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Accreditation in the Framework of Evaluation Activities

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Innovation through Participation

Trade Union Positions on the Europeanization of Higher Education and Research

The internationally comparative study "Accreditation in the Framework of Evaluation Activities" shall stimulate and focus the discussion about the future shape of quality assurance in European higher education institutions. At the same time this study should underline the trade unions' claim for co-determination in the field of Europeanisation of Higher Education and Research.

Trade unions who organise and represent the academic, technical and administrative staff in higher education as well as students want to be involved in both the evaluation of teaching and studying, and the accreditation of study courses and academic institutions.

The study shows how limited trade union participation is until now. Without participation of the respective persons "reforms from top-down" – however positively meant – will fail. The trade unions offer to co-determine the necessary changes ahead together with the employers in a "social dialogue".

Education International (EI), the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE), and the German Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft (GEW) – the trade unions organising nationally, European-wide and globally in the field of education – have organised the "Berlin-Forum: Shaping the European Area of Higher Education and Research" in April 2003 to illustrate that trade unions have their own concepts how to arrange the "European area for higher education and research". They combine material co-determination with a sustainable engagement in higher education and research policies. Trade unions support the idea to finance work in higher education institutions according to the tasks to enable science to develop its own critical and constructive contribution for the shape of the "social Europe".

We would like to thank Stefanie Schwarz-Hahn and Don F. Westerheijden for this survey and the participating researchers in higher education for their twenty country studies.

We would like to thank Gerd Köhler and the team which stimulated this survey and the discussion in the framework of the Berlin-Forum.

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Shaping the European Area of Higher Education and Research

Gerd Köhler

Conclusions from a Trade Union Point of View

On top of the agenda of the Bologna Process stands the subject of "Quality Assurance": By use of a compatible system of evaluation and accreditation which is sensitive to the different national higher education systems, the quality of teaching and study courses in the European Area of Higher Education should be improved. The Ministers for Higher Education and Research of the signatory states of the Bologna Process will discuss in May 2005 in Bergen, Norway, how to realise this objective.

In the Berlin-Forum "Shaping the European Area of Higher Education and Research" organised by EI, ETUCE and GEW the related questions were discussed in detail. Twenty country studies have shown on the one hand that almost all European countries have meanwhile introduced systems of quality assurance. On the other hand it was proven how different the instruments evaluation and accreditation are used. The discussion led by the authors of the internationally comparative study "Accreditation in the Framework of Evaluation Activities", Stefanie Schwarz-Hahn (Centre for Research in Higher Education and Work (WZ I), University of Kassel, Germany) and Don F. Westerheijden (Center for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS), Twente, the Netherlands) underlined the following positions:

- The Bologna Process has contributed to many changes in the European higher education sector.
- The introduction of Bachelor (BA) and Master (MA) courses is a trend which is visible throughout all countries surveyed.
- The strategies for implementation differ. This leads from those countries which adapt their already existing BA and MA courses to the new regulations, whereas others strive to replace the existing old degrees in a rather short term by BA and MA.
- In all countries activities for quality assurance were implemented. Whereas some countries emphasise evaluation, others focus more on accreditation.
- These different positions are reflected at the European level where both the "European Network for Quality Assurance" (ENQA) and the "European Consortium for Accreditation" (ECA) are concerned with the improvement of the border-crossing co-operation.

- A "European solution" would be desirable, because the WTO-GATS negotiations have shown that there are many interested in making accreditation an "educational service" and thus a tradeable in the educational service.
- It is necessary to involve both academic teaching staff and students in the accreditation processes – at whatever level.

The discussion on "accreditation" is embedded in the entire process of Europeanisation of higher education and research. This was the main topic of the "Berlin-Forum" held in April 2003.

Gerd Köhler (GEW), head of the "Berlin-Forum", has summarised the results of the conference – which hosted almost 160 academics and scientists as well as trade unionists - in the following 9 items:

