visited the University about three months before the visit of the group and informed the University of his general view on the evaluation and discussed the aims and procedures. During its visit, the group met 45 people at 28 meetings in one week. After the visit, the group handed over its draft report to the Rector, and after receiving the comments, the group submitted the report both to the Ministry of Education and to the University. The report was analytic and could be characterised as responsive evaluation. It was pedagogical rather than didactic. However, it became evident that this kind of report presupposes continuing discussion in the same spirit, not only administrative measures.

Positive achievements in the self-evaluation

Commitment

-- Aroused much discussion in the University community;

-- Active participation in self-evaluation;

-- At all levels the University took responsibility for the evaluation.
The commitment in the evaluation at the University was high, even though this kind of evaluation was a new and strange activity. The reports were relatively open and only a few could be called defensive. However, no heated debate on the report took place, probably because the evaluation was not related to any current controversial reform.

Organisational self-understanding

-- Large data base was collected;

-- Sharper self-portrait;

-- The University became more aware of itself;

-- Increased transparency, within and outside the University.

The self-evaluation process increased transparency both to the members of the University community and to outsiders. The idea of autonomy is often equated at the departments and among the teachers with such privacy, that prevents open discussion. The evaluation broadened the range of topics that can be discussed in public. This type of development may well also bring about better and wider co-operation.

New frame of planning activities

-- Functional conceptualisation of the University;

-- Quality of planning improved;

-- Link to negotiations on outcomes.

University administration and planning usually divide the university according to organisational borders, into faculties and departments, rather than according to the university’s functions, such as areas of study. At the University of Jyväskylä, the self-evaluation was for the first time carried out to review complete areas of study independent of the departments they represented.

Long-term plans usually consist of proposals for starting and expanding the activities of certain organisational units, at the departments and faculties, even of individual professors. They are not a good starting point for changing and restructuring the University’s activities. It was quickly realized that self-evaluation is a fruitful component in the budget and long-term planning. Also, self-evaluation was taken as a starting point in the annual negotiations on outcomes between the University’s Rector and the institutions.

Future orientation

-- Readiness for change;

-- Awareness of further possibilities;

-- Good start for the development of evaluation culture.
Self-evaluation increased awareness of the purpose and significance of evaluative reflection of the past, present and future activities at the departments. It seems that open constructive discussion on future has been surprisingly rare at the departments.

**New position in external relations**

- Better position in negotiations on University’s outcomes at the Ministry;
- Clearer external image.

The top management of the University has the opinion that the self-evaluation improved the University’s position in the annual negotiations on outcomes at the Ministry of Education. Mass media transmitted to the public and to various interest groups an extremely positive picture of the results of the evaluation.

**Problem areas related to the self-evaluation**

**Mission**

- The University’s goals are vague;
- Role and profile unspecified.

The mission and goals of the University received insufficient attention in the self-evaluation, as was also noted by the external visiting group. The role and profile of the University as well as the co-operation with the other universities and the rapidly growing higher education institutions was left unanalysed.

**Focus**

- On activities and outcomes, less on programmes, process, and common activities;
- Focus varied among institutions.

Processes were ignored in the evaluation and it focused mainly on outcomes and less on programmes and activities. Of the activities, research received far less attention than teaching. Also, services and other common activities received less attention than the departments’ own activities. There were also great differences between the departments’ and faculties’ readiness for evaluation and in the evaluation discourse.

**Orientation**

- Self-evaluation may be too much "looking at oneself in the mirror";
- Evaluation of administration, rather than of management and leadership.
The evaluation was self-centred in the sense that it did not pay enough attention to the customers, students, common services, and society. Also, the evaluation focused more on administration and less on leadership and management. A well-thought analysis of management was made in connection with the pilot, but it was made by the external visiting group. Self-evaluation may be too inwards looking, and the University as a whole as well as the environment may be left too much in the background.

Resources of evaluation

-- Required considerable resources;
-- Too little time for data analysis.

Both the Ministry of Education and the University of Jyväskylä granted for the pilot probably all the resources they felt necessary to carry it out properly. Still, at every level, from the Ministry to the departments, the resource demands were considered too high, but at the same time scant keeping the task in mind. In the future the University has to carefully consider how to optimally allocate resources for evaluation, and how to utilise the extensive data basis.

EVALUATION PROCESS AFTER THE SELF-EVALUATION STAGE
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

Expansion of the institutional self-review into quality management

During the self-evaluation, the main aim was "good" evaluation, whatever that might mean. It was only after the evaluation reports were published (in May, 1993), when it was realized how much of its impact will depend on what takes place after the evaluation. At this stage a new interesting process was brought about: An expansion of the institutional self-review into what could be called quality management. It was based on expanding the general idea of the self-developing interactive evaluation, i.e. combining evaluation with organisational communication, planning and development.

The importance of connecting self-evaluation with the activities of a university would become obvious if only the documentation of the procedures of the University of Jyväskylä would be handed to another university. It is possible that the self-reporting would not, however, have much impact there. It is highly important that self-evaluation will be continued with, and expanded into the management and other interaction at the University.

The events after the self-evaluation depict what the expansion of evaluation in management could be. Most of them are measures taken by the Rector of the University and by the top management of the University in general on the basis of the self-report and of the report of the external visiting group.

1) The external visiting group pointed out problems with the infrastructure and services, and suggested setting up ad hoc groups to study them. At the moment, several ad hoc groups are reviewing such areas as computing, library, administration, study guidance, and the organisation of adult education.

2) Priority areas and the mission of the University were the major points raised in the evaluation. The Rector started, in connection with the annual negotiations on outcomes, discussions on the priority list, i.e. on the special areas of scientific research expertise and the University
Senate has reviewed the resulting priority area descriptions. One of the major impacts and benefits of the pilot evaluation at the University may be the strengthening of the priority approach.

3) The status of staff training has been raised by setting one of the two Vice-rectors in charge and by recruiting a special person to direct the training activities. Training is focused on leadership at the departments and on the development of instruction (higher education pedagogics).

4) Annual budget planning and long-term planning have been more closely integrated with evaluation.

5) The external visiting group suggested a shadow staffing plan. Several measures have been taken in this direction: reallocating open posts, changing the duties within the posts, filling more posts on a temporary basis, also from industry and foreign countries, and recruiting more staff on the basis of a personal invitation.

6) The development of evaluation culture is seen important and one of the first tasks given by the Rector to the recently elected Senate was to review the evaluation reports and the measures following them, and to make suggestions for further measures. Also a series of more specific evaluation studies is being planned.

Has it been worth all the work -- will it be?

Relation to the Ministry of Education

What could be learned of the possible role of an individual university in the government’s evaluation policy? Finland has been a well-regulated country under the Swedish Crown, under the Russian regime and also independent of them. The lower level institutions are used to waiting for the inevitable orders and reforms from above. When the 1987 Higher Education Law required development of evaluation, the universities criticised the initiative and waited to see what would happen as to the Ministry’s measures, but did not launch their own evaluation projects. All this can be risky as to the background, and the initiative of an individual university, both in relation to the Ministry and in front of the academic world. As the experiences from the evaluation pilot were, nevertheless, mainly positive, much could be learned from the pilot.

There were several factors which contributed to the success from the University’s point of view.

-- First, the University assumed a strong ownership in the pilot. When starting the self-evaluation, much effort was devoted to involve the University community in the pilot and to demonstrate that it should primarily be made to serve the University, and that the results should be taken seriously by the University’s top management.

-- Second, the University sought for a mode of evaluation which would, in fact, be like the University itself and the approach to self-evaluation was also explicitly formulated. Granted that the self-developing interactive approach is general, even vague and may represent a weak model or theory, it probably was a more fruitful contribution to national evaluation, to other universities, and to the Ministry than, for example, new data gathering sheets, procedures, and other practical devices.
Third, **sharing the experiences.** In connection of the other activities than research, there are many mechanisms which work against sharing. The University’s practices are seen as mere practical work, to be run, done and forgotten in order to being able to do something more important, and not at all worth of further reflection. The outcome has been that the community of universities have had little to offer to the development of national evaluation and other practices in the Finnish universities, compared to the activity of the Ministry of Education. However, evaluation is too central an aspect of the university’s work to be left for the experts and administrators only, and for "plug-in" solutions, without the commitment of the university community. Reflection, sharing of experiences and collective development of evaluation culture at the universities themselves is a prerequisite for any major contribution from the universities’ part.

**The evaluation process at the University**

The fruits of good co-operation and partnership with the Ministry may be limited to the University’s Rector. What did the University community gain in participating in the national pilot? The most obvious result was the introduction of the idea of evaluation at the University. The University community has now crossed the threshold, after which concrete development and realistic use of the evaluation can be started. In the long run, the search for the University’s own approach to evaluation, can become equally important.

The initiative of the University was rewarded and it was able to win much freedom in planning the evaluation. Of course, the Ministry of Education can be credited for this as much as the University itself. Participation in the evaluation pilot, among the first universities, has created a positive and co-operative attitude at the Ministry of Education and at the other organisations. The University has now more information on its activities than before the evaluation, and it can be used in demonstrating and arguing for its achievements and intentions. The evaluation pilot has also reinforced the image of the University as an active and enterprising institution.

The self-developing interactive model of evaluation was successful in starting critical discussion and the development of evaluation culture. It has also turned out to be a fruitful idea in designing the measures after the actual self-evaluation. However, the effectiveness of this model depends on to what extent the University community can be involved in a continuous evaluation discussion and on the ability to formulate paths of concrete development on the basis of it. In this light, it is understandable that the measures taken after the pilot evaluation should have a very high priority on the agenda of the University’s leadership.

However, great differences were noticed between the units and persons in the readiness for evaluation, in the ability to analyse own activities, in the willingness to participate in open discussion, and in the ability to see alternative opportunities for development. Still, evaluation can benefit every unit and person, if the style of evaluation matches the traditions and readiness of a unit or person and meets their needs. This is one reason why the organisational communication aspect should be kept in mind in the planning of evaluation procedures.

**The role of peers and external experts**

As noted by Åhgren-Lange, Carlsson, Oscarsson and Bäckström (1993) in the Swedish context, the external visiting group can have a great effect on the attitude towards self-evaluation. In this type of evaluation, it is important that the external evaluation group has an opportunity to build a communicative
atmosphere with the University community and clearly articulate its expectations. In this case the expectations were the quality of the self-assessment and the depth of analysis, not the assessment and rating of the quality itself.

At the University of Jyväskylä, the external visiting group had a very important role in the evaluation pilot. The group presented severe, but constructive criticism on the University’s management, which was almost completely omitted in the self-evaluation. The external visiting group should also be credited for the continuation of the evaluation process. The group suggested such strategic measures that seem to sustain discussion and evaluation.

**The role of self-evaluation among other simultaneous activities**

It is, of course, very difficult to separate the impacts of the self-evaluation pilot from the impacts of other simultaneous events. It seems that these impacts were intermingled. It is more realistic to ask, what the probable conditions for the positive impacts of the self-evaluation were. Some of them must have been the following:

*Increased self-regulation*, both for the University and for the faculties and departments. Even after abolishing regulations, it seems to take some time to find all the regulations and practices which indirectly hinder taking full responsibility.

*Monitoring the use of resources and outcomes*. Despite the extensive data base, it is still too difficult to target resources to specific activities and to demonstrate the effectiveness of their use. The result has been that restructuring and budget cuts are still based more on impressions than results.

*Well-functioning planning system at the University*. Annual budget planning and long-term planning are well-established systems at the University of Jyväskylä and it is easy to add evaluative component to them. However, there is a danger that evaluation in this context will turn into persuasion and tactics.

*Annual negotiations on the outcomes and main efforts*. A planning system alone is not sufficient to commit departments to any long-lasting contracts. A more flexible system is needed. At the University of Jyväskylä, the annual negotiations between the Rector and the faculties and departments seem promising now that the Rector also has the right to make decisions on the use of the University’s resources.

*A systematic process to define the areas of special expertise*. To profile its activities and to clarify its mission, the University community was invited to formulate special areas of excellence in research. The motivation came from the national offer to support excellent research units (cf. the list of national evaluation projects in the beginning of this paper). This process and the self-evaluation probably had positive effects on each other.
There are many roads in developing evaluation and evaluation culture at the universities and in the higher education system in general. Institutional self-reporting and peer-review together can be one of them. The present pilot evaluation could be seen only as a general survey of existing problems at a university. This view might ignore the essence of the self-evaluation. First of all, self-evaluation is needed

-- to learn to know better the functioning of the whole university, in order to be able to take responsibility in decision making;

-- to learn to analyse together common activities as a basis of development, not only to measure and rate them.

If the present pilot evaluation was not analytic enough, it only confirms the need to learn such skills.
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QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION
- A REVIEW OF ISSUES IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Liam Ryan

Introduction

The author was privileged to act as General Rapporteur at a Council of Europe Workshop on Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation, in Bratislava, Slovakia, on 17-19 June 1993 (Ryan, 1994). That workshop, organised under the Council’s Legislative Reform Project for Higher Education, provided a timely opportunity for many countries of the region to consider the issues involved in developing systems of evaluation and accreditation in higher education, and to compare the range of existing and proposed models, including several from countries elsewhere in Europe and around the world. Participants included representatives from 27 countries, including 13 countries of the CEEC and former Soviet Union regions, together with observers from the main international organisations.

This paper draws on the discussions at the Bratislava Workshop and subsequent discussions and correspondence, and attempts to identify those issues which are currently of concern to CEEC countries in relation to the establishment of effective systems of quality assurance in higher education.

Concern for quality assurance in higher education

The past decade has seen an increased emphasis on formalised systems of evaluation and accreditation in higher education systems around the world. The major forces at work, and the various models developed to meet different countries’ circumstances, have been well documented in the literature (e.g., Craft, 1994; Van Vught and Westerheijden, 1993). A remarkable feature of this increased attention to quality assurance has been the extent to which various actors in the field -- institutions, governments, international organisations -- appear to have simultaneously accepted the need for structures and practices which had hitherto been confined to a relatively limited number of countries and institutions. The principal factors influencing the adoption of formal systems of evaluation and accreditation -- governments’ demands for greater accountability by institutions, and increasing international collaboration and interdependence of institutions -- had been growing for some years, and appear to have reached a critical mass in the mid-1980s, from which time specific initiatives have been taken in many countries around the world to establish formal evaluation and accreditation systems.

The current series of OECD seminars and workshops on higher education reform in CEEC countries should prove of considerable value to governments and institutions in the region in tackling the myriad problems involved in the post-communist transition to democratic political structures and market economies. The selection of quality assurance and accreditation as a topic to be considered at the Ljubljana workshop is particularly welcome. There is little doubt that quality assurance is seen in all of the countries concerned as a high priority for the successful transformation of higher education structures and practices. Legislative reforms in most countries have given special attention to the area of quality assurance, evaluation and accreditation, as an essential and central item in structural and procedural reform.
Forces promoting quality assurance systems in CEEC countries

General goals of quality assurance, evaluation and accreditation

The goals of formalised quality assurance systems, including evaluation procedures and accreditation structures, in CEEC countries, as expressed in the terms of actual and draft reforming legislation, are similar to those underlying similar arrangements in other countries:

-- to guarantee quality and standards;
-- to improve quality and to raise standards;
-- to provide public accountability of resources expended on higher education;
-- to ensure consumer protection against inadequate or defaulting institutions.

Special factors in CEECs

In the current transitional circumstances of CEEC countries, the following are among the most powerful forces influencing the adoption of formal quality assurance systems in higher education:

-- the restoration of university autonomy, radically changing the scope of decisions to be made by universities themselves, and the internal decision-making structures;

-- structural change and growth of the higher education sectors in most of the countries, the most notable features of which have been the introduction and expansion of disciplines formerly disfavoured, the widespread reintegration of research with the teaching function, innovations in teaching methodologies and the emergence in many countries of private institutions;

-- adaptation to a free market environment, requiring universities to consider new kinds of data and new kinds of decisions;

-- the need for international recognition of their standards and qualifications, especially for the purpose of establishing exchanges and other links with institutions in other countries.

It should be recognised that moves to establish quality assurance arrangements are but one aspect of the general reforms being made in higher education structures in CEEC countries. Whilst quality assurance is seen as an essential strategic aspect of the reforms, it is not necessarily to the forefront in the discussions of reforms: power structures and political balances, and the struggle for increased resources, tend to command more attention in both the political and academic arenas.

CEEC approaches to quality assurance and accreditation

Diversity and tensions

In terms of the Burton Clark Triangle (Clark, 1983), the transformations taking place in CEEC higher education systems can be characterised as a move from very close to the apex representing the State, towards the apexes representing, respectively, the institutions and the market. The relative importance
accorded to these three poles of influence and control varies somewhat from country to country. There appear to be substantial differences, for example, in the role envisaged for private institutions in the higher education sector. These have established themselves as significant players in, e.g., Romania, whereas they are not allowed to operate in some other countries, e.g., the Czech Republic. Where private profit-making institutions exist, it would seem that there is an ambivalence as to whether they should be regarded as part of the higher education institutional structure or as part of the free market economy.

Many CEEC countries are addressing the problem of quality assurance in higher education by means of government-established accreditation boards, rather than by means of self-regulating associations of institutions. Much discussion has been generated, in legislatures and in higher education institutions, regarding appropriate structures for such arrangements, especially as regards the composition and membership of the main board, and of its committees and visiting parties. As can be observed in the variety of approaches adopted in countries outside the CEEC region, political, social and cultural parameters will indicate appropriate solutions in each country.

Systems of quality assurance which involve external scrutiny of university functioning appear to present a conflict between the principle of university autonomy and the need to ensure accountability to the taxpayer and to society at large. Whilst CEEC universities are savouring to the full their restored autonomy, this potential conflict does not appear to arouse such passions, on either side, as it does in other countries. It would seem that CEEC institutions, emerging from a period of difficulties and constraints, are sufficiently astute to recognise the desirability of formal acknowledgement of their obligations to society, and sufficiently pragmatic to devise acceptable means of monitoring and endorsing their performance in this regard.

The political context is, however, quite a complicated one, with many facets and dimensions to be taken into account. The recent history and circumstances of universities and other higher education institutions in CEEC countries, and the nature of the events which have led to the radical changes in their situations, have resulted in a complex network of ambivalent and conflicting perspectives, and a spectrum of attitudes to reform, ranging from the euphoric and enthusiastic to the circumspect and defensive. Initial reactions to political freedom have, e.g., in the Czech Republic, produced reforming legislation which, in retrospect, is now seen as over-reaching in the direction of academic autonomy.

