

# SUMMARIUM

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## QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

*The aim of the Quality in Higher Education issue* is to discuss the improvement of the quality issue in Higher Education and the dilemma that has emerged at the present stage of the improvement.

After the developments of mass education the quality-perception of higher education shows a very determined move away from an academic quality approach towards a commercial quality conception.

The important element of the move is that consumer quality-assessment is taking the place of the academic sphere's self-assessment – although it may be that the identity of the consumers (students) is not that obvious.

István Polónyi: *The Issue of Quality in Higher Education* first looks over the improvement of the issue of quality in the commercial world, then the problems of the issue of quality in education and describes briefly the educational-economic reasons, which can be traced back to the characteristics of re-distribution policies. According to these characteristics quality-assurance in the re-distribution spheres is simply a tool to be used by the administration towards the re-distributor (the management of the institution, the leadership). Thereafter the paper describes the improvement of the issue of quality in higher education from the Humboldt University up to the present; then mentions the characteristics and problems of accreditation.

Here intensity, confusion of roles arising from safeguarding of interests, the predominance of an academic viewpoint, independence, professionalism and the lack of experts are all characteristic of accreditation. Even the institutions of higher education themselves have realised the non-sustainability of the current system of accreditation, as the statement of the 'European University Association' shows. The essence of this also demonstrates that even the university sphere was compelled to realize that in the process of quality assurance in mass higher education one must go beyond accreditation, and move towards a market quality assurance approach. Unfortunately the Higher Education Act in 2005 achieved very little in this respect.

However the issue of quality in higher education is rather complex, not simply because the interpretation of quality is subjective, but because the educational service is a very complex activity and we do not even know its key production factors, i.e. we do not know all the factors influencing the outcomes. After all the methods of quality assessment in higher education are: self-assessment of institutions, accreditation, quality evaluation based on state/governmental quality indicators, regulated, competition-based self-assessment of institutions and commercial quality evaluation conducted by outside, independent organizations.

At the turn of the millennium we are witnesses of important developments in the field of quality assurance in higher education in the European Higher Education Area. The Hungarian issue of quality in higher education moves more slowly, the most important task in its present stage is the establishment of sectoral quality policy and quality assessment within the Ministry.

Ildikó Hrubos: *The Issue of Quality Culture in the European Higher Education Area*. The European higher education reform began with the harmonization of education systems with the intent of making international student (and staff) mobility easier, and at the end of this 10 year program has reached the issue of quality, which addresses every important question in the process and provides a solution to most of the theoretical and practical problems that have arisen. It can be considered symbolic that before the 2009 Conference of Ministers of Education which will discuss the last report on the results of the reform - as a kind of a pinnacle of the process - the European Quality Assurance Register was founded. What can we expect in the new phase; what will happen after 2010? Placing quality at the centre can be viewed as a decisive step, and not only in the context of the Bologna process. Restoring the damaged image and integrity of universities and the world of academia, and strengthening them depends on this. Those institutions and groups of institutions which not only think in terms of quality assurance, but also integrate a quality culture, can hope that their efforts will lead to success. This undertaking is not risk free. In a negative scenario, extremely expensive, time consuming, technocratic-bureaucratic practices are introduced, which are more likely to lead to dissatisfaction and resistance among staff members, especially among academics. The accreditation of internal quality assurance systems can even lead to the reduction of institutional autonomy, since it can become a stronger control than what we have seen in the past. The paradoxical effect of international quality assurance can cause the segregation of a closed group of elite institutions whose position can become cemented for an extended period of time, in a way splitting the European Higher Education Area into two parts, even though it was created to enhance inter-institutional, international mobility. This would reduce the chance of healthy competition as well. The decisions concerning the issue of quality and the drawing up of plans for the phase following 2010 will not only require expertise and imagination, but also a 'good dose' of courage.

The study *'Higher Education Accreditation in Hungary – Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow'*, written by György Bazsa and Tibor Szántó, first outlines some historical aspects of the Hungarian higher education accreditation, from the foundation of the Temporary National Accreditation Committee in November 1992, through the National Accreditation Committee, the Hungarian Accreditation Committee from 1996, established in the Higher Education Act passed in 1993 and coming into effect on September 1st, to the Hungarian Higher Education Accreditation Committee established in the Higher Education Act in 2006. It also mentions the question of responsibilities. The study analyses the tasks of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC) and the changes in its tasks, before drawing up plans for the future, the strategic ideas of the Committee, and mentions some international aspects and tendencies. In the end the study states that in the long run the future of HAC is mostly determined by when and how much the quality assurance systems of Hungarian higher education institutions will be able to guarantee the internationally acknowledged educational, research, economic, organisational and management standards required by the Higher Education Act and society at large. It points out that

HAC will have a significant role in assuring the quality of Hungarian higher education for several years.