1. Up to now the two processes of integration in the fields of higher education and research have to a great extent been developing separately. The trade unions call for their unification, leading to the creation of a *European Area of Higher Education and Research.*
2. There must be greater access to higher education. Social participation in scientific and technological progress must be guaranteed in the interests of both the individual and society in general. The knowledge society has as its prerequisite informed and competent citizens who are capable of actively using the new possibilities offered by information and communication technology. Greater access to higher education must be achieved through a programme of expansion in higher education institutions. The "investment in the future" necessary to achieve this must be realised in the form of a binding plan at European level. Evidence of the required governmental/public spending on education should become one of the Maastricht criteria.
3. The trade unions support the introduction of consecutive degree courses in European higher education institutions, provided that the possibility to continue from the bachelor to the master stage is guaranteed. The trade unions reject any restriction on access the master stage, be it in the form of a specific grade average or a quota (only 40% of graduates at bachelor level will be permitted to continue to the master level.). The students themselves should decide with which qualification they will complete their higher education. Due to the fact that the new qualifications are, at least presently, not yet fully accepted by private and public sector employers, the trade unions call for the presentation of a report on the *Introduction of Bachelor and Master Level Degree Courses* at the 2005 Bologna conference taking place in Bergen. It should only then be decided whether the new bachelor and master degree courses are of a sufficiently high standard to universally replace the old degree courses and qualifications. Any other course of action would be irresponsible towards the students. This would be an opportunity to involve the unions and the employers in the decision making process. This form of "social dialogue" in the EU would be a positive step towards a reform in higher education that would make possible a publicly accountable process of negotiation by the parties involved.
4. Expansion in higher education, differentiation in the range of degree courses and the students' educational interests make it necessary to rethink the relationship between academic studies and the world of work. The trade unions accept the need for a discussion of the qualification of graduates with a view to employability, provided this does not lead to an uncritical adaptation to short-term interests in the labour market. A broadly based academic education is the pre-requisite for lifelong learning.

5. The administrative independence of higher education institutions must be guaranteed and the state needs to delegate its authority to approve curricula and examination regulations. As a consequence the higher education institutions must guarantee the quality of their work. The GEW, together with the other European educational trade unions, has published an international comparative report on *Accreditation in the Framework of Quality Assurance Activities in Europe* and has offered to participate in national as well as international evaluation and accreditation procedures, if it can be guaranteed through accountable and fair participation procedures, that, above all, the aim is an improvement in the quality of the content of teaching and study programmes.
6. The European educational trade unions call for an expansion of student mobility programmes. There are still too many obstacles to mobility. These range from problems in gaining entry to and permission to reside in the foreign country, to unsolved problems in the recognition, in the home country, of studies undertaken and qualifications obtained abroad, to questions of financial support, student fees and uncertain professional prospects. The trade unions support the idea of regular reports on the *Social and Financial Situation of Students in Europe* to create the basis for a policy of financial support that would grant students from financially weaker social backgrounds and countries free access to the *European Area of Higher Education and Research.* This must apply in particular to students from central and eastern European countries, if the brain drain of young graduates from these countries is to be reduced.
7. The absence of the issue of the employment conditions of academic staff from the Bologna process is clearly attributable to the fact that this group and the unions representing them have so far not been included in the deliberations. The European educational and research trade unions demand that this situation be remedied immediately. The GEW, together with the Educational International and the European Trade Union Committee on Education (ETUCE) have published the survey *The International Attractiveness of the Academic Workplace in Europe* to draw attention to the limited attraction of an academic career in Europe. Clear evidence is provided of obstacles to mobility as well as the negative consequences of the increasing flexibility demanded of the academic workforce. Those who expect high quality from higher education institutions must create for those employed there working conditions appropriate to the academic environment that encourage creativity and innovation. The paper on *Researchers in the European Space of Research* published by the European Commission shows that these demands apply equally to research institutes in Europe.
8. In view of demographic developments and the growing significance of higher education and research for the "knowledge society" particular steps must be taken to recruit and support young academics to work in the *European Higher Education and Research Area.* The trade unions do not consider the positioning of the doctorate as the third stage of higher education as being suitable to increase the attractiveness of this qualification. The trade unions call for the recognition of the doctorate as the first stage in an academic career. Young academics should be employed on doctoral research contracts and paid accordingly. At the Bologna conference in Bergen a *Report on the Different Routes to the Doctorate in Europe* should be presented. It should analyse concepts and practice and develop perspectives on "a European status for young academics". Only in this way will it be possible to develop transnational academic co-operation.
9. The European educational trade unions acknowledge that European higher education and research policies play an important role in the international debate on the liberalisation of trade in services. They consider that education must remain a public good and not degen-

erate into a commodity. They expect a clear commitment from the participants of the Bergen conference to measures against the commercialisation of education and science. Neither the market and short-term trends nor primarily commercial interests but rather the pursuit of knowledge should determine the aims and content of academic research. Accordingly, the WTO GATS negotiations should be suspended and the control of transnational education should be entrusted to UNESCO. Science must do justice to its particular social responsibility for economic, social, cultural and ecological developments.