A particular set of tensions which has emerged in the reform of higher education in CEEC countries arises from the conflict between, on the one hand, the desire to internationalise the standing and character of the institutions and, on the other hand, the wish to reassert national identities and cultural characteristics in the wake of a period of alien domination. The balance ensuing from the operation of this friction can be expected to influence the approach to be taken to the development of quality assurance arrangements in each country, particularly in relation to the participation of experts from abroad in evaluation and accreditation processes.

**Powers and functions of accreditation boards**

The broad constitutional approach to accreditation in CEEC countries has been that accreditation boards, although generally appointed by government, operate independently once appointed. This freedom is of less significance where the board is given advisory functions only, as, for example, in Slovakia. Freedom from systematic or arbitrary interference by government in operational activities is, however, in some cases, in danger of being somewhat devalued by detailed legislative prescriptions regarding the methodology of evaluation and accreditation. It is possible that amending legislation will be required in several countries within a short period of years, in order to reduce the extent of detailed specification of procedures.
Quality judgements and funding decisions

The influence which accreditation and evaluation exercises have on funding decisions in CEEC countries remains to be seen in practice. The prognosis would appear to be that there will be a significant influence. Countries with serious economic management problems can hardly be expected to indulge the luxury of ignoring expert independent views on the effectiveness of institutions’ use of public funds. The question which is sometimes posed, usually facetiously, in western countries as to whether the outcomes of evaluation and accreditation exercises should be used to justify increased funding to the institutions demonstrating high quality (as a reward for their excellence) or to those of low quality (to enable them to improve) assumes real content in the case of CEEC institutions, where low quality in an institution may well be the result of inadequate funding in the past.

There could be enormous political and practical difficulties in using the outcome of quality evaluations to influence funding decisions in an indeterminate manner, i.e., sometimes rewarding excellent quality and sometimes assisting poor quality to improve. On the other hand, such an approach might provide a partial solution to Westerheijden's Dilemma (Westerheijden, 1990):

Without the expectation of real consequences, the incentives to organise quality assessment are lacking; with the expectation of real consequences, quality assessment will turn into a power game.

Whilst there is little likelihood of devising quality assurance arrangements which are devoid of strategic behaviour designed to secure institutional advantage, the avoidance of direct, predictable, funding consequences of quality judgements is a desirable feature of evaluation and accreditation activity.

The apparent predilection of CEEC governments (and, it would seem academics) for a direct positive link between quality judgements and funding may be due to a desire to embrace what is seen as a free market principle. In a competitive market successful operators are rewarded, whereas the unsuccessful are eliminated. By analogy, those higher education institutions which are most effective in fulfilling their missions, including the achievement of the highest quality programmes of teaching and research, should be rewarded by having their resources increased, whilst those less successful should be allowed to decline. This analysis ignores some important aspects of the situation. Higher education, whilst it operates in a market, does not function as a market. The functioning of higher education in most countries is characterised by a comprehensive array of subsidies, quasi-monopolies, restrictions and barriers to competition that the use of market analogies as a guide to policy can be quite misleading. In addition, insofar as current quality achievement to some extent reflects relative resource allocation in the past, the basing of further funding decisions on current quality would merely reinforce earlier decisions which may xtraneous factors no longer relevant to current conditions. Such a formula could have a stagnating effect on dynamic new development in formerly under-funded institutions, which would be a perverse anti-market outcome.

Range of Institutions to be included in accreditation arrangements

Potential types of institutions for official accreditation may be categorised as follows:

-- universities;

-- polytechnic-type institutions;
-- specialist (single-discipline) institutions;

-- private institutions (where permitted to operate).

The general tendency has been to include all of the above in accreditation and licensing arrangements, although the legislation in most countries makes clear distinctions between the categories. Indeed, it would seem that the making of these distinctions is one of the principal purposes of the general reforming legislation. (Reports of parliamentary debates include frequent references to the need to secure the status of established universities as superior forms of institution, as compared with other higher education institutions). This differentiated comprehensive approach represents the attempts by the respective legislatures to cope with the rapid changes in the patterns of higher education provision. The creation of new universities, in many cases by merging existing specialist institutions, has required clear legal definitions to enable the general public to understand the nature, orientation and status of institutions in what is becoming, in some countries, a quite confusing plethora of organisations.

Professional accreditation and licensing

State licensing of persons engaging in particular professions has long been a feature of higher and professional education in many countries. In the CEEC region the range of professions so regulated has been more extensive than in many other countries. Higher education reforms in progress in some CEEC countries are tending to retain the practice of licensing, but its implementation, in some cases, e.g., Romania, the Russian Federation, is being delegated to agencies at more distance from government than was formerly the case. These developments in themselves present no great problems, but some attention needs to be given to the international aspect of professional recognition. As market systems develop further in CEEC countries, professional mobility will increase. It is important that the quality assurance and accreditation arrangements in the CEEC countries will satisfy the requirements of the major professional bodies which regulate admission to practice in many professions on an international basis.

A particular issue concerning professional licensing in CEEC countries is that it has been a common practice for government ministries, or bodies under their direct control, to act as the licensing authority. New quality assurance and accreditation arrangements, in the context of increased institutional autonomy, will bring about changes in these arrangements, but there may be a transitional period of adjustment during which the area of professional licensing may be a source of tension.

Implementing quality assurance in CEEC institutions

Commitment to quality at all levels

A fundamental prerequisite to the successful implementation of any system of quality assurance is that there should be a dedication to quality on the part of all members of the institution. Formal commitment by the Rector, Governing Body and Academic Council is not sufficient to ensure effective participation and co-operation by faculty heads and teaching and research staff. Likewise, enthusiastic support by the latter will not succeed unless the university’s top management is also dedicated to the achievement of the goals of quality assurance.

In CEEC institutions, the problems which quality assurance methods are striving to address are so pressing that there is widespread support for quality assurance at all levels of most institutions. Nevertheless, it is important that steps be taken, in designing quality assurance systems and in their modes of implementation, to ensure that those concerned feel a sense of ownership of the system. This has not
been an easy task in those countries with established systems; it may prove even more difficult in CEEC countries emerging from decades of suppression of the academic freedoms and rights of self-regulation which have characterised institutions of higher education in countries with free democratic political systems (Ryan, 1993). The “compliance culture” engendered by former systems in CEEC countries is seriously counter-productive to the development of quality awareness. Equally destructive of quality improvement would be an excessive exercise of a sense of personal freedom consequent on the restoration of political freedoms. Institutional quality is delivered and sustained by a combination of personal responsibility and a willingness by all concerned to co-operate in a team effort.

The ongoing empowerment of university personnel, as part of the reform of higher education structures, provides a favourable climate for the development of a “quality culture” in higher education institutions in CEEC countries. The opportunity should be availed of to build the structures and procedures which will facilitate the organic growth of the attitudes, relationships and morale conducive to a commitment to quality in all aspects of the institutions’ functioning.

Effective internal structures and procedures

An effective internal institutional structure for self-evaluation is the essential basis of all evaluation and accreditation activities. Higher education institutions in CEEC countries are going through a learning process in the creation of decision-making structures for the post-communist era. Progress in reforming the authority and decision-making systems has been remarkable. Whilst quality assurance is very high on the agenda in most countries, there is a danger that other matters may be seen as more pressing in the tumultuous transition to democratic structures and market economies. One of the issues facing those committed to quality assurance and enhancement will be to see that their concerns are not pushed aside in favour of other aspects of institutional development.

Reliable data

Evaluation and accreditation procedures involve, as a necessary input to the judgement process, the collection and analysis of comprehensive data on institutional performance, resources and environment. This requirement may present serious problems in some countries, as the data requirements of an autonomous higher education institution, operating in a democratic market economy, and implementing systematic quality assurance procedures, are quite different from those of an institution subject to direct government or party control in a command economy (Urban, 1993). Many CEEC institutions may need some time to develop systems and expertise in the new data requirements. Some years may elapse before reliable time-series of critical data become available to form the basis of comparable performance indicators. Although it is the subjective judgements of peers which provide the essential validation of academic activities, the absence of reliable comparable data may hinder the development of credible evaluation and accreditation systems.
**The appropriate unit for evaluation**

There is some discussion regarding the appropriate unit for evaluation in an accreditation context. Overall government policy requirements lean towards the institution as a whole as the natural unit to be considered and evaluated, mainly with a view to providing a correct classification of institutions as universities or various other types of higher education institution. The academic community, on the other hand, appears to favour the subject/discipline, or individual teaching department or research unit, as the proper subject of evaluative studies and accreditation decisions. This preference may be related to the sociological structure of the world of learning, in which one’s standing as a teacher, and particularly as a researcher, is related to the opinions of one’s colleagues in the field. The peer review method of evaluating faculties and departments draws much of its appeal and strength from this factor. A similar consideration does not seem to apply at the level of the institution as a whole.

In the smaller countries of the CEEC region accreditation by discipline/department/faculty enjoys the further advantage of greater political credibility: it is easier to contemplate abolishing or downgrading a single unsatisfactory faculty or department than an entire institution.

A serious disadvantage of discipline-based accreditation, from the viewpoint of university presidents and top institutional management, is that it can lead to a series of unco-ordinated demands from faculties for increased funding to rectify shortcomings perceived as a result of the various accreditation processes. To provide a balanced view of priorities for institutional development, a review process at institutional level is desirable. Most proposed schemes in the CEEC countries are making provision for such an overview.

**Choice of peer reviewers**

Newly-established accreditation agencies in CEEC countries are, in some cases, revisiting problems and controversies formerly encountered by the older agencies in other countries. New accreditation structures involving peer review invariably give rise to concern as to the balance to be struck between peer reviewers from different "constituencies". Institutions of different types tend to be sensitive regarding the appointment of peer reviewers from institutions seen as rivals, or considered to be in a different category of institution. For example, if the accreditation system embraces both universities and other types of institution, there can be an initial reluctance on the part of the university sector and of the other sectors to accept peer reviewers from each other. Experience in other countries indicates that this mutual diffidence is relatively short-lived and quickly gives way to an increase in mutual respect and co-operation.

The rapid economic transformation of many CEEC countries, with the transition to free markets, has given rise to some difficulty in identifying suitable personnel from the industrial, commercial and professional sectors to join teams of peer reviewers in evaluation and accreditation activities. Industrial and business interests and not well-defined in some countries, and are in a volatile state. In many cases the newly-emerging entrepreneurs have not yet succeeded in attracting the wholehearted respect of society at large for their contribution to economic development. Institutions and accreditation agencies will require to exercise care to ensure that their inclusion of private sector representatives in the evaluation and accreditation processes serves to enhance the credibility and acceptability of the quality assurance arrangements.

To a much greater extent than in stable economies, CEEC institutions will have difficulties in attracting the assistance of the more successful entrepreneurs and industrial leaders to act as peer reviewers. Care must be taken to avoid the temptation to use the services of people who happen to be readily
available: these are unlikely to be among the more dynamic operators in the turbulent transitional economies of the CEEC region.

**Evaluating the evaluation process**

The question "*quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*" is one which is raised at most discussions of quality assurance systems in higher education. This does not appear to have emerged as a major concern in those countries in the process of establishing accreditation structures. There is clearly a reluctance to introduce a further layer of possibly bureaucratic procedures on top of the newly created autonomous structures for self-evaluation and peer reviews. The emergence of some form of pan-European accreditation structures is not taken as a serious possibility in the foreseeable future. Meanwhile, the relevant international organisations, especially the OECD and the Council of Europe, are expected to provide essential support to build the necessary level of international confidence in the emerging structures. The activities of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and the European Group on Academic Assessment (EGAA), proposed in the Oradea Statement (CEPES, 1993) will also underpin the CEEC initiatives and provide valuable means of information dissemination.

**Costs of quality assurance procedures**

The costs of implementing comprehensive quality assurance procedures in higher education are a matter of serious concern to many CEEC institutions and governments. At a time when there are heavy demands on resources to implement reforms in all aspects of higher education, the requirements of formal quality assurance and accreditation systems may be seen as a luxury which can be ill afforded.

An issue to be addressed is the distribution of the costs among the various parties to the process. Where the direct costs are borne by the institutions, rather than by the government, there is a desirable distancing of the accreditation and evaluation processes from government purview. There is also a greater sense of ownership of the process by the institutions, and the probability of a more responsive service from the accreditation agency. On the other hand, there is a danger that the internal budget-allocation mechanisms of the institutions may not be such as to place a sufficiently high value on quality assurance, leading to a progressive curtailment of funding and the eventual deterioration of the effectiveness of the quality assurance arrangements.

It is well recognised that the overt direct costs of accreditation are, in most systems, outweighed by the indirect costs borne by institutions in responding to the documentary and statistical requirements of accreditation agencies. It is a notable feature of the history of such agencies in several countries that their initial procedures call for extensive and voluminous details of all aspects of institutional activities. With experience, most agencies relax these requirements substantially. Newly established accreditation boards, in CEEC countries and elsewhere, would do well to study this aspect of the experience of longer-established bodies elsewhere. The avoidance of unnecessarily detailed demands for information could help to make new evaluation and accreditation procedures more acceptable, as well as helping to contain costs.

**Gaining international recognition for CEEC qualifications**

The ongoing discussions on the Council of Europe and UNESCO conventions on mutual recognition of diplomas, aimed at eliminating some current anomalies and producing a more comprehensive and cohesive framework, is of considerable importance to the higher education systems of CEEC countries.
The emerging evaluation and accreditation structures in those countries should be influential in ensuring that graduates of CEEC institutions enjoy appropriate recognition for their qualifications.

The question of including foreign experts in evaluation and accreditation teams is a matter of lively debate in CEEC countries. There would appear to be general acceptance in principle that such participation is desirable but a number of practical issues are giving rise to reservations on its practicability. The costs involved, and the problems of identification and selection of suitable experts, are the principal areas of concern, together with the language barriers which can exist. Suggestions have been made in Council of Europe, European Union and UNESCO circles for the establishment of a project to fund the participation of foreign experts in CEEC quality assurance schemes. The benefits would include the facilitation of an improved infrastructure in support of academic collaboration and exchanges across Europe.

A further matter for consideration, in building the confidence of other countries in the quality assurance procedures of CEEC institutions, is the possibility of CEEC experts participating in evaluation and accreditation exercises in other countries, within and outside the CEEC region. Most of the national accreditation agencies in western European countries already invite foreign experts to assist in major evaluation exercises. Such agencies could be encouraged to give some priority to the inclusion of experts from CEEC institutions on such projects. Not only would this help to familiarise the CEEC representatives with standards and procedures in other countries, but would also make available to the latter the considerable expertise of the CEEC personnel. Such an arrangement would involve the non-CEEC organisation in minimal, if any, marginal costs over and above those of utilising a foreign expert from a non-CEEC country.

Concern has been expressed in relation to the quality assurance arrangements underpinning jointly-taught courses leading to "European" diplomas on the basis of study at two or more institutions in different countries, normally, to date, in the European Union. The inclusion of international experts, independent of the providing institutions, in verifying the quality and standard of such courses would seem desirable, not least as many of these arrangements seem to emanate from departments or faculties without undergoing the institutions’ normal ex ante quality assurance measures. As CEEC institutions may be expected to engage in an increasing number of such joint offerings, as they develop their academic programmes in response to their new political and economic environments, the putting in place of a credible international quality assurance methodology in such cases is a matter of some importance for CEEC countries also.

**Higher education quality assurance in smaller countries**

Apart from the matter of the costs of quality assurance and accreditation processes, which are not a trivial concern even in large and relatively prosperous countries, certain features of the higher education systems in smaller countries pose special problems. Six of the 12 CEEC countries currently participating in the TEMPUS programme, viz., Albania, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Slovenia, have populations of less than 6 million, as have Georgia and Moldova. Four other countries in the region, viz., Belarus, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Hungary have populations in the 9-10 million range.

In a small country it is not uncommon for there to be just single faculties in some specialist disciplines. The implementation of credible evaluation and accreditation strategies can present difficulties in such circumstances. Effective sanctions against unsatisfactory quality in an institution may be impossible if there are compelling strategic or cultural reasons for maintaining the current level of provision.

Operationally, the selection of a credible peer review group from within a small country may not be feasible in the case of certain specialist institutions and disciplines. The costs involved, and the likely
language difficulties, may prevent the utilisation of experts from abroad, even where a heavy dependence on foreign experts would be politically acceptable.

The organisation of regional accreditation arrangements by means of specially constructed organisations has been suggested as a possible solution to this problem, and, indeed, as an approach which could be taken, on more general grounds, in other parts of Europe also, e.g., Scandinavia, the Mediterranean region. A difficulty with this suggested approach is that it appears to remove responsibility for quality even further from its source -- the institution -- and to superimpose an international solution on what is seen as a matter of institutional and national pride and self-esteem: higher education is a strategically vital part of a country’s cultural heritage. Also, a regional arrangement, while addressing the practical issues of costs and available expertise, do not solve the essential problems of accreditation in the smaller CEEC countries - limited numbers of institutions and unique non-international languages.

It seems clear that some form of international co-operation will be required to devise acceptable means of providing an internationally credible methodology of quality assurance in the smaller countries. The problem is not unique to the CEEC region but is more acute there because of the radical changes taking place in higher education structures and institutions in the countries concerned.

Concluding remarks

Enormous changes are taking place in the higher education systems of central and eastern Europe. It is a time of rediscovery and experimentation: a notable tradition and heritage of higher education is being restored to vitality, with courage and commitment. Significant change is also in progress elsewhere in Europe and around the world. The nature and purpose of higher education, and the appropriate forms of organisation and procedures, are being considered on a broader scale, and with greater intensity, than ever before. Future historians of higher education will benefit from the legacy of reports, papers, legal instruments and other documentary evidence on what we, approaching the end of the 20th century, considered to be the essential mission of higher education, and its relationships to political, social and economic contexts.

The universities and other higher education institutions of central and eastern Europe have been presented with a unique opportunity to define themselves, and to set down the fundamental parameters of organisation and functioning which will ensure the achievement of their goals, including the re-establishment of harmonious and productive relationships with their counterpart institutions in the family of free, democratic societies, to form a commonwealth of scholarship for the benefit of mankind. The promotion and maintenance of the highest quality is an important strategic tool in this endeavour.