*Quality Assurance in the Bologna Process, Central European Experience*, a study written by Tamás Kozma and Attila Juhász, is the summary of the international comparative research 'The Bologna Process in Central Europe'. The aim of the research carried out in 2007 and 2008 was to reveal the similarities and the differences of the Bologna Process in some countries. First the study outlines some peculiarities of the transformation of the Central European higher education governance from centrally agreed planning to managerialism. It states that quality assurance and the Bologna process are contradictory because the Bologna process is a series of central reforms whereas quality assurance is typically conducted at an organisational level. Quality assurance is in fact a new and more comprehensive than ever form of governmental control, which has managed to break down the walls of institutions, and establish its representatives as well as its bridgeheads (quality assurers and agencies), thus making the previous university autonomy and independence a thing of the past. The study continues by describing the actors and the peculiarities of the Bologna process. Analysing quality assurance in higher education, the authors point out that all governments in the region try to adopt quality assurance guidelines at each stage of the Bologna process, though with minor degrees of deviation. With their reform measures all governments try to adjust to Western European higher education and quality assurance systems. The authors give a survey of the steps taken in the field of quality assurance in higher education in Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Serbia, Ukraine and Austria. As a conclusion they state that quality assurance and accreditation are not typically separated from each other in central European higher education quality policy, which can be explained by the lateness of the higher education reform in central Europe. Quality policy is no longer only a means of governmental control, as accreditation was earlier, but is also a means of international control. Instead of (or perhaps along with) quality assurance we should talk about quality policy, knowing that quality assurance has become a policy, the policy of creating a single European higher education system.

The introduction to Ádám Török's *Measuring Quality and League Tables in Hungarian Higher Education* deals with the introduction of league tables into Higher Education and their significance. The first section summarizes certain theoretical and methodological problems connected with the preparation of league tables. It then continues with a discussion of the Hungarian league tables and their methodology and specific features. Finally, in the third part of the article, the author discusses lessons to be learnt from educational policy, and particularly for assessment and quality control systems. He establishes that the Hungarian higher education 'league-table industry' can develop a more serious future if the credit system is re-organized and a genuine market demand develops for a comprehensive and multifaceted expertise in the higher education services, which can be used for quality measurement. This demand on the future second level of the accreditation system could be profitable and academically well-grounded, and could cause a forward movement in the process of economic development – at least in the league table industry.

András Derényi and Jozsef Temesi's paper *The Credit System and Quality Control* briefly outlines the processes during which the credit system connects with quality control, and discusses this relationship from several perspectives. On the one hand they consider the relationship from the participants' (students, teachers and institutions) point of view; on the other hand they examine the role of the credit system from a quality control perspective. The former perspective deals with how to focus on, assess and analyse the gua-

rantee of the quality of teaching performance, while the latter deals with opportunities for monitoring and examining the operation of institutions, particularly opportunities for introducing a credit system.

For both approaches, the study draws on conclusions and examples from completed projects, taking into consideration various experiments and debates related to the process of introducing credit systems into higher education.

The authors do not wish to create the impression that the extension of the credit system will enable the analysis of all complex educational processes, but they do state that without an examination and analysis of the credit system it is now impossible to examine educational processes and guarantee quality. They also show that data provided from the operation of the credit system can, with some adaptation, be used to develop institutional and system-level quality development and quality control processes by experts in institutions, regulators and directing authorities.

József Topár's *'The Assurance of Quality in Higher Education Institutions'* firstly describes the role of quality management systems in the changes occurring in higher education institutions. It then examines the peculiarities of analyzing quality in higher education, before touching on the links between institutional quality management systems and the requirements of the European Higher Education area. It considers the quality assurance (quality management) systems adopted in higher education institutions, before looking at the quality systems that conform to the ISO 9001 standard, the TQM system, the ENQA standard and guiding principles, and the application of self-assessment models in higher education. It finally looks at aspects of quality management systems in higher education institutions. In conclusion the author emphasises that respecting the principle of the autonomy of universities, the differing characteristics of institutions do not justify the application of a general model, but rather that the work of higher education institutions can be helped by the extension of general principles to different systems in various institutions.

Julianna Bálint's *'Do Quality-improvement Systems Work in Higher Education?'* paper looks over the nine elements, determining and influencing factors of quality-improvement systems.

These are: (1) the European and Hungarian environment of higher education, (2) the legal rules, (3) the direction of the institution, (4) the capacity for self-assessment and objective examination of the present situation, (5) the involvement of the students and employers, (6) the planning of the system and the introduction project, (7) the resources supporting the realization, (8) the operation and maintenance of the system, (9) the difficulties of realization and assessment, and methods of solving them.

In the course of the survey the author summarizes her numerous experiences in connection with quality-improvement in higher education, which could provide very useful help for institutions.

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