Accreditation in the Framework of Evaluation Activities Synopsis of the Current Situation and Dynamics in Europe

Stefanie Schwarz, Don F. Westerheijden

1. Introduction: The Study's Goals and Structure[1]

Higher education systems in Europe are currently undergoing deep reforms. These reforms are triggered by national developments, as well as by the aim to evolve towards comparable systems and ensure the quality of the higher education systems in Europe (Bologna Process). This study was initiated by the education trade unions' goal to widen the scope of the debate on accreditation and evaluation activities in higher education in Europe from a comparative perspective. In order to provide the factual base for this discussion, we were asked to carry out a comparative study of 'accreditation in the framework of evaluation activities' in the European higher education area. Accreditation is the focus of our study, but accreditation is a policy instrument made up of two elements: evaluation and approval. Therefore, we felt it necessary to analyse these two elements in their own right. Hence, the aims of the study are to:

1. Provide an updated picture of the current situation with regard to (1) accreditation schemes, (2) other approval schemes (outside accreditation) and (3) evaluation schemes.
2. Analyse the underlying principles of the accreditation scheme(s) and how they relate to other approval and evaluation schemes ('system logic' or 'system dynamic').
3. Point out and analyse current reforms of the accreditation scheme(s) (with a view to other approval and evaluation schemes as well as supra-national developments, e.g. the Bologna process and other influences).

Our study covers all countries involved in the Bologna process. For practical reasons, we have had to limit ourselves to a sub-set consisting of all fifteen EU member states (situation as of 2003, minus Luxembourg which has a minute higher education sector), a main Western European country which is not part of the EU (Norway) and a sample of Central and Eastern European

1 We would like to extend our sincere thanks to Gerd Köhler, the initiator of this study, for his valuable ideas and support as well as to the Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft (GEW) and Education International (EI) for their financial support and for hosting the Berlin Conference 'Shaping the European Area of Higher Education and Research', April 10-13, 2003.

countries which will enter the EU in 2004 (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland), bringing the total to 20 countries. With regard to Central and Eastern Europe, we have reason to believe that the situation depicted below is representative of not just the countries sampled, but also of much more of the Central and Eastern European area (Campbell & Rozsnyai, 2002).

We asked all twenty country experts of this study to provide reports on their respective system of 'accreditation in the framework of evaluation activities'. They compiled studies describing and analysing in detail how the respective accreditation and evaluation systems are institutionalised and how they are linked to other relevant developments, e.g. the Bologna Process and internationalisation trends (including GATS). From April 10 to 13, all country experts were invited to share their work and to learn about the ideas of their European colleagues in a two-day workshop at the EI/GEW Forum 'Shaping the European Area of Higher Education and Research'.

In this chapter, we will provide a synopsis of the findings of the country reports by taking the three main elements, 'accreditation', 'evaluation' and 'approval other than accreditation' as the basic structure of the sections. To maintain consistent distinctions between accreditation, evaluation and other approval schemes across all twenty country cases, we adopted the following definitions.

Accreditation schemes:[2] All institutionalised and systematically implemented evaluation schemes of higher education institutions,[3] degree types[4] and programmes[5] that end in a formal summary judgement that leads to formal approval processes regarding the respective institution, degree type and/or programme.

Approval of institutions, degree types, programmes: To grant the 'right to exist within the system' (or, respectively, to reject the 'right to exist') to an institution, degree-type, programme (e.g. charter, licence, accreditation). The approval can be carried out by several organisations or one organisation and is granted by an organisation(s) at the supra-institutional level.

Approval outside the accreditation scheme: All major approval schemes of higher education institutions, degree types and programmes that are not part of the accreditation scheme (e.g. approval by the state ministry that does not involve accreditation).

Evaluation schemes: All institutionalised and systematically implemented activities regarding the measurement, analysis and/or development of quality for institutions, degrees-types and/or programmes that are carried out at the *supra-institutional level*. Evaluation activities *do not* directly or indirectly lead to approval processes regarding the respective institution, degree type and programme.

Other evaluation schemes: Other types of ratings/measurements of quality that do not fulfil the criteria of the definition of *evaluation schemes*, such as institution-based evaluation.

Moreover, the term *quality assurance scheme* or *quality assurance system* will be used as an umbrella term, denoting accreditation and evaluation systems together, in contrast to approval without formal evaluative elements.

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2 The term 'scheme' refers to the 'entire picture', the 'overall picture', the landscape of the respective three concepts of 'accreditation activities', 'approval other than accreditation activities' and 'evaluation activities'.

3 Higher education institutions: All organisations providing degrees at the tertiary level (ISCED 5 and 6), recognised by governmental/public agencies and/or by the general public. This definition is meant to include both public and private higher education institutions with official national recognition and 'non-official' higher education leading to degrees that may be recognised in other countries but not necessarily in the country of operation. Our intention is to keep an eye open on organisations that are active in 'transnational higher education'.

4 Higher education degree-types: The different degrees that are awarded by and certified through a higher education institution (e.g. Bachelor, Master, Diploma, etc.).

5 Higher education programmes: All education provisions within higher education institutions that lead to higher education degrees (ISCED 5 and 6).