Towards a General Model of Quality Assessment in Higher Education

Franz Van Vught

Summary

In this paper a number of elements of a general model of quality assessment in higher education are presented. These elements are, on the one hand, put in a historical context of quality assessment in Medieval universities and, on the other hand, deduced from the recent experiences with quality assessment in both North-American and western European countries. With respect to the historical context a distinction is made between the intrinsic and the extrinsic values of higher education. Two types of quality assessment related to these values are also distinguished. Concerning the recent experiences with quality assessment systems, the practices in the U.S.A, Canada, France, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom are explored. The elements of the suggested general model of quality assessment are traced back to these practices.

The historical roots of quality assessment in higher education

From the early days of higher education on, the assessment of the quality of their processes and products has been an important focus of attention for higher education institutions. In this historical attention for quality a certain tension is found which we nowadays still experience and which sometimes appears to be the source of heated debates.

Already in Medieval higher education a distinction can be made between two extreme models of quality assessment. Neither of these two models is of course found in the actual history of European higher education. The models rather point to two crucial dimensions of quality assessment in higher education. Referring to their historical backgrounds, I will call one model the French model of vesting control in an external authority (Cobban, 1988, p. 124), the other model I will call the English model of a self-governing community of fellows.

The French model can be illustrated with the dramatic struggle for autonomy by the University of Paris in the early thirteenth century. It was the chancellor of the cathedral of Notre Dame, acting as the delegate of the bishop of Paris, who represented the then dominating episcopal outlook that the universities should be seen as ‘ecclesiastical colonies’. The universities were viewed as higher forms of education that were however to be integrated in the ecclesiastical structure and that were to remain under episcopal authority. The chancellor of the cathedral of Notre Dame was an external official set above the masters’ guild. As such he claimed the authority to grant or to withhold the teaching license and he claimed the right to decide about the content of studies. The masters fought the chancellor’s authority. And after a long and bitter conflict, Pope Gregory IX in his bull called Parens Scientiarum (1231) finally made an end to the dominance of the bishop and the chancellor over the masters’ guild (Cobban, 1975, pp.76-84).

The English model of self-governance has its origins in the aspirations of the masters at the Medieval Universities of Oxford and Cambridge to be completely independent of external jurisdiction. English Medieval colleges were sovereign, self-governing communities of fellows. In the English colleges
the fellows themselves had the right to remove unsuitable masters and to co-opt new members. It was up to the community of the fellows to judge the quality of their colleagues.

The French model may be considered to be the archetype of quality assessment in terms of accountability. In the French model the power to decide what should be studied and who could be allowed to teach at the university was in the hands of an external authority. The guild masters were accountable to the chancellor for the contents of their teaching.

The English model is the expression of what we nowadays call: quality assessment by means of peer review. The masters decided among themselves what should be taught and who should teach.

The French and the English models can, I think, be considered to be two important dimensions of any present-day system of quality assessment in higher education. Both the dimension of providing accountability (the French model) and the dimension of peer review (the English model) are crucial elements of present-day quality management systems in higher education.

These two dimensions refer to the two subcategories of the general concept of quality that have always played a central role in higher education. Looking at the history of higher education, it can be argued that higher education has always had both intrinsic and extrinsic qualities. The intrinsic qualities refer to the ideals of the search for truth and the pursuit of knowledge. The extrinsic qualities are related to the services higher education institutions provide to society. Already in the early days of higher education, these two categories of quality can be found. Higher education institutions have always espoused the values and ideals of the search for truth and the disinterested pursuit of knowledge. At the same time through the centuries the institutions of higher education have been able to respond to the needs of society. Higher education institutions have adapted themselves with great flexibility to the changing needs and opportunities in their environment. By combining both intrinsic and extrinsic qualities, higher education institutions have been able to show a remarkable historical persistence. The combination of intrinsic and extrinsic qualities has helped higher education institutions to capture their important place in history and society.

The recent call of higher education quality assessment

Since the early 1980s quality has become a central concept in many discussions on higher education. In the United States and Canada the debates on the various approaches and instruments with respect to quality assessment have intensified. In the United Kingdom (in 1984) quality was declared to be a principal objective for higher education. In France the "Comité National d'Evaluation" was set up. In the Netherlands an influential policy-paper was published in which quality played a major role. In Denmark, Finland, Spain and several other countries the first steps were taken to design a quality assessment system (Neave & Van Vught, 1991; Van Vught & Westerheijden, 1993).

There are various factors that can explain this recent increase of the attention for quality in higher education. An important factor is the expansion of the various higher education systems. The rapid growth of the student-body and the accompanying increase of the number of fields of study, departments and even whole new institutions have triggered questions about the amount and direction of public expenditure for higher education. Another (related) factor lies in the simple fact that the limits of public expenditure have been reached in many countries. Budget-cuts and retrenchment operations automatically lead to questions about the relative quality of processes and products in higher education. A third factor concerns the transition process to technology-based economies which in many countries brings along policies to guide student demand to fields that are perceived to be important for further economic development (Neave, 1986, p.168).
These factors indicate that during the last ten years or so, especially the extrinsic values of higher education have driven many governments to policies of quality control in higher education. The increasing costs of higher education systems had to be legitimised by clearly definable societal benefits. And for this, mechanisms and procedures of quality assessment were necessary.

New systems of quality assessment and quality control have been (or are being) developed in several countries. But, while it may be clear that the extrinsic values of higher education are important factors stimulating these developments, it appears to be difficult to combine in the new systems of quality assessment on the one hand the government’s goals regarding the national higher education system and on the other hand the views and characteristics of the higher education institutions.

In the rest of this paper I will briefly discuss the experiences with quality assessment in a few relevant countries. From this discussion I will try to deduce a number of elements of a general model of higher education quality assessment, which may be applicable in various contexts.

Experiences in the U.S.A. and Canada

As is well known, in the United States and Canada, the market is the dominant form of co-ordination in higher education. Competition between higher education institutions is something which is generally accepted. Higher education institutions are organised on a basis which to a considerable extent is similar to private corporations. There is considerable power at the top of the higher educational institution. And these institutions have a board and a president, rather like private corporations. Although the influence of governmental steering is not completely absent, compared to for instance continental Europe, this influence is limited. The higher education institutions in the United States and Canada are supposed to regulate themselves. If they do not, they will loose resources, students and scholars to their competitors.

In the United States the growing diversity in institutional forms and the initial lack of centrally defined standards led by the late nineteenth century to a level of chaos in the United States higher education system. If the institutions would not have addressed this increasing level of chaos, strong government intervention would probably have become unavoidable. Because such an intervention was not attractive to the higher education institutions, the institutions took the initiative to develop themselves two processes of quality assessment (Kells, 1989).

The first process of quality assessment is accreditation. Accreditation of a higher education institution or of a specific study programme within an institution consists of a procedure of self-assessment by the organisation seeking accreditation, followed by a visit of a team of external assessors and a final discussion, by a peer-board using pre-existing accreditation standards, on the question whether or not to give accreditation.

In the United States accreditation has two forms. The first is institutional accreditation, conducted by regional bodies that are controlled by the higher education institutions themselves. The second form of accreditation is specialised accreditation conducted nationally by profession controlled bodies.

The second process of quality assessment in American higher education, is the intra-institutional process of systematic review of study programmes. This review process is being used by universities: to assess programme quality, to enhance institutional decision-making, and in some cases to provide a basis for the redistribution of marginal resources within the institution. (Barak, 1982; Kells & van Vught, 1988;
In Canada, quality assessment in higher education is somewhat differently organised. In Canada quality assessment has not so much taken the form of a full process of accreditation. In this country two crucial elements of the United States type of accreditation have been chosen to be part of the dominant quality assessment approach: self-assessment and the visits by peers. For example, the technical schools and community colleges in British Columbia have employed such an approach, as has the provincial university of Alberta (Holdaway, 1988).

So, in higher education systems with an emphasis on market coordination and a high level of institutional autonomy (at least compared to some continental European systems) we find an approach to quality assessment in which the following elements can be found:

a) a process of self-evaluation. In some cases the assessment is limited to this element. This is especially the case when the assessment takes the form of an intra-institutional review processes;

b) a review by peers, usually in the form of a visit by a team of external assessors;

c) finally, especially in the United States, these two elements are brought together in a wider system of accreditation in which (except for self-evaluation and review by peers) one other element in crucial: the formulation of standards that are used to take the decision to give or withhold accreditation.

Developments in western Europe

Contrary to the United States and Canada, the predominant form of co-ordination in the western European higher education systems in many countries still is state control. With the exception of Great Britain, the western European higher education systems have been heavily controlled by governments for a long period of time. In these centrally controlled continental western European higher education systems the institutional autonomy was rather limited (and in many cases still is) and the funding was and is generally provided by the State.

During the 1970s and the 1980s the western European higher education systems have been confronted with a number of far-reaching changes. Most of these changes can be related in one way or another to a shift in governmental strategies towards higher education. A major underlying political force was the rise to power of conservative governments in many of these countries. The so-called "value-for-money" approach of these governments with respect to the public sector led to the end of the more or less unconditional government funding of public higher education. In practice this implied, among other things, that public funding of higher education was increasingly becoming linked to the performance of higher education institutions. As a consequence, the question of how to assess the performance, or quality, of higher education became one of the central issues in western European higher education in the last decade.

A second important development in higher education policy-making in western Europe is the rise of the governmental strategy of "self-regulation" (Van Vught, 1989; Neave & Van Vught, 1991). During the second half of the 1980s, the ministries of education and higher education institutions, especially in the countries of northwestern Europe, have agreed upon the desirability of more self-regulation by the higher
Several governments have advocated in this period deregulation by central ministries and increased autonomy of and competitiveness among the higher education institutions.

The establishment of a governmental strategy which is directed towards more autonomy for higher education institutions was generally motivated by governments by the wish to stimulate the innovative behaviour of higher education institutions and especially to stimulate their responsiveness to the perceived needs of the economy and of society. Also, there was to be a greater awareness on the part of society and the public about the quality of study programmes, which implied that credible systems of quality assessment should be developed.

In some western European countries new attempts to set up quality assessment systems arose from the developments described above. A quality assessment system was either initiated by the central governmental authorities, (as was the case in France) or it was negotiated between governmental actors and the leaders of higher education institutions (as was the case in the Netherlands). Together with the United Kingdom, these two countries offer a good overview of the recent experiences with quality control in western Europe. Let me briefly describe the developments in these three countries.

France

The President of the French Republic and an act of parliament brought into being the Comité National d’Évaluation (CNE) in 1985 as a result of the so-called Loi Savary. It was, accordingly, set up in a spirit of concern about the dysfunctions of the traditional, centralised, system of quality control: lack of actual autonomy, uniformity, rigidity, bureaucracy, etc. (Staropoli, 1991, p. 45). Given its position in terms of constitutional law, the CNE is a government agency, but it only reports to the President, so it is independent of the Prime-Minister, the Minister of Education and other executive agencies.

The CNE quality assessment procedure consists of two parts: institution-wide evaluations and “horizontal”, disciplinary reviews. The evaluations are not specific down to the individual level, nor do they assess courses: these two levels are covered by the traditional mechanisms. Where necessary and possible, the CNE makes use of existing evaluations and control reports of other agencies that do examine these and other aspects (e.g., CNRS research laboratories). The tasks of the CNE are not only concerned with quality assessment, but also with judging, quite generally, the results of the contracts established between higher education institutions and the Ministry of Education. Many factual indicators are, therefore, at the basis of the CNE evaluations, including information as diverse as research and finance. Evaluation results are not used directly for making reallocations of funds, though through the contract negotiations and the annual budget negotiations, a firm link with decision-making is established.

The CNE makes institution-wide evaluations of education, research and management, the argument being that research and teaching are interdependent primary activities of higher education institutions. Also, other aspects of the higher education institution as an environment for teaching and research are examined. Evaluations are undertaken after an invitation by the higher education institution; it is a voluntary procedure, though the CNE has the right to undertake the evaluations it wants. The CNE "tours" all institutions every eight years approximately. Each audit results in a report on the institution, making recommendations to the persons responsible for institutional management. These reports are public. They are sent, among others, to the ministers responsible for the higher education institutions visited, so as to assure the reports’ roles in the negotiations mentioned above. The whole procedure, from invitation to report, takes about one year (see also Neave, 1991).

The second part of the CNE procedure (the disciplinary reviews) consists, first, of self-evaluation reports provided by the institution to be visited. These reports are confidential (and include names of
individuals). Second, the CNE, the institution involved and government offices collect statistical data. With those two sources and its own visit to the location, an external peer committee makes qualitative judgements, resulting in a public report. The committees work "horizontally", reviewing all courses in a broad disciplinary area.

Every year, the CNE presents a summary report to the President of the French Republic. In the reports the CNE gives an overview of its institution-wide evaluations. However, no explicit rankings are made of the institutions audited. The character of the reports is sometimes judged to be descriptive rather than analytical (Guin, 1990).

The Netherlands

Following the publication of the policy paper entitled Higher Education: Autonomy and Quality (1985), the relationships between the Ministry of Education and Science and the higher education institutions in the Netherlands were restructured. In exchange for a greater degree of financial and managerial autonomy, the higher education institutions would prove to society (in fact: to the government) that they delivered quality education. Originally, the government intended this evaluation to be executed by the, partly newly-established, Inspectorate for Higher Education (IHO). In subsequent discussions the umbrella organisations of the higher education institutions, the Association of Co-operating Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU) for the universities and the HBO Council for non-university higher education institutions, took that responsibility on themselves. The IHO was bypassed through that compromise and was largely left with the task of "meta-evaluation": evaluation of the evaluation, and evaluation of the follow up on assessment results by the higher education institutions. A pilot project was held by the VSNU in 1988. As a consequence of the evaluation of the pilot project some adjustments were made and the quality assessment procedure became operational in 1989. In 1990 the HBO Council started a procedure in the non-university sector that, although not completely similar to the VSNU approach, is based on the same basic principles.

For reasons of brevity I shall concentrate here on the VSNU system. The focal point of the VSNU quality assessment procedure is the visiting committee that reviews all study programmes in a given area of knowledge in the country; the approach is by disciplinary fields, rather than institutional. In a fixed six year cycle, in principle all study programmes are covered by the procedure.

In preparation for the visiting committee, each participating study programme is required to write a self-evaluation. As the aims of the self-evaluation are not only to prepare the faculty for the visiting committee, but also to stimulate internal quality management (Vroeijenstijn & Acherman 1990, p. 88), the content of the self-evaluation is not fixed completely: the faculties and departments to be evaluated can stress points which are important to them. However, for reasons of comparability, a fixed format is given by the VSNU checklist (VSNU, 1990). The self-studies of all participating study programmes are collected by the visiting committee before it starts on its "tour" of the country.

The visiting committees consist of about seven members, including at least one foreign expert in the field. The members of the committee are proposed by the collective deans of the participating faculties and nominated by the board of the VSNU. The committee visits each study programme for, normally, two or two and a half days. During this period the committee speaks with representatives of all interest groups in the faculty, including students. To enable non-selected voices to be heard, an "open hour" is part of the procedure. Subjects for the talks are taken from the self-evaluation, from the committee’s prior visits and other (usually considerable) knowledge of the field and the faculty, and whatever else comes up during the visit. At the end of the visit, the chair gives an oral, temporary judgement about the quality of the study programme. Based on the written version of this judgement and the (factual) comments of the study
programmes, the visiting committee then writes its final report. The report usually contains a general part, stating problems, outlooks, expectations and recommendations pertaining to all of the field, and chapters about the individual study programmes.

The recommendations in the visiting committee report supposedly lead to improvements in the study programmes, together with the measures taken based on the self-evaluations in anticipation of the visiting committee.

As a result of the agreements of 1986, the Ministry of Education and Science has not taken any action on the basis of the visiting committees’ judgements. It was thought that the introduction of the system should not be hampered by direct consequences for decision-making and funding. Direct links to funding and other aspects of government decision-making would lead only too easily to strategic behaviour on the part of the higher education institutions, which would undermine the quality assessment system completely.

**The United Kingdom**

In the United Kingdom, two models of quality management have been developed since the enlargement of government influence over higher education in the 1960s. The first model applies to the sector of non-university higher education, the polytechnics and colleges. Much later, quality assessment was extended to university higher education too. I shall characterise these models in their chronological order. After doing so, I will discuss the new arrangements with respect to quality assessment that are a result of the 1991 white paper *Higher Education: A New Framework*, formalized in the *Further and Higher Education Act* of 1992.

Since the first half of the 1960s non-university higher education in the United Kingdom was under the aegis of the CNAA, the Council of National Academic Awards (Brennan, 1990). Like in other countries, quality in this higher education sector was also controlled by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate (HMI), which continued to exist, with its own responsibilities and methods, alongside the new CNAA. The main characterising element of HMI procedures was classroom observation.

The CNAA, a government-initiated body, was independent: it obtained its own royal charter in 1964. It was a degree-awarding body, giving out degrees of a professedly equal level to those of universities (bachelor’s degree). The CNAA validated proposed courses in colleges and polytechnics *ex ante* and reviewed them quinquennially. For a long time the committees consisted of peers, i.e., academics working in the same area of knowledge but in other higher education institutions (colleges, polytechnics and universities), plus, if applicable, representatives of the relevant profession or industry. These committees based their visit on detailed written information regarding the structure and content of the course, ways and methods of teaching and student assessment, and available resources (research and teaching qualifications of the staff members who were expected to become involved, physical equipment, etc.). In the frequent cases of disapproval by the committee a new round, based on an amended proposal, would start.

The peer review of courses was complemented by a, usually quinquennial, review of the institution’s own operational (i.e., not just existing on paper) mechanisms to assure the level of its courses. Later, since 1988, the CNAA accredited a number of polytechnics to validate their own courses (undergraduate and postgraduate degree level) through this procedure of monitoring the institutional quality management procedures.
Based on this tradition of government-independent quality assessment, the CNAA and the funding organisation of the public sector higher education institutions, the Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Council (PCFC), tried to liberalise the evaluation culture developing in the 1980s, which was becoming more and more government-centred by taking account of the institution’s goals and aims.

When, in 1992, the binary system in the UK was abolished, the CNAA ceased to exist. Its activities end more or less with the academic year 1991–1992.

The turning points in quality management for British universities were two reports in the mid-1980s: the Reynolds report to the Universities’ Grants Committee (UGC) and the Jarratt report to the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals (CVCP). In the Reynolds report, criteria were laid down for internal quality management systems which all universities would be required to introduce in the following years. The Jarratt report was the focal point for the discussion of performance indicators and their role in quality-based funding.

The Academic Audit Unit (AAU) was introduced in 1990−1991 by the umbrella organisation of the universities, the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals (CVCP), reputedly to counter the threat of Her Majesty’s Inspectorate (HMI) to extend its control to the universities (Young, 1990). Before, each university individually took care of its own quality control. The external, comparative aspect in this system consisted of the external examiners. Views on the effectiveness of these external examiners in terms of quality assessment differ. However, this approach was judged to be an insufficient mechanism for providing accountability towards society in general and to the government in particular. The AAU had to fill this gap.

The AAU activities were, a form of "meta-evaluation": it did not evaluate the quality of higher education, but the quality of the institution’s evaluation methods. The core of the AAU quality assessment procedure consisted of an on-site visit by an audit team. The teams consisted of academics, as a rule two or three persons. The choice of institutions to visit resulted from "negotiated invitation". In preparation for its (usually three day) visit the audit team received written information from the university on the quality assessment systems it had, plus -- if requested -- a small number of examples of the application of these systems. The AAU had a checklist based on good practice against which to assess an institution’s quality assessment mechanisms. From this documentation together with the information gathered during the on-site visit the audit team drafted a short report for the university as a whole and, if necessary, confidential reports on "sensitive issues" to the Vice-Chancellor. Following the institution’s comments on this draft a final version was written of the official report. The AAU did not itself publish the report, but the university was encouraged to do so.

The changes following the 1991 "White Paper" have led to profound changes in the organisational structure of the intermediate level in the United Kingdom higher education system (between the individual institutions and the department of education); new procedures for these organisations have been drawn up.

Organisationally, the changes include primarily the following. First, the collective of heads of higher education institutions established the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) with a Division of Quality Audit, into which the AAU has been subsumed. The work of the CNAA in supporting and enhancing quality will also be developed for all of higher education by this Council. Second, the former funding councils (UFC and PCFC) have been transformed into three new funding councils, one for England, one for Wales and one for Scotland. These have set up Quality Assessment Committees to assist them in making funding decisions based on the quality of teaching in the separate institutions.
The "White Paper" also has led to the introduction of very specific meanings for the following terms in the British context:

-- **quality control**: "mechanisms within institutions for maintaining and enhancing the quality of their provisions";

-- **quality audit**: "external scrutiny aimed at providing guarantees that institutions have suitable quality control mechanisms in place" (this is the responsibility of the HEQC);

-- **quality assessment**: "external review of, and judgements about, the quality of teaching and learning in institutions" (this is the responsibility of the funding councils).

In this way higher education institutions will be audited by one agency, and assessed by another. The quality audits by the HEQC resemble the basic principles of the AAU: an investigation of the quality control mechanisms and policies present in the individual institutions by a small team of external experts, including *in loco* audit trails to examine the practice of quality control.

Although on a more detailed level differences can be found between the approaches of the English and the Scottish funding councils (the Scottish funding council taking, e.g., a slightly more explicitly developmental and quality improvement oriented stance than the English one), on a general level they are fairly similar. Basically, the faculties are asked to provide information about themselves, in writing, on a limited number of indicators, and on their programme, resulting in a claim for "excellent" or "satisfactory" quality of teaching. The funding councils will compose small visiting committees from a pool of experts (primarily disciplinary peers), to assess and visit all institutions claiming excellence, all those where -- based on information available to the funding council -- weaknesses may be encountered, and to examine a sample of other institutions. Each visiting committee is selected to visit one institution; no effort is made to set up a nation-wide system of comparisons. The committees’ judgements are summarised as "excellent", "satisfactory" or "unsatisfactory". In what way, through which "formula" (if any), the judgements will inform the funding decisions is not yet completely clear.

To what extent the practices of quality audit and quality assessment amount to the same thing in practice, cannot be told yet. Some fears exist that, e.g., an audit trail into the practice of quality control in a faculty will closely resemble the quality assessment of that same faculty.

**A general model of higher education quality assessment**

Overlooking the experiences with quality assessment systems both in the U.S.A. and Canada, and in the western European countries just mentioned, it can be argued that in all these systems a number of similar elements are found that can be combined into the core of a general higher education quality assessment system. The various systems described before (as well as all other systems, not mentioned here) of course all have their own characteristics that apply to their own specific circumstances. But these systems also show some similar elements that can be combined into a general model.

Crucial in such a general model is, I think, the assumption that quality assessment in higher education should have both an intrinsic and an extrinsic dimension. In any sensible system of higher education quality control both the traditional English model of a review by peers and the historical French model of providing accountability to external constituencies should be incorporated. Focusing on only one of these two models leads to a risky overestimation of specific functions and practices of higher education institutions. A quality control system which only takes place by means of collegial peer review without any reference to the needs outside the higher education system, implies the risk of an extreme isolationism
of the higher education institutions from the rest of society (and thus the danger of the denial of legitimacy of their existence). A quality control system which is limited to only providing accountability to external authorities denies some of the basic organisational characteristics of higher education institutions and therefore implies the risk of not being taken seriously by the academic experts.

What then could be common elements of a general model of higher education quality assessment?

A first element concerns the managing agent (or agents) of the quality assessment system. Such an agent should be independent and have the responsibility to manage the system at a meta-level. The meta-level agent should be the co-ordinator of the quality assessment system, acting independently from government politics and policies and not having the task to impose upon the institutions an approach that the government deems to be necessary. The meta-level agent should preferably have some legal basis. Its co-ordinating task should imply (after consultation with the institutions) the formulation of procedures and formats that can be used by the institutions. In these procedures and formats consistent statistical information can be indicated as highly relevant. The experiences in the various countries in western Europe show that exactly this meta-level role is of great importance to obtain acceptance of the system. The Academic Audit Unit (AAU) in the United Kingdom neither inspected courses nor programmes, nor did it validate courses. The AAU only monitored and commented on the mechanisms by which the institutions themselves assured the quality of the programmes they offer. Similarly, in the procedures used by the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) since 1985, the institutions were encouraged to undertake their own quality review processes. While the CNAA kept its responsibility for the final approval of the courses leading to its awards, the quality assessment mechanism first of all had to do with the institution’s capacity to identify its strengths and weaknesses and to improve its quality. In the new British systems, two meta-level agents exist, namely the Higher Education Quality Council, "owned" by the collective universities, and the funding councils, which are tied more closely to the governmental services. The Association of Co-operating Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU) follows a strategy similar to that of the CNAA and the CVCP. In the quality assessment system in the Netherlands emphasis is put on the institution’s self-evaluation and the visit by peers. The Association itself only operates as the co-ordinator of the system.

A second common element may be deduced from both the North American and the western European experiences. These experiences indicate that any quality assessment system must be based on self-evaluation (or: self-study, self-assessment). It is often argued in the higher education literature that, in order for academics to accept and implement changes, they must trust and "own" the process in which problems are defined and solutions are designed. This is certainly also the case in quality assessment. Only if the academics accept quality assessment as their own activity, will the system be successful. Self-evaluation is a crucial mechanism for academics to accept a quality assessment system. Moreover, in a self-evaluation process (or in any set of activities in a higher education institution with a focus on internal quality assessment) consulting processes with outside actors (employers, alumni) is of great importance.

A third common element in a general model of quality assessment certainly appears to be the mechanism of peer review and especially one or more site visits by external experts. It is crucial that these external experts should be accepted by the institution to be visited as unbiased specialists in the field. They can come from many constituencies (including employers’ organisations, industry and professional bodies) and, depending on the nature of the visit (review of content and level of a specific study programme, or management audit at the institutional level), they will need to have specific backgrounds (academic expertise, managerial experience, etc.). The external visitors should visit the institution (or faculty/department) for a period of a few days, during which they can discuss the self-evaluation report and the plans for future innovations with the faculty. The visitors could also take the opportunity to interview staff, students, administrators and (if possible) alumni. This element appears to be used successfully in both North American and western European quality assessment systems. In the U.S.A. and Canada a visit by
peers always has been a crucial aspect of the various assessment systems. In the United Kingdom the CNAA emphasized the visit by a committee of peers. The Academic Audit Unit saw the visit as an intense and concentrated activity (Williams, 1991, pp. 7,8). The procedures developed since the changes in British higher education in 1992 continue this emphasis. Although for reasons of economy the funding councils abstain from visits to all faculties, all those whose quality is claimed or expected to deviate from the average will be visited, plus a sample of the "satisfactory" ones. In France the Comité National d’Evaluation organises at least two visits to each university being reviewed. In the Netherlands a team of external experts visits each programme site of a specific discipline.

A fourth element of a general model of quality assessment concerns the reporting of the results of and experience with the methods used. Regarding this element it may first of all be pointed out that some form of reporting the conclusions of the peer review team is very useful. However, looking at the experiences, such a report should not have the function of judging or ranking the institutions or programmes that have been visited. It rather should have as its main objective to help the institutions and study programmes to improve their levels of quality. A crucial phase in the reporting process therefore concerns providing the opportunity to the institutions and units that have been visited to comment on a draft version of the report and to formulate counter-arguments if necessary. Also, in the final version of the report higher education institutions should be able to indicate possible disagreements with the peer review team. Reporting the results of the quality assessment processes is an important mechanism in the process of providing accountability to external constituencies. However, there appear to be various ways of offering such a report and each has its specific advantages and disadvantages. One way is to publish the complete report and, by so doing, offer it to all those who might be interested. The advantage of such an approach is that each constituency can immediately and clearly find out what the outcomes of an assessment have been and how these outcomes relate to their norms and criteria. A disadvantage of this approach is that it may severely limit the commitment of those who are visited to engage in open discussions with the peer review team, simply because they fear the effects of their frankness when the results of the review are published. A second way to report on the results of the peer review is to offer the detailed individual reports only to the institutions visited and to guarantee confidentiality. To the external constituencies (and to society at large) a general summary of the report can be presented, which may be used as a mechanism for providing accountability. The advantage of this approach is that the commitment of those who are visited will be high. The disadvantage is that some external constituencies might not be satisfied with only a summary of the report, out of fear that information is being withheld from them.

Regarding this element, the approaches in the various countries differ. In the U.S.A. and Canada the reports are usually kept confidential. In France, the CNE publishes its reports on the institutions. The institutional self-evaluations are kept confidential, while the report by the external experts is public. In the Netherlands, although in the pilot phase the reports on the individual study programmes of the external visitors were kept confidential, since the system has been fully implemented the final reports, including the "local reports", have been made public. The argument for doing so is the accountability objective. In the procedures of the British Academic Audit Unit the audit report was intended to provide an accurate account of an institution’s quality assurance mechanisms. The report thereby drew attention to good and bad practice. The report was first of all written for the institution and the Academic Audit Unit itself did not publish the reports. It was for the institution to decide what publicity to give to its reports, although it was assumed that the report "finds its way into the public domain accompanied by a commentary prepared by the university" (Williams 1991, p. 10).

A final common element of a general model of quality assessment concerns the possible relationship between the outcomes of a quality review system and the (governmental) decisions about the funding of higher education activities. Based on the experience of quality assessment in especially western Europe so far, I can argue that a direct, rigid relationship between quality review reports and funding decisions should not be established. By a direct, rigid relationship we mean that the quality judgements
are the only input into the funding process, which, moreover, is a simple, e.g. linear, function of the quality judgement: "good" education means x extra money, and "bad" education means x money less. Such an "automatic" direct relationship will probably harm the operation of a quality assessment system. All the more so as funding decisions presently tend to be cut backs (negative sanctions) rather than incentives (positive sanctions). The danger of this is that it may lead to a compliance culture, the only aim of which will be to appear to meet the criteria formulated, irrespective of whether those criteria are appropriate in the context of specific institutions or not. In such a rigid relationship academics and institutions will distrust the external review teams and they will produce self-evaluation studies in compliance with perceived criteria but with little real interest. Relating a system of rigid and direct rewards and sanctions to the delicate mechanisms of quality assessment may have a very negative effect on the operation of the system. In France, the Comité National d’Evaluation has understood these dangers. The evaluations performed by the Committee do not have a direct impact on state subventions to the institutions. The new procedures for quality assessment in the United Kingdom also do not imply a direct relationship between quality management and funding on a large scale. Moreover, the amounts of money involved in the funding councils’ judgements seem to be fairly marginal for the moment, thereby mitigating any possible negative effect. Also, the quality audits of the new quality council for higher education, continuing the role of the AAU, have no direct link to funding either.

The above does not imply that an indirect, non-automatic relationship between quality management and funding decisions should also be rejected. On the contrary, as the experiences in the U.S.A. and Canada as well as the new approaches in France and the United Kingdom show, such an indirect relationship, where quality judgements are one -- but not the only one -- of the inputs into the policy processes leading to funding decisions, could very well be part of the general model of quality assessment suggested here. An indirect relationship would imply that national governments will only provide the necessary financial means to higher education institutions if these institutions (and the various units within these institutions) can show that they have submitted themselves to at least one external judgement which is an accepted part of the general quality assessment system. Only if higher education institutions can show that they have offered their educational programmes for external review, should these institutions be eligible for governmental funding. Whether the funds provided by government are used to reward programmes that have been judged to be of good quality or to help programmes that received a negative qualification by an external review team, should be the decision of the higher education institution itself. It should be left to the discretion of the higher education institutions how they react to the outcomes of the quality assessment system. The decision to fund or not to fund an institution (or certain programmes within an institution) should, in this approach, only depend upon the willingness to submit the institutional activities to outside review.

The elements presented here (touching upon the meta-level role of managing agent(s), upon self-evaluation, upon peer review and site visits, upon the degree of confidentiality of reporting, and upon the relationship between quality review outcomes and funding) together form the core of what could be called a general model of higher education quality assessment. In this model both the intrinsic and the extrinsic values of higher education are addressed. As such, the elements of the general model combine the two traditional approaches to quality assessment that are found in the history of higher education. By doing so this general model relates the present-day experiences with the historical roots of higher education quality assessment.
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Although American colleges and universities use a variety of forms of external review, accreditation is what gets most attention from those outside the United States. The American system of accreditation is very different from the traditional practice of most other countries. It has been looked to as a model by some other countries now planning their own accreditation systems. The private, voluntary accreditation system of the United States has worked reasonably well for nearly a century. However, it is currently a topic of intense controversy in the United States, and is likely to undergo some major changes over the next few years.

This paper includes four main sections. First, for those not familiar with the American system of higher education, it presents a brief overview of some of the salient features of U.S. higher education and the accreditation process. Second, it describes some of the current controversies about accreditation in the United States. That may be useful in alerting you to some of the problems of the U.S. system and should serve as a warning that private accreditation can be a difficult and controversial process. Third, it discusses some of the proposals for change and their chances for adoption. Lastly, it reviews some of the questions that must be addressed either in changing a system or in adopting a new system of accreditation.

First, let us review some of the basic characteristics of the United States higher education system and its form of accreditation that distinguish the United States system from that of most countries in Europe. As many of you know, unlike the common practice in Europe, the national (federal) government in the United States does not play a major role in the formation of higher education policy. The United States Department of Education is not a Ministry of Education in the European sense. It does not accredit institutions, but merely recognises the accreditation status granted by private accrediting agencies. It does not determine the qualifications for entrance to the university or for the granting of degrees. The federal government does not provide basic funding for universities, although it does provide significant funds for financial assistance to students and for research projects at universities.

Public universities and colleges receive basic funding from the 50 State governments, but they are not tuition-free as they are in much of Europe, and they rely on private sources of funding as well. Private universities and colleges are funded primarily through student tuition fees and private gifts, although private research universities also receive major funding for research from the federal government.

State governments license both public and private post-secondary institutions in their States, but the degree of control they exercise varies widely from State to State; some States closely monitor the performance of private institutions, some exercise almost no control at all. (As in Japan, a significant proportion of American institutions -- nearly half -- are privately controlled, although they enroll only about 20 per cent of students.) The fact that an institution is licensed by the state government, therefore, is not in itself an assurance of quality. Unfortunately, some state-licensed “universities” are in fact no more than “diploma mills” -- companies that simply sell degrees and diplomas.

Quality control of post-secondary institutions in the United States has historically been a self-regulation process, carried out by regional or national accrediting agencies.
Basic characteristics of United States accreditation

United States accreditation is a private, non-governmental process.

Institutional accreditation is done primarily by regional accrediting associations whose members are the accredited colleges and universities in specific geographic regions. Some special types of institutions are accredited by national accrediting associations.

Neither the federal government nor the State governments accredit institutions, but they recognize accreditation done by private agencies, primarily for the purpose of determining which institutions are eligible for student financial aid or other government funds.

The standards for accreditation are developed not by the government but by the members of the accrediting bodies -- that is, by the institutions and members of the professions.

Both institutions and individual academic programs (such as law, medicine, and business) may be accredited.

Six regional associations and five national associations accredit institutions. The regional institutional accrediting associations are:

- Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools
- New England Association of Schools and Colleges
- North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
- The Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges
- Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
- Western Association of Schools and Colleges

The national institutional accrediting bodies are:

- American Association of Bible Colleges
- Association of Advanced Rabbinical and Talmudic Schools
- The Association of Theological Schools in the U.S. and Canada
- Career College Association (mostly for proprietary, profit-making institutions)
- National Home Study Council

Forty-three recognised specialised accrediting associations, run by professional and disciplinary associations, accredit programmes. Examples are:

- American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business
- American Bar Association
- American Medical Association (with 20 specialised committees)
- Computing Science Accreditation Board
- National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education
- Society of American Foresters
Accreditation is (at least formally) a voluntary process.

However, institutional accreditation is generally required for access to federal student financial aid, government or foundation grants, and recognition of the institution's degrees by other universities.

Specialised (programme) accreditation, while necessary for some professions like medicine and allied health and law, is not required for most other programmes, but is sought for reasons of program improvement or prestige.

Accreditation always involves a self-study by the institution.

The institution is responsible for clearly stating its mission, for collecting required data on organization and performance, and for identifying its own strengths and weaknesses through a self-study which often takes a year or more to prepare. The self-study is sent to the accreditation team in advance of the site visit.

All accreditation processes involve peer review.

Outside teams of evaluators are usually chosen from similar institutions or from the same discipline or profession as the programme being evaluated. Teams visit the campus for two days. Members of accrediting teams serve on a voluntary basis, but the institution being accredited must pay the team’s expenses.

Standards for accreditation are flexible and are adapted to the mission of the individual institution.