These definitions were developed with a view to the specific goals of our study, and may therefore diverge somewhat from other sets of definitions. However, we are convinced that the differences with many recent or authoritative publications in the field are not substantial (cf. Sursock, 2001; Young & associates, 1983). A particularly well-developed set of definitions is found in an ENQA report on 'accreditation-like practices' (Hämäläinen, Haakstad, Kangasniemi, Lindeberg, & Sjölund, 2001). Hämäläinen *et al.* also distinguish distinction between *accreditation* and *approval* '(without an explicit accreditation process)' (p. 7), but they also analyse terms that cover effects for the individual graduate, such as *recognition* of degrees and *authorisation* to practise a given profession, which are beyond the scope of this study. When discussing accreditation, they make several distinctions, i.a. official as against private accreditation. In their terms, our definition of accreditation seems targeted at 'official' accreditation, i.e. accreditation by governmental higher education authorities or their delegated agencies, leading to – as in our definition – formal approval decisions. 'Private accreditation', being voluntary and not linked to the authorities, 'may enhance a unit's reputation, but it does not alter its formal status' (Hämäläinen et al., 2001, p. 9). As will be shown below, in 'open accreditation systems' such private accreditation agencies may be given a role in the authorities' decisions, which is one of the reasons why we include them in our study. Moreover, with the current 'denationalisation' (cf. i.a. van Vught, van der Wende, & Westerheijden, 2002) of higher education we do not wish to overlook the possibility that higher education institutions attach a great deal of importance to private accreditation by narrowing our definition too much in advance.

2. Quality in the Steering of Higher Education before the Bologna Declaration

Quality in the sense of achieving academic excellence has always been a central value in higher education. Neave rightly stated 'quality is not „here to stay", if only for the self-evident reason that across the centuries of the university's existence in Europe, it never departed' (Neave, 1994, p. 116). Until the 1970s, quality in higher education was controlled through bureaucratic means: legal conditions for the establishment of institutions, faculties and/or programmes of study and state-provided means (funding, housing) to fulfil those conditions, centralised and formalised rules for the appointment of academic staff, similarly centralised and formalised rules for the acceptance of students, annual line-item budgets, etc.[6] And until about the 1960s or 1970s, this way of ensuring quality of higher education was fairly successful: low-quality provision of higher education was an unheard of phenomenon in the state-controlled European higher education systems. However, quality assurance as a separate instrument in university management and in government policy started in the 1970s and 1980s, when it was discovered as a new management tool in industry mimicking the successes of the Japanese economy. First, higher education in the USA was influenced, later, around 1984, the first governmental policies were implemented in Western Europe. Apart from the old isomorphism drive to copy whatever seemed successful in US higher

6 The United Kingdom and Ireland have been exceptions in this trend of bureaucratic centralised control on the European continent. British universities were more autonomous, but they too were subject to national rules (e.g. Acts of Parliament) for their establishment and there was national funding (although the British mechanism for distributing money, the University Grants Council, gave much more autonomy to the academic oligarchy) (Clark, 1983).

education, and the new isomorphism drive to copy whatever seemed successful in industry,[7] there were a number of reasons why new governance tools became expedient in Western European higher education at that point in time. In sum, these were (van Vught, 1994):

- 'massification' of higher education;
- limits of central control were reached with these larger higher education systems;
- deregulation was in fashion at the time, when neo-liberalism made a forceful entry into the political arena;
- government budget limits were reached, again because of the massification of higher education but also more generally because governments under the neo-liberal influence were not willing to increase the share of public to private earnings even more to maintain the welfare state.

This put 'value for money' high on the agenda, which resulted in higher education institutions being given autonomy to do 'more with less', as one of the half-serious, half-sarcastic slogans went. As Trow observed quite sharply, evaluation policies indicated the breakdown of the traditional degree of trust in society that higher education was functioning at high quality (Trow, 1994, 1996). A danger inherent in evaluation policies is that '[i]f accountability and evaluation are reduced to a primarily technical exercise by way of rigid output measures and overly standardised evaluation exercises, then the essential debate about the values and assets which HEIs are best suited to pursue for society is clearly at risk' (Reichert & Tauch, 2003, p. 102). This rise of societal demands for accountability has been documented extensively, not only in higher education, but also and especially in public administration generally (cf. Brignall & Modell, 2000; Enders, 2002; Lane, 2000; Rowley, 1996).

The implementation of quality assurance mechanisms in higher education systems first started in some Western European countries in the middle of the 1980s. In Central and Eastern Europe, they were introduced from 1990 onwards. However, the aims and goals attached to quality assurance were quite different in Western and Central/Eastern Europe at the outset.