Accreditation teams are instructed to honour the diversity of institutions and to make judgments according to the stated mission of the institution. A small undergraduate institution that concentrates primarily on the teaching function is not judged by all of the same criteria as a research university that emphasizes scholarly research.

The purpose of accreditation is both to ensure accountability for quality and to provide the impetus for institutional and programme improvement.

When it works well, the self-study in itself will help the institution evaluate its own quality and identify problems which must be corrected.

A good accreditation team will not only make judgments about whether an institution or program is qualified for accreditation, but may also serve as expert consultants to help the institution solve problems and improve quality.

Both institutional and specialized accreditation increasingly are focused not only on inputs (size of faculty, quality of facilities, funds available, size of library), but also on processes and outcomes.

The following kinds of questions are gaining in importance: What are the processes for internal curriculum evaluation and revision? What opportunities are available for faculty development? How is
student learning assessed? What percentage of graduates get jobs for which they have prepared? What is the degree of employer satisfaction with graduates?

**Criticisms: how well does it work?**

Much of this seems like an ideal system. It is designed to ensure institutional and program quality. It respects and guards the autonomy of the institution and encourages the diversity of institutions. It uses peer review and helps institutions improve their quality. Why, then, are we hearing in the United States the following kinds of comments -- from the public, from Congress, from parents and students?

*The accreditation system is not effective for accountability.*

Critics contend that self-regulation is rarely effective in enforcing accountability because it is carried out by self-interested parties. To make an institution truly accountable, the assessment process would have to include those to whom it is supposed to be accountable: the various publics it serves, including governments, students, taxpayers, and employers.

The system does not give students and parents sufficient information on which to base choices; the results of the accreditation process are not made public, except for the final decision on whether or not to grant accreditation.

*The accreditation process does not really help to improve quality.*

We have been charged with being too concerned with measuring those things we believe contribute to quality, such as the size and qualifications of the faculty, institutional planning, and financial health, and not enough with demanding direct evidence of student educational achievement. Since there is never any question as to whether long-established institutions like Harvard or the University of California at Berkeley will be accredited, the self-study and team visit may not be taken seriously by those within the institution. However, smaller and weaker institutions probably do learn from the accreditation process.

*Accreditation costs too much.*

Large institutions must pay the costs of accrediting teams for institutional accreditation (often 20-30 people for two days) and for multiple programme accreditation teams. Each takes time for self-study and for the visit. But while college and university presidents complain about the number of specialized accreditations, most institutions get as many as they can for reasons of prestige. About half of the special accreditations are needed because they are the basis for state licensure in the professions, and others are needed to form the basis of judgment of new programmes.

*Nobody understands the purpose or process of accreditation.*

Faculty members, students, and many administrators within the institutions may not understand or appreciate how the process of accreditation works or what purposes it serves. Too often, the self-study is carried out by a small team without full consultation with those most involved with the programs and issues at the university. The results of the team's visit often are not shared even within the institution.
Accreditation is not well understood by those whom it should be serving: students and their parents, government agencies, Congress, and the public.

Proposals for change

A. Government regulation

As higher education systems in several other countries have been moving toward more autonomy and self-regulation for higher education and away from the strict governmental controls of the past, there has been a trend in the United States in recent years for both federal and state governments to move toward closer regulation. The United States Congress has imposed requirements that colleges and universities make public reports about graduation rates, crime on campus, and other matters. Partly in response to public concerns about rapid increases in costs and issues pertaining to the quality of undergraduate education, the government has considered various measures to address such issues. There has been special concern about the performance of the proprietary sector, mostly the for-profit trade schools whose students are eligible for federal financial aid. In addition to questions about their general quality and low completion rates, there has been concern about the high default rates of their students who take federal loans to pay for their training.

In 1992, the United States Congress passed legislation that was designed to control such abuses, but which could radically change the accreditation process for all higher education institutions. The Higher Education Act of 1992 attempts to put on the institutional accrediting agencies the burden for tracking compliance with federal regulations. Under the act, these agencies would be responsible for determining whether institutions are in compliance with a variety of regulations, including those concerning acceptable default rates for repayment of student loans. The act also establishes state government responsibilities for higher education's compliance with unspecified “performance standards” for quality, as measured by things like student drop-out rates and the failure of graduates to find employment. It establishes State Postsecondary Review Entities (SPREs) to do their own assessments of institutions. It also establishes “triggers,” including complaints from students (as well as high loan default rates) that would result in state activity. The Act specifies standards that must be met by accrediting agencies.

Furthermore, the draft regulations issued a few weeks ago by the United States Department of Education seem to go even further than the legislation in intruding on the autonomy of both the accrediting agencies and the institutions. They suggest a number of specific standards not spelled out by the law (such as refund policies and completion rates), and they impose huge record-keeping burdens on institutions. They appear to give the state entities much broader authority over colleges and universities, including private colleges, than Congress intended. And they do not provide for adequate due process protections by specifying appeal processes. In addition, the lack of specificity in some areas gives enormous discretion to state bureaucrats (who universities believe do not understand higher education).

Critics believe that the new regulations do not get at the issues of fraud and abuse in effective or efficient ways. The accrediting agencies do not want the responsibility for enforcement, which they consider the responsibility of the government. They do not accept the idea that the federal government should set standards for accreditation agencies, believing that should be a matter for the institutional members of the agencies. Some are ready to abandon the link between accreditation and an institution's eligibility for student aid funds if that means accepting such regulation.
B. Restructuring accreditation from within: mechanisms and process

Most of the regional accrediting associations and many of the specialised agencies have been re-examining their policies and priorities. Partly to ward off increasing government control and partly in response to a general movement in the United States toward better assessment of outcomes, the regional associations are putting more emphasis on teaching and learning and are working to devise effective methods for the accreditation process in order to help institutions improve from within.

The mechanisms for co-ordinating the work of regional and specialised accrediting agencies will also change. Until recently, the Council for Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA), an association which included the regional, national, and specialised accrediting bodies, was charged with such coordination and with recognising the various accrediting agencies. The Federal government depended on COPA recognition as the basis for its recognition of bodies authorised to accredit institutions as eligible for federal financial aid for students. Last spring, charging that COPA was not providing useful services, the regional accrediting associations decided to terminate their membership in COPA.

When COPA was formally dissolved last fall, the major higher education associations whose heads served on the COPA Board took the initiative to convene their own group and the heads of the regional accrediting agencies as a “National Policy Board on Higher Education Institutional Accreditation” to plan together what should be done. On January 28, 1994, they agreed that they would move toward an accrediting system with the following characteristics:

--- Instead of separate standards for each region, there would be a core set of national, uniform baseline standards for institutional accreditation. The standards would be centered on student learning outcomes as well as institutional integrity. (However, there is not yet agreement on what those baseline standards should be);

--- A second tier of standards would be designed to promote institutional improvement, again with a focus on student learning outcomes. (But there are not yet any agreed-on forms of assessment of student learning, and unless those are somehow tied to the teaching process, critics say, they won’t lead to improvement.) Institutions would be asked to provide evidence of planning for improvement based on such assessments;

--- Reports on the findings of the accreditation process would be made public; private letters to institutions that undergo accreditation reviews would also be provided, detailing needed improvements;

--- A voluntary third tier may be developed to provide recognition for institutional excellence, perhaps something like the Baldridge programme in business;

--- A national organisation would be established to oversee the accreditation process. The purpose of the permanent national organisation would be to oversee higher education accreditation. The organisation would establish core standards to be used by all accrediting associations and would serve as a recognition body for both regional and specialised agencies. A majority of its governing board would consist of public members, including college and university governing board members, rather than those directly involved in higher education. The organisation would also have an advisory board composed of the chief executives of the regional accrediting associations.

The national organisation would ensure the public accountability of accreditation and would hold accrediting agencies responsible for their standards and procedures; serve as an advocate for self-regulation
before the federal government and with the general public; sponsor research and development projects; and help coordinate and integrate activities by the higher education community on accreditation issues.

Other suggestions include changing the accreditation process so that instead of assessments of the entire institution every ten years by a large team, there might be visits by a small team every year or two to look at particular programmes. For established institutions like Stanford or Michigan State University, which are never at risk of losing accreditation, the once-every-ten-years assessment may not be meaningful. More frequent concentration on particular programmes or problem areas chosen by the institution might better address areas needing improvement. The Southern Association is already experimenting with such an approach, splitting the process into two phases, one for accountability or compliance with administrative norms, the second for improvement or enhancement of programs, in which the university identifies three or four major issues it wants to deal with. In the latter case, the visiting committee members serve more as consultants than as judges.

The Uncertain Future

What will be the result of all this ferment? At the moment, it's hard to say. The higher education associations and the accrediting agencies are trying to work with the Congress and the Department of Education to make the proposed government regulations less burdensome. It is likely they will succeed in getting the law changed the next time authorising legislation comes before the Congress.

It is not at all certain that most institutional heads (presidents and chancellors, who are the current official representatives to the regional accrediting agencies) will accept the proposals of the National Policy Board on Accreditation. As one association head told me, if the accreditation process is really going to be given some teeth, if what it does includes real consequences for institutions and the publication of institutional weaknesses, then many university presidents would probably prefer that it be done by the government, no matter how much they protest that they believe in self-regulation. This may be especially true if the new accreditation process were to concentrate on the outcomes of learning for undergraduate students, an area in which many of the big research universities feel somewhat vulnerable.

In addition, the plan for a national organisation that would oversee the entire range of the accreditation process and have the responsibility of recognising accrediting agencies probably will not work if it does not have the support both of institutions and of at least the major specialised accrediting agencies. At the moment, that cannot be predicted.

Although the future of accreditation in the United States may be in some doubt, it is certain that there is more interest in the subject among college and university presidents than ever before. A session on accreditation at the American Council on Education's Annual Meeting in February 1994 drew an audience of more than one hundred; three years ago it might have attracted seven people, three of them regional association executives. The prospect of the demise of the accreditation system and of increased government control is of great concern. As Samuel Johnson once said of the prospect of being hanged, it does wonderfully concentrate the mind. The threat may help American institutions make some difficult and much-needed decisions about what is important to them.

It may be that the requirements for an assessment system that holds institutions accountable to the public and those for a system that focuses on institutional and programme improvement will prove to be incompatible. In that case, United States higher education may have to make choices about what it will find acceptable for the government to do and what it must do by itself if it is to maintain its autonomy. Most American higher education leaders will strenuously resist government intrusion into the setting of academic standards, or any attempt to standardise the curriculum. Our tradition of, and commitment to,
institutional diversity is too strong to be easily overcome. Some might, on the other hand, be less reluctant to accept government involvement in the weeding out of institutions that are clearly fraudulent or so ill-managed that they cannot serve either their students or society well.

**Basic questions for the future**

What questions must be asked and answered before the accreditation system can be improved? Most of these questions are also relevant to those considering the introduction of a new system of private accreditation.

-- Who needs accreditation? What purposes is it intended to serve? For what constituencies? For the universities? For governments? For the public?

-- To what extent should the evaluation process be “formative” vs. “summative,” i.e. should it be used only to judge current quality, or should it be used as a tool to help institutions improve?

Those who will take part in the process must agree on what they want it to measure or judge:

-- Adequate facilities, like laboratories, lecture halls, faculty offices, the library (number of books, computerisation of catalogues, number of librarians), dormitory and dining facilities?

-- Adequate personnel, e.g., the ratio of faculty to students, or the number of student services personnel? What is an adequate ratio? What kinds of academic degrees or other training are required for faculty? For other university personnel?

-- Teaching loads? What is a “reasonable” teaching load? (University perceptions may differ radically from the public's perceptions.) How should we differentiate the teaching load among institutions with different missions?

-- Research output, e.g., published research in monitored journals? Do we count quantity or judge quality? Who judges? Do we count electronic networks as a kind of publication?

-- Good management of funds? How is that measured?

-- To what extent should we measure outcomes as opposed to inputs? Outcomes often are more difficult to measure. How do we evaluate undergraduate teaching and learning? By standardized tests? By retention or graduation rates? By job placements after graduation? Student satisfaction based on surveys? Employer satisfaction?

-- What level of “quality” (however measured) is good enough? Should different types of institutions be required to meet different standards? What are the baseline standards that all must meet? What happens if they are not met? Should there be some kind of ranking after that minimum standard? If so, should that be voluntary? Who is to decide on guidelines and requirements.

-- What will be the relationship between accreditation and government agencies? What should be the relationship, if any, between “quality” as judged by an accreditation team and the level of state or federal funding?
-- Who will establish the accreditation agencies? How? A process is needed to establish, recognise, and possibly regulate accreditation agencies. Their responsibilities must be clearly laid out. What should they not do?

-- Is a self-study really needed for all institutions? Is it helpful in the institutional planning process, or as a spur for improvement? What would happen if we abandoned it?

-- Who should pay for the accreditation process?

-- How will accreditation teams be trained?

-- How often should the process take place? Should it be the same for all institutions? Should there be different phases of accreditation, with some programmes and processes being examined more frequently than others?

-- To what extent should the results of assessment be made public?

Significance for central and eastern Europe

What significance do these developments and questions in the United States have for institutions in central and eastern Europe? Potentially, I believe, a great deal. Many of your countries have just developed or are considering new legislation on accreditation. If the longest-established system of non-governmental accreditation fails, or if its purposes are significantly changed, it could have an impact on newly established systems.

Then, too, accreditation processes established in central and eastern Europe, as well as those adopted by countries in western Europe, may have an effect on what changes are adopted in the United States. We can, I hope, learn from one another's experiences.

In addition, many international exchange programs depend on accreditation as an indicator of quality and a requirement for participation. As the European Union and the North American Free Trade Area strive to develop a system of equivalency of academic degrees, both the regional institutional accrediting agencies and those specialised accrediting agencies in the United States that determine degree requirements in different fields will be needed to help negotiate common standards. A number of them already are involved in co-operative efforts with European and other North American countries to help them develop their own assessment standards and processes. Many United States accrediting agencies, both regional and specialised, welcome inquiries from agencies in other countries and may even invite others to participate in accreditation teams. There may be further efforts to develop some common standards for accreditation in a variety of disciplines in order to facilitate the movement of workers and professionals among countries.

I do not believe that the system of United States accreditation will fail. I do believe that it will be changed. We can maintain self-regulation as an alternative to government regulation only if we can show that it serves the public interest. I remain optimistic that once it has our full attention, it will change for the better.
NOTES


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Part II

Country Reports
The autonomy of the Czech higher education institutions, which was provided to them by the Czechoslovak Higher Education Act of 1990, has, among others, extensively concerned the formulation of the needed standard of their performance. The institutions themselves became responsible for the contents and organisation of their studies. By the Act of 1990, the **Accreditation Commission** of the Czech Republic was established as a "consultation body on higher education to the Czech government", to replace the previous politically biased and bureaucratic state inspection, which directly intervened in all aspects of higher education performance. The tasks of the Commission, as they have been characterised by the Act, are rather limited. According to this Act the Accreditation Commission:

-- comments on the proposals to establish, merge, divide or abolish the institutions of higher education and their faculties;

-- proposes or comments on the proposals to remove the rights of the institution or a faculty (or to return them the rights) to organise State or doctoral exams in the respective fields of study, the habilitations of associate professors and the proceedings leading to the appointment of professors.

Although it was not its task by the Act, the Accreditation Commission has soon started to develop a less formal evaluation of the Czech higher education through the form of peer review.

Another mechanism of quality assurance, as for example, the **financial incentives by the State**, only begin to apply in the Czech higher education. The barrier here is the absence of an overall strategy of higher education and research development. Also, the mechanisms leading to a broader **reflection of the interests of social partners** (including those of the applicants for study, employers, professional and interest associations, different sectors of the economy, as well as local and regional administration) in the performance of higher education do not fully appear as yet.

When preparing the Czech higher education law, which is to replace the federal Act of 1990, an extensive discussion concerns the future development of the system of quality assurance, mainly in connection to the needs of:

-- the distinction of criteria applied for university and non-university sectors of higher education;

-- the reflection of the interests of social partners;

-- the objectivity of funding of higher education institutions;

-- the formulation of the general concept of higher education quality management.
This paper characterises the present system of quality assurance in the Czech higher education. It analyses the pros and cons of the system and summarises the discussion concerning its further development, as it is to be reflected by the new higher education law. A special attention is devoted to preparation of evaluation of the emerging sector of the non-university higher education.

Accreditation Commission and the Development of Evaluation in the Czech Higher Education

The Fulfillment of the Legal Functions of the Commission

The Accreditation Commission of the Czech Republic has been established by the Czech government, on the approval by the Council of Higher Education Institutions (the democratic representation of the institutions and their faculties). The members of the Commission were proposed to the government by the Czech Ministry of Education. It consists from eminent professionals in their fields but they cannot be rectors of deans at the institutions of higher education. It has 21 members, four of whom are from abroad. The members are both from higher education and from other, mainly research institutes. Each member of the Commission may establish a sub-commission, which is mostly for a definite field. Neither the members of the Commission nor the members of the sub-commissions are paid for their work for the Accreditation Commission.

The Commission has a secretariat (two persons) situated at the Ministry of Education and paid from the budget of the Ministry.

The Czech Accreditation Commission co-operates with the Slovak Accreditation Commission, which consists mainly in the exchange of information and common discussion of problems. One of the foreign members of the Czech Commission is Slovak. The chairman or vice-chairman of the Slovak Commission participate at the sessions of the Czech Commission and vice versa.

Up to the present, the tasks of the Commission, as they have been described by the Higher Education Act of 1990, have been fulfilled as follows.

In 1990-1991 the Czech Accreditation Commission has been dealing with proposals of new institutions. On the basis of its recommendation, the establishment of five new regional universities was officially approved by the Parliament in 1991, with the intention to overcome huge centralisation of higher education in big cities (Prague and Brno): the Silesian University in Opava, The University of Ostrava, the South Bohemian University in České Budejovice, the West Bohemian University in Pilsen and the University of Jan Evangelista Purkyně in Ústí nad Labem. Most of them have been formed on the basis of already existing independent faculties of education or dislocated faculties of other universities. For the accreditation the project of the material and personnel preconditions and the expected development of the university had to be prepared.