The 'pioneer countries' in Western Europe – the United Kingdom, France and the Netherlands – introduced their first formal quality assurance policies around 1985. In 1990, Denmark was the first follower of these pioneers, and from then on, the 'quality movement' spread to the rest of Western Europe. The conditions of higher education in Western Europe were similar for some countries and quite different for others, as were the tendencies to mimic. For example, the main motor to establish accreditation in most Nordic countries was the desire to expand open access and equal opportunity for mass higher education by creating new regional colleges and new study programmes as counterparts to the large traditional universities. In other countries both North and South (Germany, Italy, the Netherlands), low efficiency of the higher education system was the major issue to be solved by quality assurance.

An important tool in spreading the external evaluation was the European Union's Pilot Project, which was launched in 1994 (Management Group, 1995). It consisted of evaluation exercises involving one or two programmes in two knowledge areas in all (then) EU countries.

In 1998, as a late consequence of the EU's pilot project, the Commission of the EU made a recommendation to establish and support a network of the EU member states' quality assurance agencies (Kern, 1998). This network, the European Network of Quality Assessment Agencies (ENQA), became operational in 2000. By 2002, it had 36 member organisations and 30 government members. With a voluntary but exclusive membership, ENQA is heterogeneous in nature.

7 We stress 'seems' here, because of the mimetic character of much of this copying behaviour, witnessed by the fact that many similar 'fads' fade away without leaving many traces after a number of years (Birnbaum, 2000).

The character of its operation is professional – a body of quality assurance experts – rather than political, although its work inevitably has political consequences. ENQA is very aware of this.

That same year, just before the Sorbonne and Bologna Declarations changed the whole scene, two inventories were made of the situation of quality assurance in Western Europe (Centre for Quality Assurance and Evaluation of Higher Education, 1998; Scheele, Maassen, & Westerheijden, 1998). From both, it can be concluded that almost all Western European countries at that moment had a government policy to assess quality in higher education. (The most notable exceptions were Germany, Italy and Greece.) Spontaneous serious involvement of universities in quality assurance without governmental policies were rare exceptions, although existent (witness e.g. the dozens of universities that volunteered for the CRE's Institutional Evaluation Programme). And if universities engaged in quality assurance voluntarily, the effectiveness tended to be much more marked than when complying with government-initiated policies (Brennan & Shah, 2000).

The Central and Eastern European Countries advanced rapidly regarding evaluation and accreditation activities. With the demise of the Communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989–1990, the issue of quality assurance presented itself in a very different form in this half of the continent, quickly leading to different institutional arrangements to cope with it. Before 1989, the central control of quality in Central and Eastern Europe, like in the West until the 1980s, was based on bureaucratic means. In Šebková's words in this volume: 'Quality was not evaluated or even discussed. Indeed, the high quality of education was simply declared and announced'. In (some degree of) contrast to the West, state bureaucratic control was confounded with overt and covert control mechanisms of the governing party's *nomenklatura* system (e.g. Cerych, 1993; Hendrichová, 1998; Neacsu, 1998; Sadlak, 1995; Wnuk-Lipinska, 1998).

In short, we could say that the main purposes of introducing quality assurance policies in Central and Eastern Europe included (cf. Westerheijden & Sorensen, 1999):

- Transformation of higher education curricula to eradicate Marxist-Leninist dogma.
- Rapid expansion to accommodate tremendous excess-demand for higher education (reflecting the needs of post-industrial societies in combination with the elite character of the higher education systems).
- Much freer entry to the higher education market than previously, for national private higher education institutions as well as for foreign (public and private) higher education institutions.
- Underlying these changes was the change of the relationship between the state and higher education institutions: the state retreated from its former strict central control, which led to extremely decentralised higher education systems.

In general, the model used for quality assurance in Central and Eastern European countries was that of state-controlled accreditation of all programmes and/or institutions in the country. Accreditation was to function as a shield to keep out 'rogue' provision of higher education and maintain some form of central control in the highly decentralised higher education systems.

In sum, this shows a great divide among the different paths of development with regard to quality assurance followed in European countries. In the next section, we will look in more detail at the situation in the 20 countries of our study. For analytical purposes, we will try to group countries as much as possible, but the groupings and categories may be different for different aspects, implying that in principle there is not a *fixed* taxonomy, as summarised in geographical notions like 'the Nordic countries', 'the Mediterranean countries' or the 'Central and Eastern European countries' – even though for some limited purposes such fixed geographical categories may be useful.

3. Quality in the Light of Evaluation and Accreditation Activities

The countries in this study include many of those that signed the Bologna Declaration – that is why they were chosen in the first place. It was only for reasons of time and money that we could not include all of them. At the same time, we are spanning large parts of other continua. For instance, the size of the higher education systems in the countries involved ranges from small (with some 110,000 students in Latvia) to large (e.g. France, which counts more than to 2 million students in higher education). There are also unitary systems (e.g. the United Kingdom) and systems with several types of higher education institutions (e.g. France). All are to a large degree publicly funded, although the institutional arrangements differ; e.g., in the United Kingdom all public institutions are autonomous entities, while in Germany they are in many respects (e.g. personnel policy) part of the government apparatus. The arrangements regarding private higher education also vary: from non-acceptance (as in the Czech Republic before 1998) to liberal – but quality-controlled – as in the Netherlands.

When in the following we refer to 'government', in many countries this is the nation-state government. However, a number of large European countries have devolved (part of) authority over higher education to federal states within the nation, especially Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom. Belgium has another type of federalisation. Here, higher education is completely decentralised and our data (as often in European projects) are limited to the Flemish-speaking Community.

Concerning government, there is great fluidity regarding its role, ranging from passive administrative authorisation for a private body to open a higher education institution, to actively taking the initiative to create and support a public body to run a higher education institution. In this chapter we are mainly concerned with the passive side of the spectrum, i.e. with the judgement and approval, not with the issue of whether governments also actively initiate and support higher education institutions or study programmes.

In response to the GATS negotiations, both universities and students in Europe in 2000 vehemently declared that higher education in Europe is a public good (EUA & ESIB, 2002), a statement also adopted by the ministers of education (*Prague Communiqué*, 2001). And indeed, higher education in all the countries involved in the study is mainly provided by public institutions.[8] However, private higher education institutions can be found in most countries (except Greece), even though they usually service only a small proportion of the students according to official statistics (Tsaoussis, 1999; Uvalic-Tumbic, 2002). Thus, in Germany there are 43 private higher education institutions servicing just over 1% of all students. In other countries, private higher education is much more widespread (e.g. Poland, Portugal).

3.1 The Three Pillars in Relation to Each Other: Evaluation, Accreditation and Approval

Quantitative Developments of Evaluation and Accreditation Activities in Europe

As indicated in section 2, European countries have experienced great change regarding their institutionalisation of evaluation, accreditation and 'approval other than accreditation'. The results of our study show that in the early 90s, less than half of the European countries had started evalua-

8 In the United Kingdom: 'state-funded private institutions'.

tion at the supra-institutional level. By 2003, all European countries had implemented supra-institutional evaluation (see tables 1 and 2). According to data in the *Trends III* report, this covers 80% of all higher education institutions in Europe (Reichert & Tauch, 2003, p. 105). In most countries, evaluation activities include teaching as well as research performance (in combined or separate schemes) and may be carried out at the programme as well as at the institutional levels (cf. also: Danish Evaluation Institute, 2003). Great differences are encountered when the focus is on aims and instruments of evaluation: the 2003 ENQA survey sees three predominant modes: programme evaluation, programme accreditation and institutional audit (Danish Evaluation Institute, 2003). However, the general procedures of supra-institutional evaluation in all countries largely follow the 'general model of quality assessment' (van Vught & Westerheijden, 1994).

Table 1: Focus on Supra-Institutional Evaluation Activities. Year: 1992[9]

No Focus on Evaluation Activities	Focus on Evaluation Activities
NO, SE, FI, ES, PT, IT, GR, DE, AT, BE (FL)	NL, DK, FR, GB, IR, HU, PL, CZ, LT, LV

Table 2: Focus on Supra-Institutional Evaluation Activities. Year: 2003

No Focus on Evaluation Activities	Focus on Evaluation Activities
–	NO, SE, FI, DK, HU, PL, CZ, LT, LV, ES, PT, IT, GR, GB, IR, DE, AT, FR, BE(FL), NL

Granting institutions and programmes 'the right to exist' was traditionally a task that was performed by the state government. Only recently, in the wake of the introduction of 'new autonomy' for higher education institutions, has the task been transferred from the state ministries to newly established supra-institutional organisations (e.g. accreditation agencies, quality assurance agencies that incorporate accreditation activities, etc.). The country experts report that all European countries have established a framework of accreditation for (parts of) higher education. The pace of the development can be characterised as rapid. Whereas in 1998 less than half the European countries in our study had implemented accreditation schemes for (parts of) higher education, in 2003 all European countries, with the exception of Greece[10] and Denmark,[11] define their system as having implemented 'some type of accreditation scheme' (see tables 3 and 4). Denmark is the only country in Europe that explicitly does not see any added value in shifting from its well-functioning evaluation scheme in combination with state approval to an accreditation scheme in combination with evaluation activities.

9 For brevity, we shall use ISO two-letter codes to designate countries in the tables; Flanders will be abbreviated to BE(FL).