The proposals to new faculties at the new institutions as well as at the traditional ones have been judged according to their capability to provide a good quality education, as it was guaranteed by the composition of their professional staff, their material equipment (buildings, laboratories, libraries and other), and the possibilities of their co-operation with other research and cultural institutions (including sharing the equipment of these institutions). The responsiveness of the institutions and faculties to the regional needs as well as the support by their regions were considered.
Since the establishment of new universities and new faculties is always a costly decision, which influences the whole system of higher education, the Commission recommended that all these proposals would be preliminarily evaluated by the Ministry of Education and the Council of Higher Education Institutions.

Up to the end of 1993 the Commission evaluated many proposals for establishment new faculties. Some of them were results of reorganisation of already existing structure of faculties at the given institution (this concerned the Economic University in Prague, the University of Veterinary Medicine and Pharmacology in Brno and the University od Mining and Metallurgy in Ostrava). These faculties have kept full rights of university faculties, and were also approved the right to organise doctoral studies. From 16 proposals of completely new faculties at the traditional institutions, 14 were approved by the Accreditation Commission, with different rights to organise particular levels of studies (bachelors’, masters’ or doctoral), and the habilitation and nomination proceedings. From 20 proposals of establishing new faculties at the new universities 13 were approved.

New faculties at the new universities were mostly accredited for providing only shorter -- three to four years -- bachelor’s studies. Since the teaching staff of the new universities is still forming, the Commission recommended that habilitations of their associate professors and nominations of their professors in the respective fields would be made by other institutions of higher education, which have longer and respected tradition in providing higher education (Kurzweil et al., 1992/93; Vinš - Mikulec, 1993).

New proposals for the extension of the rights of faculties are currently evaluated by the Accreditation Commission, as given by their new development (Vinš - Mikulec, 1993).

Although site-visits were not a usual precondition for accreditation of faculties at the initial stage of the performance of the Accreditation Commission, because of too many proposals that had to be processed, they appear as a necessity at the present more stabilised stage.

Until May 31st, 1993 the Commission recommended 391 fields of doctoral studies at 78 faculties. Eighteen field groups of professionals both from higher education and the research institutes outside higher education were formed for this purpose. Also, it recommended co-operation of faculties at different institutions, for which the same field of study was approved, in the organisation of doctoral studies. The faculties were asked to establish common field councils or other forms of co-ordination of doctoral studies, which helps to overcome the separation of the institutions, which is a result of their large autonomy after 1989. The Commission also recommended co-operation of the institutions of higher education with other research institutes (mainly the institutes of the Academy of Sciences) in this respect, even though the institutions of higher education keep the exclusive right to award the doctoral degree (as given by the Higher Education Act of 1990).1

While the assessment of the proposals of new institutions is made for the Czech government and following for the Czech Parliament needs, since the establishment of each new institution must be approved by a parliamentary decision, the assessment of proposals for the new faculties, their abolition, merger, or division, or proposals for organisation of habilitations of associate professors and the proceedings leading to the appointment of professors, as well as the accreditation of doctoral fields of study is made for the institutions themselves. All the rights concerning the changes in the structure of faculties are confined to the academic senates (the elected representation of the academic community) of the institutions. Since the role of the Ministry of Education is not clearly defined in the process of accreditation (it is to "remove" or to "return" the institutions the rights as they were defined in the point 2. in the introduction of this study), it applies strongly only in cases when the need of the approval by the Ministry is beyond question (mainly as concerns the appointments of professors, which are to be suggested by the Ministry to the final nomination by the President of the Republic).
As a result of this vague situation it appeared in a few cases that the institutions did not respect the recommendation by the Accreditation Commission when it did not recommend to organise longer (magister’s) studies. Some of the proposals submitted to the Commission were renewed and evaluated repeatedly -- in two or three cases when a faculty was established, although this was not recommended by the Commission.

By the Amendment to the Higher Education Act of 1990 the Commission was given beginning the September 1993 a rather uneasy task to propose to the Minister of Education the composition of commission deciding on competitions for positions of heads of departments in higher education. This is in connection with changing all tenured contracts within higher education to the terminated contracts (up to five years) as a result of competitions, by this Amendment. Even though the intention was to contribute to the development of the teaching staffs at the institutions, the measure adopted seems to be too bureaucratic and it is criticised as an undue intervention in the internal affairs of the institutions by the Accreditation Commission itself.

**The Development of Evaluation of the Czech Higher Education**

By the chairman of the Accreditation Commission Jaroslav Kurzweil, who is director of the Mathematical Institute of the Academy of Sciences, the Commission is to "provide an independent view of the quality of higher education and help the institutions of higher education and their faculties by an objective evaluation of their standard of studies, research or artistic activity. A comparison with foreign institutions and foreign systems of education is part of the evaluation. The Accreditation Commission thus contributes to the formulation of conditions which are necessary for the international acknowledgment of the Czech higher education." (Kurzweil et al., 1991/1992).

This formulation represents substantial specification and extension of the involvement of the Commission, as given by the Higher Education Act. This extension appears mainly in the beginning of permanent evaluation of the already existing faculties and institutions. In 1992 the Commission started to evaluate faculties of natural science and faculties of electrical engineering. The evaluation process adopted the form of peer-review, by the group of external experts appointed by the Commission. At the beginning, in the spring of 1992, an "evaluation questionnaire" has been distributed to the faculties concerned and the Accreditation Commission appointed working groups for evaluation of both types of faculties. The working groups had studied the answers in the questionnaire received back from the faculties, visited the faculties and their departments in the autumn of 1992 and drew the evaluation report. The Commission has co-operated, during the process of evaluation, with the staff of the faculty and their departments, academic senate and scientific council of the faculty, and the dean. The evaluation report on the faculty as well as a summary report on the respective group of faculties was given to the dean and to the senate for expression of their opinions, which afterwards became a part of the evaluation report.

The questionnaire comprised groups of questions concerning the following areas of the performance of a faculty:

-- general characteristics of a faculty;

-- organisational structure and employees;

-- equipment;

-- financial management;
organisation of study;

organisation of the teaching process;

characteristics of research and development;

conclusion (including the estimate of the position of the faculty among other similarly oriented faculties as concerns teaching and research, the prospects of graduates and the correspondence of the educational goals of the faculty to the qualification structure of teachers).

It was expected that the details of the wording of the questionnaire will change according to the nature of the fields of study and that the experience attained through this first step of regular evaluation, which is expected to be repeated once in five years, will show the necessity of other improvements of the evaluation technique (Kurzweil, 1993).

In 1993-1994 the pedagogical faculties and the faculties of chemical technology, as well as the faculty of nuclear physics at the Czech Technical University have been evaluated according to the same scheme.

At the same time, the Czech higher education institutions have been encountered with the international evaluation, of the Agricultural University at Prague by the University of Agriculture in Waageningen, The Netherlands. This evaluation followed a similar scheme, with the group of experts from the Netherlands.

Up to the present, all methods of evaluation have exclusively incentive function, aimed at the development of the respective fields and the exchange of experience among the faculties or institutions in question, without any impact on, for example, funding of the institutions.

The self-study as a method of internal evaluation of the institutions and their fields of study, appearing outside the above evaluation processess, which would naturally arise from their internally recognised needs for their quality improvement, is still in its beginnings. The most often used method of this type of evaluation is the evaluation of teachers by their students, which is often not seen as too objective and internalised as an incentive for the self-improvement of the performance of teachers. The evaluation of teaching staff according to their research performance is another method which is used quite often and is connected with the development of the professional career of teachers.

Some higher education institutions are presently interested in their overall internal evaluation, mainly for the purposes of their restructuring and internal division of funds. This is the case of, for example, Charles University in Prague, which is seeking for external assistance when formulating criteria of this evaluation. An offer to co-operate on setting of these criteria has been made to the Centre for Studies of Higher Education in Prague. The evaluation of the Charles University would concentrate mainly on the research performance of its individual departments and faculties.

Another aspect of evaluation is connected with the financing of the system of higher education. The present formula based state funding, introduced in 1992, distinguishing seven groups of fields of study, follows more or less the historically emerging differences in the cost of the fields. The objectivisation of the formula concerned, until recently, the assessment of the justified differences among the groups of fields. The differences among the institutions and faculties in their standard of provision of the similar fields of study were not assessed in the formula. Other differences, as eg. the needs for equipement and other larger investments were respected in the non-formula part of the budget, which represented, in 1992 and 1993
about 30 per cent of the higher education budget. Moreover, the institutions could obtain grants for research either from a specific part of the higher education budget or from outside sources.

In 1994, the formula is based not only on the number of students, but also on the "research performance" of the institution, which includes the volume of the research grants attained and the number of doctoral students.

Still, no difference is in funding of magister’s and bachelor’s studies, which may lead the institutions to some manipulation with the proportion of generally cheaper bachelor’s studies, without an objective evaluation of the need for these studies.

The Discussion of the Present System of Quality Assurance

"The system of control and formal acknowledgement of the Czech higher education institutions is presently a more political question and it does not give a proof of a real quality”.

A representative of the Czech Conference of Rectors

The above words by a Czech rector may imply the fact that although many useful methods of evaluation of higher education have already been implemented in the Czech higher education, there is still no serious discussion on what really is the quality of higher education. In the case of approval of the regional universities as well as in the case of acknowledgement of some new faculties the regional and local political interests are applied at least with the same strength as the aspect of academic quality.

The clear fact that concerns most of the up to date methods and criteria of evaluation is that they concentrate on the internally fixed standards within the education and research fields, or within the institutions themselves, typical for the university education. The orientation of the Accreditation Commission on the capacity of the institutions and their faculties to organise doctoral studies, habilitations of professors and associate professors, their success in obtaining research grants and their cooperation with the research institutes in the country as well as abroad deepens. These criteria fully apply for assessing the education even in fields where a substantial part of it should be very practically orientated and directly correspond to the urgent needs of the labour market (law, economics).

Through this system, even though is is already very helpful for the institutions as concerns the relevancy of their academic and research performance, other functions of higher education, more directly connected with their responsiveness to the needs of the society at large, are rather suppressed. A typical example is that faculties are accredited for provision of doctoral or master’s studies, and the accreditation for the rest -- ie. shorter bachelor’s studies, which are to provide intermediate qualification, does not attract almost any specific attention. The implicit but fault assumption is that the faculties which are not good enough to provide master’s studies, are still good for provision of bachelor’s studies.

At the same time, bachelor’s studies, introduced in the Czech higher education by the Act of 1990, became one of the true sources of diversification of higher education on the scale from more theoretically orientated university education (which was until recently an almost exclusive orientation of the Czech higher education), to the more practical non-university education. Therefore, another criteria of quality evaluation should be applied to most of their fields, which would respect the needs and ideas of employers and professional associations, the professional and cultural needs within the regions, as well as the differentiated needs of applicants connected with the extension of numbers of study places, which is one of the main aims of the diversification. For some new regional institutions or faculties, the offer of which
could very easily and usefully follow the development of the labour market in their region, the traditional university standards may become too tough and frustrating, leading them to undue ambitions, and in fact limiting their proper development.

Similar difficulties may concern the prospects of the sector of non-university education emerging outside the existing university type institutions. Presently, there are 21 institutions of secondary vocational education at which the postsecondary vocational education is organised within an experiment co-organised with the Dutch HBO’s from 1991. The possible accreditation of the postsecondary fields of study these institutions provide (which are mostly interdisciplinary economically and/or technically orientated) as higher education would need completely another, more practical criteria than the traditional criteria of the university education.

These criteria already apply in the case of formal acknowledgement of these post-secondary vocational fields. The selection of the institutions for the experiment is made on the basis of their interest and a project on the development of postsecondary vocational education, which describes the intentions and capabilities of the institution in this respect. An important criterium of the formal acknowledgement of this education is its connection with the regional needs on the side of both employers and applicants for the study, and the quality of practical training, which is an integral part of it.

The project is formally assessed by the Ministry of Education. To attain a more objectivity of this assessment the Association of Schools of Postsecondary Vocational Education has offered to the Ministry an informal evaluation of the project, which would precede the formal assessment. This evaluation is made through visit of three members’ evaluation commission, consisting of one representative of the Association, a representative of the possible employers of graduates and an independent representative of the respective profession, to the institution. The intention of the informal evaluation is not only to help the Ministry in its decision for or against the institution, but also to help the evaluated institution to attain more experience. The evaluation report contains recommendations for the improvement of the project, for the case that the formal assessment would not be positive.

This apriori evaluation will soon be complemented by an experiment aposteriori evaluation through the standard peer-review of the current performance of the institution in 1994. This is organised in co-operation with the Dutch HBO’s. The criteria for the self-evaluation report, which would become a background for the peer-review by the Dutch professionals, will be agreed upon by representatives of the 21 institutions in question in the following areas:

-- the aims (mission) of the institution;
-- organisation of study;
-- contents of study;
-- organisation and management of the institution;
-- the connections with the region;
-- internal assessment of the quality of teaching and learning;
-- the summary of advantages and disadvantages;
-- the expected measures for the improvement.
This evaluation should not only contribute to the further development of the institutions, but also become a base of their further evaluation by an independent gremium. It should also be used by the Ministry when assessing the experiment and by the Accreditation Commission when deciding on the possible accreditation of this kind of education as higher education (Karpíšek, 1994).

The opinion prevails at present within the Czech Ministry of Education as well as within the Czech Parliament and the Accreditation Commission that there should exist, by the new higher education law, either two Accreditation Commissions or two chambers of the Accreditation Commission: for the university and non-university education. The chairman of the Council of Higher Education Institutions Jan Stárek has expressed the opinion that the separate accreditation of the university and non-university education could avoid the clash of quality demands for totally different types of study, which would otherwise certainly appear.

At the same time, it is clear that it would be useful to have some sort of communication between the two Accreditation Commissions or the two chambers of the Accreditation Commissions, so that the different standards of different types of higher education would be respected within the system of higher education as a whole.

The problem is, at present, that still the university type of education is seen not only by the academic community, but also by the large part of the public as the only true higher education and there should exist some mechanisms to reverse this view, so that the graduates from the non-university education would not be handicapped by the public opinion.

The very reasonable but surprisingly tolerant attitude towards the different standards of the non-university education in view of the fact that e.g. within the Rectors Conference the opinion emerges that the universities should take over the guarantee for the quality of the non-university education probably arises from already internalised notion of the due differences of these two kinds of education by many academics. Also, according to the chairman of the Accreditation Commission Jaroslav Kurzweil, the Commission, as it functions at present, cannot take over the tasks concerning the non-university education. One of the main reasons, besides the limited capacity of the Commission, is that the members of the Commission possibly would not be able to see the non-university education without prejudices and with the due practical insight. The confinement of the task to accredit the non-university education to another body (or another chamber of the Commission) would help the present members of the Commission to concentrate fully on the academic standards of education.

According to Jaroslav Kurzweil, the members of the non-university Commission or Chamber of the Commission should be unbiased professionals the interests of whom are not touched either in positive, or in negative sense by the issue. Substantial proportion of them should be from areas outside higher education -- from the respective professions or professional associations.

With respect to the distinction of the university and non-university education, it is considered, in connection to the ongoing preparation of the new Czech higher education law, that instead of the present institutional accreditation (ie. accrediting institutions and faculties for providing different levels of education) it would be useful to accredit definite study programmes, or, later on, definite groups of fields of study -- university or non-university at the particular institutions. This would enable the already existing higher education institutions to apply for accreditation of either the university or non-university programmes. It is expected that the non-university institutions would limit themselves to provision of the non-university programmes, so that the specificity of this sector would be kept.

The preconditions of accreditation of the two types of programmes would differ in the consideration of the needs of the labour market, the expected structure of teaching staff, the needed
equipment, the demands for admission of students etc. Probably, the non-university types of education within the same fields would be considered as cheaper by the formula of funding.

Still, it is discussed what would be the role of the bachelor’s studies within this distinction, since at present, a smaller part of the short bachelor’s studies is seen as a first step of the regular university education, and a larger part of them as an education leading to a definite qualification. The opinion represented at present by the Ministry of Education is that the bachelor’s studies should fall into the system of the non-university education, which would mean a redefinition of the fields which are taken as the first step of the university education. In the Parliamentary Commission for Science and Education the opinion is put forward that the non-university fields should differ from the bachelor level of study, which would be an intermediate level of the long higher education.

It is expected that extension of study opportunities which will appear in connection with the introduction of the non-university sector of higher education and the extension of the rights to provide higher education outside the existing institutions (including the non-state institutions) would bring in the system of higher education the needed competition, which would force the institutions themselves to improve their quality not only with respect to the criteria set by the formal accreditation and evaluation, but also with direct respect to the society’s needs.

Another discussion concerns the formal position of the system of accreditation. It is seen as reasonable to keep the present semi-independent position of the Accreditation Commission. Nevertheless, some opinions appear that the membership in the Commission should be professionalised, so that the members would have enough time and energy to assess properly all proposals. This is connected with the suggestion that the role of the Commission should be not only to "recommend", as it is at present, but to have the final decision word in all the areas of accreditation. In this case, it would be advisable if the system of permanent (regular) evaluation of study programmes through the form of peer-review would be separated from the performance of the Accreditation Commission.

Against it the opinion arises concerning the strength of the present informal authority of the Commission.

A useful base for the future quality assessment and the objectivisation of funding of higher education should become a state strategy of higher education and research development, setting priorities for this development. This strategy should follow an examination of the society’s needs for higher education and research as concerns their different fields and levels of qualification.

Conclusion

It is clear from the above said that the notion of quality assurance has already been internalised within the Czech higher education both at the level of its formal acknowledgement and at the level of its external as well as internal evaluation. Probably, in the near future, the methods of accreditation and evaluation will develop in the sense of involvement of a broader range of the needs and interests of the social partners of higher education than it is in the case of application of purely academic criteria. This process will be supported by the diversification of higher education and introduction of possibilities of organising higher education outside the existing state university sector. Another means of quality assurance as the indirect intervention through the system of funding need to be supported by an overall strategy of development of higher education and research. All this should be supported by the new Czech higher education legislation.
NOTE

1. Since the right to organise postgraduate studies leading to the degree of candidate of sciences -- CSc, was previously given both to the Academy of Sciences and to the institutions of higher education, this recommendation is very reasonable. It helps to overcome the tensions between the institutions of higher education and the Academy of Sciences, which may arise from the fact that the present doctoral degree may be awarded, according to the Act of 1990, exclusively by the institutions of higher education. Still, many institutes of the Academy may provide better conditions for doctoral studies than the institutions of higher education, even though the budget of the Academy substantially diminished (by about one half in real terms) in the past three years and there was large reduction of staff and numbers of research institutes in the beginning of 1993.