10 At the time of writing the reports in this volume, evaluation was proposed in Greece, but the policy process had not come to a conclusion. Accreditation was a concept beyond the Greek discussion.

11 Nevertheless, even in Denmark accreditation is part of the policy instruments, viz. for private tertiary study programmes that want to apply for government funding. However, this is an 'accreditation' performed solely by staff of the national evaluation agency (cf. the remarks on France below).

Table 3: State approval versus accreditation scheme with evaluation activities. Year: 1998

State Approval	Accreditation scheme with evaluation activities
NO, SE, FI, DK, ES, PT, IT, GR, DE, AT, FR, BE (FL), NL, LT	HU, PL, CZ, LV, GB, IR

Table 4: State approval versus accreditation scheme with evaluation activities. Year: 2003

State Approval	Accreditation scheme with evaluation activities
DK, GR (?)	NO, SE, FI, HU, PL, CZ, LT, LV, ES, PT, IT, GB, IR, DE, AT, FR, BE(FL), NL

Whereas evaluation activities follow a common general approach in all European countries, accreditation is not following any type of common general approach at present in Europe. The main differences in the accreditation schemes across Europe can be defined as follows:

(1) There are currently no patterns that demonstrate comparable structures of accreditation schemes. For example, the accreditation activities range from approval procedures of 'degree programmes at one type of higher education institution' (e.g. Austria) to 'all institutions and all programmes' (e.g. Hungary). The key players are quite different in the European countries, some countries have started agencies at the supra-institutional level (e.g. Germany, Spain), others have accreditation only for professional fields by professional bodies (e.g. Ireland, Spain before 2003), other countries regard the state ministry as the 'accreditation agency' in co-operation with the respective quality assurance agencies (e.g. Finland).

(2) At present, there are no patterns that demonstrate comparable methods for accreditation schemes. Moreover, a number of country reports suggest that there is no direct link between the different types of accreditation organisations connected to public authorities (e.g. accreditation agencies), and private sector agencies (e.g. professional bodies) (e.g. Spain, Portugal, the United Kingdom).

(3) The types of evaluation processes underlying the approval decision in accreditation schemes vary widely.

In sum, one can wonder if there is a common understanding of 'accreditation' amongst the contributors to the country reports – notwithstanding the definition given in this project – and more broadly, amongst the decision-makers in the European countries. We shall look into that issue in more detail later, but first, we shall continue our overview of the evaluation framework in the European countries.

Approval as an Indicator of Trust or of Lack of Autonomy?

The rise of quality assurance with evaluation and accreditation activities as a policy instrument has been interpreted as indicating a decrease in the trust in society that higher education 'delivers the goods' without giving special attention to it (Trow, 1996). Partly, an assurance of quality was implicit in the governmental regulation and funding of the overwhelmingly public systems of higher education in Continental Europe, as mentioned above. In that perspective, countries where traditional forms of approval without explicit evaluation are prevalent show a higher level of trust in higher education than countries where evaluation and accreditation are prevalent modes of control. However, the absence of formal evaluation or accreditation cannot really be

taken as a sign of trust, for traditional bureaucracy was and is a powerful means of control in itself (cf. France, Greece). Indeed, the argument was often made that quality assurance was an alternative to the former strict bureaucratic control, giving more room for institutional autonomy,[12] self-regulation or bottom-up initiatives in the higher education system (e.g. Flanders pre-2003, Finland, Greece, the Netherlands pre-2003, Sweden).

Specifying what 'traditional' bureaucracy controls and what 'modern' evaluation or accreditation controls, can solve the paradox. In general, bureaucratic control focuses on inputs (staff appointments, student access, annual funding, curriculum plans), although the French process of approval of private higher education institutions only takes place after five years of operation, implying that there is some degree of interest in output. Yet even here, the main emphasis is on staff qualifications, facilities and similar input factors. In contrast, evaluation and accreditation can focus on input, process or output alike. In more traditionally-oriented evaluation and accreditation systems, the focus remains on input factors. The aim of quality assurance models developed during the 1980s and 1990s in industry, such as TQM and ISO-9000, was to draw attention to the process of 'producing' quality education and quality graduates – the latter was the funnel through which output quality came into the picture.

The French case also shows the fluidity of terms – notwithstanding our efforts to develop strictly separated definitions. What is called into question by the report on developments in France is the meaning of 'evaluation': is it necessary for evaluation to be built upon the four-step model (van Vught & Westerheijden, 1994) with self-evaluation and review panels performing site visits? Or is it enough for experts from the ministry of education to study documentation sent by a higher education institution?[13] How does the latter differ, if at all, from the rules-based and paper-based traditional bureaucratic preparation of a decision? The distinction between accreditation and evaluation is also fluid in France. As Chevaillier mentions, (internal) evaluation is a condition for accreditation (or approval) of a study programme. Still, he makes clear that without changing names of official procedures, the mechanisms through which these procedures *actually* operate, and the character *in operation* (in caricature: from a bureaucratic rubber stamp to an actual evaluation with no guaranteed outcome) may change considerably.