The recommendation also contributes to the development of co-operation of higher education institutions with the institutes of the Academy, which helps to overcome the separation of research and teaching. This co-operation is moreover supported by diverse funds by the government and the Ministry of Education and by research grants from diverse sources. Several contracts on co-operation between higher education institutions and the institutes of the Academy of Sciences have already been signed.

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QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION IN HUNGARY

János Setényi:

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to provide an overall view on quality assurance and accreditation in Hungary. Since Hungary did not have an established system of quality assurance or accreditation prior to 1993, this paper does not attempt to offer an analytic approach on the topic, but rather a descriptive of the most recent developments.

The paper challenges the concept of academic self-regulation concerning quality, and examines those previously existing external social mechanisms which made state intervention unnecessary prior to 1990. It also describes the disappearance of those mechanisms, and the emergence of a concern for quality. It concludes with a concise description of the new policies concerning the creation of accreditation and quality assurance in Hungary.

Years without Concern: Quality and Academic Self-Regulation

Recent efforts concerning the introduction of state accreditation and systems of quality assurance in Hungarian higher education are part of a complex area of policy making. This area is largely determined by the inherited structure of higher education. Hungary has a rigid and well-established binary structure which separates the university and college (something between the British ex-politechnics and the German Fachhochschulen) sectors. Universities offer BA., MA. and PhD programmes, while colleges are only allowed to provide BA. courses. The third sector of Hungarian higher education consists of various types of post-secondary education, such as private business and management schools, community colleges, French-type IUTs, and employer-related courses. This sector is not recognised by any means by the 1993 Law on Higher Education (The Higher, 1993).

One of the most surprising characteristics of Hungarian higher education before 1990 was its failure to be concerned with quality. Quality assurance was seen to belong to the realm of the "academic oligarchy" (Clark, 1983). However, it would be misleading to consider quality in terms of academic self-regulation. Self-regulation was also served by various external social mechanisms. According to the author these were the following:

--- the quality assurance of the selective grammar schools (Gimnázium);

--- the strong hierarchical status of the rigid binary structure of higher education institutions;

--- the central control of academic curricula;

--- the labour-market’s lack of concern.
Quality assurance on the secondary level was guaranteed by the rigid selection, and the low enrolment ratios (approximately 25 per cent of the relevant age cohort in the 1980s) of grammar-schools (Gimnázium) as well as by the maturity examination. The national entrance examination system controlled the intake of applicants to universities and colleges in both the quantitative (numerus clausus) and the qualitative sense. As a result, Hungarian higher education (excluding the post-secondary sector) enrolled approximately 15 per cent of an age cohort throughout the 1980s (Setényi, 1993, 20.p.). In this highly elitist system quality seemed to be an obvious element of teaching and research. Admitted students, especially in the most popular fields of study, were privileged compared to those applicants who were not admitted (more than 50 per cent of those applying). As a result, they rarely challenged the concept of academic quality.

This binary structure did not only reflect the functional differentiation of higher education institutions, but it also reflected an *a priori* judgement on educational quality according to which universities were *the* respectable institutions, while colleges accepted the less able applicants.

The central control of academic curricula was exercised by the Ministry of Education. National standards were set up concerning the length of studies, the types of final examinations and diplomas, and at least in the form of a regulated framework, the content of the education.

One of the most important elements of this indifference toward quality was rooted in the specific character of the labour-market in state socialism. As central planning and monopolies were abandoned, competitive state enterprises became interested in the *amount* of applying graduates. The employers’ indifference stimulated students to formulate mainstream learning strategies which can be characterised by narrow pragmatism and output (diploma) orientation.

**Social Changes after 1990: The Emergence of Quality Concern**

Subsequent to the political changes in 1990, all the above mentioned external and indirect social mechanisms of quality assurance began to change. The expansion of secondary general education started in the late 1980s and was stimulated by the democratisation and by the demographic peak of the decade. The rapid massification of grammar schools (Gimnáziums) enlarged the application pool of higher education.

What concerns the rigid hierarchical status of the binary system, is that public demand has been gradually undermining the inherited ideas on quality. The change in public demand was generated by the labour-market which reflected the new values of a competitive society. The current situation can be illustrated as follows:

---

**Figure 1. Official Status and Public Demand of Higher Education Institutions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Public Demand</th>
<th>Low Public Demand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Official Status</td>
<td>Low Official Status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>multi-faculty universities</td>
<td>colleges of art, business, informatics, private colleges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Public Demand</td>
<td>teacher training and technical colleges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>small, vocationally specialized one-faculty universities</td>
<td>teacher training and technical colleges</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Since the hierarchical status of the binary system was challenged by these social changes, making *a priori* judgements on the quality of institutions or on the type of institutions has become increasingly difficult.

The regulations concerning the control of academic curricula were gradually replaced by *ad hoc* reactions to the institutions’ innovations. The former system of quality control was seriously challenged by the introduction of credit systems, the increasing length of studies, and by the appearance of new programmes and diplomas.

Finally, the demand of the new labour-market forced new values and knowledge requirements into higher education. New demands were enforced by a previously unknown social phenomenon: unemployment was growing and in late 1993 it reached its peak (approximately 14 per cent of the relevant age groups).

These developments made the measurement of quality by new standards necessary. While the academic community often measures quality by holistic or professional standards, quality assurance has in fact, a rather functional character. Although the discourse on quality in Hungary regrettably lacks clear concepts, quality is generally defined as “fitness for social purpose”.

**The Approval of New PhD. Courses: The Creation of NAC**

The preparation of the new Law on Higher Education began in 1990. In the course of the preparation, a consensus was reached concerning the system of post-graduate education. As a part of this consensus, the right to dispense PhD. courses and award PhD. degrees was taken from the Academy of Sciences and was given back to universities. In 1992, many universities were ready to start post-graduate education and a national body of programme accreditation was required.

In November 1992 the Temporary National Accreditation Committee (TNAC) was created. Its composition was the following (Róna-Tas, 2.p.):

- Hungarian Rectors’ Conference -- 12 members;
- Conference of College Directors -- 1 member;
- Hungarian Academy of Sciences -- 10 members;
- National Committee of Technological Development -- 1 member.

The TNAC had three *collegia* according to the main fields of knowledge (Human and social sciences; Biosciences; Physical sciences and engineering) and 24 disciplinary committees. In the application period TNAC received 250 applications and approximately 80 per cent of these have been approved by the Committee. The approval of PhD. courses has been complemented by the financial support of the Ministry of Education and Culture which received a separate budget for the support of post-graduate education. The Hungarian Parliament allocated about 300 million Huf (80 Huf 1 US$) for the PhD programmes for 1993 (Róna-Tas, 3.p.).
The Start of Accreditation

TNAC was created for the rapid management of a special and practical problem. The more general and better established legal framework of this new body’s activity was created by the 1993 Law on Higher Education. According to it, the NAC (this time without “temporary”) has the following legal constraints (The Higher, 1993):

**Competence:** "supervision of the standard of education and scientific activity in higher education, and the perfecting of classification there”;

**Functions:** "adopt a standpoint as to the areas of science and branches of knowledge in which a university may conduct doctoral (PhD.) education and adjudicate doctoral (PhD.) degrees.”.

"at the request of the Minister of Education and Culture, the Higher Education and Scientific Council, or a higher education institution, the NAC shall express an opinion concerning:

-- the establishment, starting up or abolition of a department;

-- requirements for qualification;

-- doctoral (PhD.) and habilitation regulations.

"at least every eight years assess the standard of education and scientific activity in institutions of higher education,”

**Sanctions:** "if the higher education institution is not achieving its educational goals, NAC shall make a proposal for:

-- the suspension of the exercise of the right to conduct the final examination and to issue certificates;

-- the abolition of the institution or the withdrawal of state recognition;

-- other measures to ensure the standard of education.

**Composition:** "one half of the members shall consist of representatives from higher education institutions who possess doctoral (PhD.) degrees, and the other half shall be representatives of scientific research institutes who possess doctoral (PhD.) degrees,”

"the members and the elected chairman of the NAC, at the submission of the Minister of Education and Culture, are mandated by the Prime Minister for three years,”

"the NAC may establish specialist committees, with the co-optation of outside members, foreigners who are experts in their fields, may be invited to participate in specialist committees on an occasional basis.”

Despite the legal framework illustrated above, the NAC started its work within rather lax constraints. There was no official vision concerning accreditation, and a very tight deadline was set (1998) for the first compulsory accreditation turn of state institutions.
On the other hand, the Law brought forth some very promising elements as well. The statement that NAC can also work at the request of higher education institutions, might, in the long run, turn the NAC into a sort of service agency. The incorporation some of the existing buffer organizations into the 1993 Higher Education Law has created a good working environment for a non-governmental agency like the NAC.

The actual content and form of accreditation was defined by the leadership and its advisors at the NAC. According to this, the first Hungarian accreditation pilot-scheme will be a mix of institutional accreditation and of programme review. The emphasis will be on the institutional review, while the evaluation of the programmes will play a complementary role. Fully-fledged programme reviews will be done apart, in the framework of programme approval. Since currently most of the Hungarian higher education institutions do not have quality assurance systems, the activity of the NAC must be carried out in the form of direct institutional review. However, according to the NAC leadership, following the first phase of accreditation, the NAC should focus on institutional systems of quality assurance. It seems realistic that this kind of quality audit or meta-accreditation should go into effect in the late 1990s.

The pilot-project of accreditation covers two universities and two colleges. The procedure will be the following:

-- NAC set the national standards and issues the handbook for institutional self-evaluation;
-- the institutions prepare their self-study and provide the required data;
-- NAC starts on-site peer-review by visiting institutions;
-- public reports are published by NAC;
-- institutions publish their comments and make decisions.

**Primus Inter Pares: The Future of NACs Accreditation**

Currently the activity of the NAC is entirely focused on the accreditation of State higher education institutions. In the future however, both institutions of post-secondary education and employer related courses may be concerned by accreditation. It demands the functional differentiation and professional diversification of the NAC.

Although the creation of the NAC and the drafting of its pilot-project are some of the most promising events in current higher education policy, there are some obvious difficulties which can hardly be solved within a small nation state like Hungary. These are as follows:

-- the small size of the domestic academic community threatens the quality of peer-reviews;
-- the emergence of the Atlantic market of degrees and diplomas which also creates alternative routes for accreditation;
-- the narrow educational portfolio of small institutions.

The last is especially problematic in the Hungarian case, where the expansion of higher education was carried out in the 1960-1970s by the creation of small vocationally specialised, one-faculty colleges (Debreczeni et alia, 1992).
Figure 2. **The Quality Concern and the Future Role of the NAC**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functions</th>
<th>Quality Control</th>
<th>Quality Assurance</th>
<th>Quality Audit</th>
<th>Quality Assessment</th>
<th>State Recognition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aims</td>
<td>Evaluation and modification of an academic programme on the basis of staff and student opinion</td>
<td>Permanent self-evaluation of the quality of teaching and research.</td>
<td>The external evaluation of the existence and functioning of the institutional quality assurance system.</td>
<td>The external evaluation of academic programmes and the research activity of an institution.</td>
<td>The classification (university or politechnic) of the institution, the recognition of its academic programmes, degrees and diplomas.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Actors            | The designers and lecturers of an academic programme. | Evaluating bodies recruited from institutional management and academic staff. | Central agencies and/or buffer organizations. | Central evaluating bodies, self-evaluating institutional bodies, consulting agencies. | A national body (or more regional ones) of accreditation. |

| Actors in Hungary | The designers and lecturers of an academic programme. | Temporary bodies recruited from institutional management and academic staff. | No actors. NAC? | Some consulting agencies and foreign evaluating bodies. NAC? | Previously the Ministry of Education and Culture. Shifting to NAC. |

|---------------------|------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|--------|

| Level of Activity | Academic team. | Faculty and/or institution. | Central and/or middle-level (buffer). | Central and/or middle-level and/or institutional. | Central. |
Figure 2. **The Quality Concern and the Future Role of the NAC** (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Activity in Hungary</th>
<th>Academic team.</th>
<th>Faculty and/or institution,</th>
<th>No activity. NAC?</th>
<th>Institutional. NAC?</th>
<th>Central.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes</td>
<td>Modification in the form and content of an academic programme.</td>
<td>The evaluation of academic programmes and the information about programme-designers.</td>
<td>Recommendations for institutional quality assurance staff and public report for the central administration.</td>
<td>The restructuring of the academic portfolio of institutions.</td>
<td>The classification of institutions and the recognition of their degrees and diplomas.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1. **The Distribution of Hungarian Higher Education Institutions According to Their Enrollment in the Academic Year 1991/92.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Number</th>
<th>Independent Institutions</th>
<th>All Institutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>less than 300</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>301-500</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>501-1000</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000-2500</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2501-5000</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than 5000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of the above mentioned problems require the involvement of international partners. On the national level, the NAC has already co-opted some international experts. On the institutional level, some pilot accreditation projects were initiated by Hungarian higher education institutions and British and American agencies. These new developments can challenge, in the long run, the state monopoly in accreditation, and they can stimulate the emergence of an international market of accrediting agencies.
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QUALITY ASSURANCE: THE JAPANESE EXPERIENCE

Yu Kameoka

Introduction

"The quality of higher education in Japan has not been appreciated so highly in Japan itself nor in other countries. While the quality and efficiency of Japan’s elementary and secondary school education systems, generally enjoy a favourable international reputation, its higher education always suffers from severe criticism in terms of qualitative standard." (Okamoto, 1992)

Concern for quality in higher education is gaining ground in Europe. Some countries like France and the Netherlands have set up their own systems of quality assessment in higher education. As quoted above, the issue of quality has become a concern for the Japanese as well. Quality assurance usually means the mechanism and actions used to enable key stakeholders to have confidence about the quality of the system and over the standards in outputs. Using this definition, the purpose of this short paper is to explain, (i) how the Japanese system of quality assurance works, (ii) how this "inferior quality" Japanese higher education system was, in fact, regarded as useful by the employers, and (iii) how the system is meeting the new challenge to improve the quality, somewhat in line with the European counterparts.

Japanese System of Quality Assurance

A recent report by van Vught and Westerheijden (1992) identified two main traditions in quality control in higher education systems in western Europe -- the Continental tradition and the British tradition. The Continental tradition is essentially a tight state control model, with the main control over inputs rather than outputs. The over-riding, implicit goal is said to be, "to employ higher education effectively for the good of the government and the national economy". Backed up by the fact that the government is often by far the largest funder of higher education institutions, the mechanisms of quality control includes such methods as yearly appropriation of line-item budgets, civil servant status for the academic staffs with concomitant quality control (e.g. diploma requirements) and governmental approval procedure for new study programmes or new higher education entities (departments or whole institutions). In the British tradition, the State is much less involved in control over universities. Individual institutions were given considerable autonomy through their charters and are free to select staff under their own criteria, to devise their own curriculum and to award degrees. The key mechanism for the collective up-keep of standards of the output have been the external examiners. For a limited number of fields this system of external examiners is complemented by a professional licensing system.

Having established its first university in 1877, the Japanese Government made a deliberate decision to adopt the Continental model of higher education. The specific aim was to modernise its national economy and ultimately to catch up with advanced countries in Europe and North America. The 1947 School Education Act, gives the Japanese Ministry of Education, Science and Culture absolute control over the chartering of new universities or departments. The ministry grants status to those institutions which have satisfied the conditions set out in its regulation "Standards for the University Establishment". The regulation stipulates the minimum number of faculty and their qualifications and the minimum grounds...
and buildings which it must possess, all relative to the total number of expected students. An advisory council to the minister, composed of senior academics, decides whether the proposed content of the programmes and qualifications of the proposed faculty members meets the standards or not. This is to assure that the students will receive a minimum level of instruction in the universities.

Once, the university is established it is expected to maintain its standards and the ministry treats all universities as equal in terms of quality. Hierarchy of status is denied for all official purposes. Almost no effort is made to evaluate the content of the education in the institutions, either by the government or by academic bodies, except for the not too frequent visits by senior academics appointed by the ministry who give advice for improvement and the occasional reduction of government subsidies for private institutions which have enrolled too many students. After the end of World War II an effort was made by several academics to introduce an American style accreditation system to Japan. The non-governmental organisation, Japanese University Accreditation Association, created its own standards for accreditation in 1947. However, it soon lost its influence, because it was a time of economic hardship and institutions were barely able to satisfy the ministry standards for university status and were not interested to do more for the sake of improving the quality of their education. Survival was their priority.

Employers’ View of Higher Education

How does the general public, especially the employers, know which university is better producer of good graduates? The answer, curiously, is by the difficulty of its entrance examination and not by the quality of its education. The reasoning behind this assumption is the following. Since all universities are officially treated as equal in status and no output measures are available to the public (graduates do not get a distinction between First class honours or Second honours), it is easy to make the assumption that the universities which attract the high scoring applicants, and are therefore difficult enter, are the producers of better graduates. Employers hired their future managers from the universities with the highest minimum entrance scores. This in turn assures the steady number of applicants who want to enter such university.

Up to now the system worked well for enterprises (Okamoto, 1992). Since they attached great importance to the training carried out within their own enterprises they cared very little for the knowledge and skills the graduates acquired in their higher education (James and Benjamin, 1988). This attitude was particularly aimed at the graduates in the Social and Human Science fields. It could be said that the employers in Japan did not want to employ too many specialised people. This is partly due to the lack of clearly defined job specifications within the Japanese workplace and the strongly held belief that employees should be flexible generalists who can cope with any kind of job that they were assigned to do and partly because of the employers’ strong wish to train their workers to their company colours. The attitude even applied to the graduates in the field of technology. Since manufacturing companies employed the strategy of introducing foreign innovative technologies and adapting them to their mass commercial production, they preferred high-level engineers or middle level scientists to high level scientists. The job prospects for the Master’s degree holders were better than those for the Ph.D. degree holders. The latter were regarded as too theoretical.

What the Japanese employers have demanded from the higher education system is a steady production of diligent and intelligent workers with high trainability who can cope with the changes of environment. Basic intelligence and diligence was assumed from the fact that they have successfully passed the difficult university entrance examinations and an expanding economy required a steady supply of such graduates. Lack of employers’ participation in the quality of higher education explains the reason for lack of the universities’ willingness to improve the quality of their education and the ensuing low esteem in which they are held. However, it is possible to say that one of the ways to judge the quality of something is to see how well it fits the purpose. From this view point, it would not be too unreasonable to say that
the Japanese higher education system has functioned quite well in responding to the demands and needs of the national economy and in fact contributed to its prosperity. The significance of this accomplishment should not be regarded lightly but it now faces a new challenge to improve quality, just as in other countries.

The New Challenge to improve Quality

Van Vught and Westerheijden listed four factors which explains the reasons for the recent increase in the attention on the quality of higher education. First, the general concern for increased public expenditure in general; second, the expansion of the western European higher education with its effect on public expenditure; third, increased general concern for "accountability" in higher education; and lastly, the increased international mobility of students, teachers and the internationalisation of the European labour market. It is interesting to note that at least the second factor is not considered as an issue in Japan. Rather, it is the demographic fluctuation of the 18 year olds (the relevant age group for access to higher education) which is giving cause for new concern over quality. Public expenditure is limited to public universities which enrol only a quarter of all students, so there is little worry in the public sector about the expanding costs. Most of the expansion of higher education, which has grown from a 10 per cent enrolment rate to 40 per cent in last three decades, has been achieved by the expansion of private universities. The number of these non-profit making private universities, which are mostly supported by fees paid by the students, now make up about 73 per cent of all four year universities (MESC, 1990). In fact, the growing national income and the rising secondary education graduation rate spurred the demand for university places in the 1970s and early 1980s, so much so that the Ministry was forced to relax the control over the limit of the students that the private universities could enrol (James and Benjamin, 1988). There was a semi-official ministerial target to maintain the proportion of successful university entrants at around 60 per cent (MESC, 1990), so as not to have too many unsuccessful applicants, many of whom would try again the following year. As long as the number of applicants grew, the universities enjoyed an unchallenged growth as well.

In 1992 the number of 18 year olds peaked at around 2 million and it is expected that within ten years the number will decrease by a quarter of that figure. Suddenly the universities are faced with a very grim prospect of shrinking markets. In 1993, although the total number of entrants did increase a little, the private universities were shocked to find that the total number of applicants had shrunk by 6 per cent (Amano, 1994). In order to survive this shrinking market universities are now forced to compete against one another to attract more students through developing a distinctive character and quality. If they fail to do so they will suffer falling income and ultimately face bankruptcy. It could be said that this is the main reason why universities in Japan are so interested in improving the quality of education.

Movement to introduce Self-Study

In response to the universities’ complaints that they needed to be released from Ministry regulation in order to develop their own distinct character and to allow them to meet the diversified demands of the enlarged student population, in 1991 the Ministry relaxed its control over the university programmes and simplified the regulations of university standards. For example, the clause which singled out general education subjects as a separate group for the first two years of a four year university education programme have been scrapped and the universities have become freer to provide education as they see fit, to meet the expectations of students and society.

In order to balance this deregulation and to make the institutions more accountable to the public, the Ministry have added a new clause to the regulations which encourages the universities to conduct a
self-study or self-evaluation of their activities and publish the results. It was expected that by having faculty members own the process in which the problems are defined, this self-study process would become a mechanism for them to realise the needs for quality improvement and implement changes by themselves. However, in contrast to some countries with similar initiatives, no attempt has been made to evaluate the results of self-study by outside bodies, nor has any guidance been issued on how such an activity should be conducted in Japan. It is doubtful whether one university or one department can conduct a meaningful self study without outside participation. There are several reasons for this. The highly specialised nature of today’s higher education tends to make a faculty member refuse to accept comments from those outside his narrow field. Another problem is that the budget for the universities is largely controlled by the ministry or board of governors in the case of private universities. It is therefore possible for faculty members to claim that their ability to improve the quality is limited by the financial constraints. This is often a valid claim but, with little incentive for the faulty to conduct meaningful self-study, such an exercise could easily be a way of shifting the responsibility of improving the quality to the controller of finance. So, in spite of the fact that around 507 four-year higher education institutions have already published their results of self study (Amano 1994), whether this exercise has really contributed to the improvement of the education and the research activities in the institution is still in doubt.

Conclusions

If Japan’s previous experience is to serve as any guide, a part of the judgement of whether the present reforms are succeeding or not will come from employers. That will become clear in four years’ time when they evaluate the new graduates educated in the universities where these reforms have taken place. It was not always academic excellence which they preferred. It is worth noting that the nature of the employers’ demands are changing too (Okamoto, 1992). Firstly, it is becoming more and more difficult for Japanese enterprises to import new knowledge and technology from other countries than it used to be in the past. The stiffer competition is making their foreign counterparts wary of exporting new technology. Secondly, in many fields of technology Japanese industry has caught up with those in other developed countries so that it is necessary for them to come up with new ideas of their own in order to keep up with world-wide innovation. Universities are now expected to produce more creative graduates who can develop new ideas. This will only be possible in universities which have improved the quality of education and research activities. Thus the Japanese universities are facing the needs to improve quality on this front as well.

NOTE

The term "university" is intended to include four-year university as well as two year junior colleges unless it is explicitly specified otherwise.
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VAN VUGHT, Frans and WESTERHEIJDEN, Don (1992), "Quality Management and Quality Assurance in European Higher Education: Methods and Mechanisms", Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies, University of Twente.
The Slovenian system of higher education is distinguished by certain characteristic features. In comparison to systems in neighbouring countries, it developed rather late, is relatively small and has been subject to several different sets of legal regulations. Nevertheless, it has managed to win international recognition in certain academic disciplines and is today facing new developmental challenges.

1919-1975: The origin and development of the mononuclear system of higher education

Despite certain significant educational traditions, the first true university in Slovenia was founded only after the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In 1919 the University of Ljubljana was established with five faculties: Arts, Law, Medicine, Theology and a Technical faculty. The first academic staff were Slovenian professors who lectured abroad, mainly in central European countries. The specific situation in the kingdom of Yugoslavia between the world wars threatened the university with dissolution in the first decade of its existence; it survived by virtue of the political pragmatism of the university administration of the time.

The University of Ljubljana began to develop rapidly after the Second World War under entirely new circumstances. Its distinction of having had a Technical Faculty from the very beginning was preserved, while other new faculties were born out of co-operation and links between the natural and technical sciences. There was a similar trend in the social sciences. The post war period was characterised by rapid industrial development, the university introduced shorter, two-year courses alongside the traditional four-year ones. The faculties were therefore joined within the university by two-year and four-year colleges, which provided education in the fields of economy, the health sector, education, public administration etc. With the exception of the Faculty of Theology, which was at the time not part of the University, there were practically no other institutions of higher education in Slovenia. This singular national monocentrism in the field of higher education was accompanied by another characteristic: all three art academies developed within the university.

Until the 1960s, which were an important turning point in the modern history of higher education, the Slovenian system had only one university developing the full complex of activities which in other systems are developed by several universities or other institutions of higher education. The lack of academic competition could be interpreted as a sign of monopoly, and as such a danger to quality. However, from the perspective of a small national system of higher education, such a situation can also be interpreted as a consequence of efforts towards quality and the maintenance of international standards. Both arguments should be taken into account in seeking to understand recent trends in Slovenian higher education. This is all the more important because since the end of the 1960s Slovenia, like other countries, has witnessed an extensive development of higher education and new developmental challenges.

It is true that for 70 years the University of Ljubljana developed as one of the Yugoslav universities. But the relation with the other Yugoslav universities did not substantially influence higher education in Slovenia because of the specific situation in the decentralised system of the former Yugoslavia.
and traditional differences in language and culture. The University of Ljubljana was one of the best in the former state; students from other federal republics came to study here and co-operation was established with universities elsewhere in Yugoslavia, but it would be difficult to say that there was any division of work or competition with these universities. The traditional structure of Slovenian higher education was changed by the establishment of a second university in Slovenia, the University of Maribor, more than by its relationship with other Yugoslav universities. Its establishment (in 1975) followed a decade of preparations, in particularly the development of individual institutions of higher education, and was closely related to the intensive industrial development of north-eastern Slovenia, as well as political debate over polycentric development in Slovenia.1

1981: Regulation of higher education as its disintegration

The second Slovenian university was created at a time when there existed no university in the classical sense because of contemporary changes in the legal regulation of higher education. The specific decentralised model, with which the so-called socialist self-management system regulated the legal status of economic enterprises, also interfered with the status of institutions of higher education. Faculties, art academies, two-year and four-year colleges became independent entities, which were obliged to associate to form a university. However, in the mid-1970s the university became a "self-managing community" of higher education institutions, and not specifically an academic institution. This change reflected the spirit of the time, a period of defeat for reformist movements, as well as democratic and liberal trends of the late 1960s and early 1970s, i.e. movements which emanated from the university. Of course, the powers of the university as a "self-managing community" were limited. Almost all crucial decisions concerning curricula, the development of scientific and arts disciplines and other academic tasks were formally taken within faculties, art academies and colleges. In such circumstances, the thesis of the traditional monocentric character of the Slovenian higher education system might seem paradoxical. But the reality behind this seeming paradox becomes evident if one takes into account the fact that at that time all important decisions were influenced by the ruling, and sometimes conflicting, political interests.

Some serious problems in the system of higher education were caused in the 1980s by the relation between a weak and disintegrated university on the one hand and powerful and independent faculties on the other, as well as by the lack of autonomy in academic affairs. The various disciplines began to develop on qualitatively different levels and major signs of disintegration in higher education appeared. These problems became even more severe with new legislation on post-primary education (Law on Career-Oriented Education, 1981), which regulated higher education together with the secondary education sector and which was based on the premise that education should be oriented directly towards work and a vocation. Undoubtedly the crucial, although not the only, mistake of this law was that it restricted the role of institutions of higher education to teaching alone, while establishing a system that neglected their scientific, artistic and expert work. Critics argued that this reinforced trends linking higher education to secondary school methods. In the first few years after the adoption of this law governing higher education, it became obvious that each curriculum was expanding. Weekly lectures for students exceeded 30 hours, and the obligations of professors and other teaching staff increased correspondingly. A trend towards longer curricula also emerged. In some instances they were prolonged by one or two semesters, which was justified on the grounds that the new system of secondary education oriented towards work and a vocation, failed to provide an adequate basis for commencing study at higher education institutions. In terms of quality these are of course worrying signs in any system of higher education. In our case they were all the more dangerous for the fact that the system lacked a mechanism which at least on a formal level would measure or check the quality of studies or in some other way determine common criteria for accrediting higher education courses.

The concept of oriented education was designed as a strategic project and in many respects demonstrated the former regime’s aspirations for strengthening development, which it was unable to
consolidate after the political conflicts of the mid-1970s. Slovenia was the last Federal Republic in the former State to launch this project, and the Slovenian leadership immediately had to contend with strong opposition from civil society. Some analysts consider that the movement against the project of career-oriented education was a component of the so-called “Slovenian spring” of the late 1980s. It was under these circumstances that in 1988 both universities drew up a special document (Zahteva, 1988) demanding the adoption of a law on Universities and submitted it to the National Assembly. The Assembly agreed to the demand some weeks later and asked both universities to prepare expert guidelines for the drafting of the law.

The *de facto* disintegration of higher education institutions on one hand, and historical events around the turn of the decade on the other, were the major reason that five years were needed for the preparation of the bill. However, these five years brought many new developments. After lengthy debate, the law on career oriented education was fundamentally altered in 1989. The changes gave both universities autonomy in the academic sphere, while in secondary education the major step of reintroducing grammar schools was taken and it was also agreed that an external final exam (*matura*) should be taken before university. These decisions undoubtedly had a far-reaching influence on the quality of higher education studies.

1993: New legal regulation of higher education in Slovenia

Expert work and co-ordination regarding new legislation was stepped up in 1992, and in December 1993 the Slovenian parliament passed a law on higher education under which both universities regained the status of true universities, and the former disintegration of higher education was at least formally reversed. More time will be needed for a comprehensive reintegration to take place. The law envisaged a two-year transitional period in which higher education institutions and their courses will be brought into line with the new regulations.

The new legislation has introduced many changes with regard to the situation in the past. It grants higher education institutions autonomy in all academic matters, stipulates conditions for their operation, especially their financing, and regulates certain matters concerning status and curricula which are directly or indirectly related to the quality of higher education.

The new law thus provides for a pluralisation of higher education institutions and introduces at least indirect competition among them. There have been hypothetical discussions of restructuring the present two universities into three, but attention has also been drawn to the negative side of such a project, and at most a gradual approach to its implementation has been advised. It seems that the pluralisation of the system will to some extent be influenced more by the establishment of private institutions of higher education, which are allowed to operate in addition to state institutions. The law stipulates that state faculties must operate within one or other university, whose bodies and procedures guarantee their academic level and quality. Vocational colleges along the lines of e.g. the German *Fachhochschulen* will operate either as independent institutions or within one or other university. Private faculties will also be allowed to operate independently, and to become associate members of state universities, thus adhering to the latter’s academic norms. In the system of higher education, vocational colleges and private faculties should primarily represent an initiative which would encourage the economic sector, in addition to the State, to facilitate conditions for the creation of study, research and development programmes. All these should fundamentally increase access to higher education for increasingly large numbers of candidates and contribute to greater job opportunities.

Pluralisation of the higher education system began in 1975, when a second university was established in Slovenia. Since there is considerably larger scope and need for pluralisation today, a competent body has been established which is to take charge of co-ordinating higher education planning at the national level. The law entrusts these responsibilities to the Higher Education Council of the Republic of Slovenia, which was founded by the government in February 1994. In the amending of higher education legislation and the funding of higher education, the council will play an advisory role to state bodies, and in addition to this, one of its most important tasks will be to define criteria for the designation of curricula and criteria for monitoring and
assessing the quality of work at higher education institutions. The Council will also give opinions about the fulfilment of conditions for the establishment of new institutions of higher education and opinions about the criteria of universities for the "habilitation" of teachers. It will issue certain consents to independent institutions of higher education, which will be given to faculties within universities by the university senate, the highest academic body. In the new system the university senate and the Higher Education Council will be the two bodies bearing the greatest responsibility for matters of quality.

Article 80 of the law defines quality control in particular. The quality and efficiency of the educational, research, artistic and expert work of higher education institutions will be monitored and assessed by a special commission. The commission will have to be established by higher education institutions within one year. Its members will be representatives of the various disciplines from all higher education institutions, and it will be obliged to obtain the opinions of students. It will have to submit a report on its work to university senates, the Higher Education Council and the Council of Science and Technology. These reports will be made available to the public.

In recent years a number of research projects and summer schools at the University of Ljubljana have managed to accomplish some important preliminary work providing guidelines for the future. It is quite clear that the problems and development of higher education in Slovenia in recent years have increased the sensitivity of all factors to matters of quality. The Matura 95 project is one of the most important efforts in this direction; it will introduce external final exams as a prerequisite for entrance to university and abolish the former complicated and unpopular system of entrance exams. The secondary school will thus again take over the task of systematic preparation of young people for higher education, which is eventually expected to contribute to a fall in the large number of drop-outs, a negative characteristic of the former system of higher education in Slovenia.

In February 1994 the Slovenian parliament adopted another important law regulating funding of some necessary developmental programmes in the education sphere for the next six years. The law earmarks SIT 3 370 000 000 (around US$ 25 000 000) for new premises for higher education institutions, and an additional SIT 1 700 000 000 (around US$ 12 500 000) for the renovation and expansion of student residences. After a long period of lethargy, the new legislation in the field of higher education simply represents a legitimate basis for a new development period, a starting point for the implementation of numerous projects calling for a co-ordination of efforts. This seminar aims to contribute to the same goals.
### Figure 1. Students and graduates, 1919-1993

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>academic year</th>
<th>full-time</th>
<th>students: part-time</th>
<th>all</th>
<th>graduates</th>
<th>MSc</th>
<th>PhD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1919/20</td>
<td>906</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>942</td>
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<td>n.a.</td>
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<td>1930/31</td>
<td>1413</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>1454</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1940/41</td>
<td>2461</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2474</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950/51</td>
<td>5409</td>
<td>823</td>
<td>6232</td>
<td>379</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960/61</td>
<td>9457</td>
<td>4035</td>
<td>13492</td>
<td>1319</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970/71</td>
<td>15482</td>
<td>6150</td>
<td>21632</td>
<td>2663</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975/76</td>
<td>19047</td>
<td>9035</td>
<td>28082</td>
<td>4501</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980/81</td>
<td>19268</td>
<td>8439</td>
<td>27707</td>
<td>5967</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985/85</td>
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<td>7571</td>
<td>29601</td>
<td>5621</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990/91</td>
<td>27774</td>
<td>5791</td>
<td>33565</td>
<td>5951</td>
<td>466</td>
<td>121</td>
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### Figure 2. Students and graduates, 1919-1993

<table>
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<tr>
<th>academic year</th>
<th>18-yr-old base</th>
<th>enrolment full-time</th>
<th>first year: part-time</th>
<th>all</th>
<th>students total</th>
<th>teachers full-time</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970/71</td>
<td>34 165</td>
<td>7 740</td>
<td>4 144</td>
<td>11 584</td>
<td>21 632</td>
<td>731</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975/76</td>
<td>30 086</td>
<td>8 343</td>
<td>6 098</td>
<td>14 441</td>
<td>28 082</td>
<td>961*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980/81</td>
<td>29 035</td>
<td>7 917</td>
<td>4 716</td>
<td>12 633</td>
<td>27 707</td>
<td>1 092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985/85</td>
<td>29 824</td>
<td>10 036</td>
<td>4 648</td>
<td>14 684</td>
<td>29 601</td>
<td>1 229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990/91</td>
<td>28 713</td>
<td>12 122</td>
<td>3 132</td>
<td>15 254</td>
<td>33 565</td>
<td>1 316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991/92</td>
<td>29 548</td>
<td>13 298</td>
<td>3 021</td>
<td>16 319</td>
<td>36 504</td>
<td>1 255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992/93</td>
<td>28 625</td>
<td>12 749</td>
<td>4 110</td>
<td>16 859</td>
<td>37 362</td>
<td>1 291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993/94</td>
<td>29 786</td>
<td>13 190</td>
<td>4 395</td>
<td>17 585</td>
<td>40 239</td>
<td>1 339</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 1976/77

**Source:** Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia
NOTE

1. On one hand, this is illustrated by the fact that one of the faculties of the University of Maribor is located in Kranj, a town near Ljubljana. On the other hand, the University of Ljubljana includes the College of Naval and Maritime Transport in Piran, a town on the Slovenian coast, where moves have recently been made towards the creation of an independent centre of higher education.

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