Accountability and Improvement Orientations

A main distinction in the analysis of quality assurance is the types of functions a system must fulfil. Weusthof & Frederiks made a distinction between four main functions (Weusthof & Frederiks, 1997):

- Accountability,
- Quality improvement,
- Validation,
- Information.

It may be argued that the basic divide – inextricably linked like 'two sides of a coin' (Vroeijenstijn, 1989) – is between accountability and quality improvement. Accountability has to do with informing society (in particular the state) about the quality 'delivered' by higher education. Validation (the function of legitimising quality judgements, i.e. something accreditation is

12 Institutional autonomy is not the same as individual academic freedom, although in political discourse, they seem to be mingled where the main opposition is between government and higher education. The moment the discussion turns into questions of power within the higher education institution, the opposition between academic freedom and institutional autonomy becomes clear, the latter being easily equated with 'managerialism'.

13 Also the practice in some British professional organisations.

supposed to do) can be seen as a form of accountability. Therefore, in the countries with a heavy emphasis on accreditation, it may be argued that there is also an emphasis on the accountability side of the coin. Information as Weusthof & Frederiks used it is linked to the transparency issue which, at the international level, is one of the main reasons for the Bologna process; it is information for stakeholders to help them make reasoned choices (e.g. for pursuing studies, or for employing a graduate). The information function was stressed in Sweden. Quality assurance stressing accountability or information giving in itself is not a strong incentive to improve or enhance quality of higher education above the threshold level defined by e.g. accreditation standards or governmental requirements. This was shown amongst others in the research on the effects of the Dutch external quality assessment mechanism (Jeliazkova, 2001; Jeliazkova & Westerheijden, 2000). A strong drive for quality improvement therefore may need external mechanisms tuned to fulfilling this function. While agreeing that the situation is indeed like 'two sides of a coin', and more complex than a simple dichotomy would suggest, as a first approximation we should like to typify countries in the study on this dimension. Other countries' landscape of evaluation and accreditation is so mixed that even a rough sketch seems too risky (the Czech Republic may be a good example, with both accountability-oriented accreditation and improvement-oriented evaluation).

As a rule, quality assurance agencies, governments and higher education institutions tend to emphasise the quality improvement element. Most studies therefore find that quality improvement is the most common function of evaluation and accreditation schemes (Campbell & Rozsnyai, 2002; Danish Evaluation Institute, 2003; Reichert & Tauch, 2003). From our reading of the country reports in this volume, a different picture emerges if one tries to distil the primary focus of the schemes as they are actually implemented (table 5, selected countries, as explained above).

Table 5: Broad emphasis of accreditation and evaluation systems per country: Year 2003

Accountability emphasis	Quality improvement emphasis
BE (FL), DE, HU, PT, LT, LV, NL	NO, SE, FI, DK

An element of the validation function may also be the recognition of study programmes abroad for purposes of student mobility or for graduate employment abroad. Although until now this is mostly dealt with by means of individual level arrangements through degree recognition by higher education institutions on the advice of ENIC/NARIC offices, quality assurance is given prominence in this respect as well (Sweden). In some cases, better international recognition of the country's higher education degrees was an explicit argument to introduce accreditation (the Netherlands). This international or European dimension seems to be prevalent mostly in small countries.

Unanticipated consequences of introducing supra-institutional evaluation or accreditation schemes may include a tendency for rigidity, as attention in higher education institutions may focus on meeting (perceived) standards (hence the term 'compliance culture' van Vught, 1989) rather than on accountability to society (also *Trends III* report, cited before). However, higher education institutions often value external evaluation and accreditation schemes as a positive 'prodding' to pay attention to its important but not always urgent core value of quality education.

Another potential problem of the development of national frameworks for judging study programmes may be that they put pressure on harmonisation within countries at a time when it is claimed that diversity is needed more than ever:

- because of 'massification' of higher education (countries are setting ever higher participation targets, sometimes well above 50% of the relevant age cohort), different types of students have different learning needs;
- in the 'knowledge society', the roles of higher education are multiplying, leading to the need to respond in different ways to different demands.

Pressure to uniformitise may ensue from methodical issues associated with the predefined criteria necessary in accreditation. They would lead to greater homogeneity instead of the diversity of approaches and competencies needed in the present-day 'massified' higher education systems and in the emerging knowledge economy. Besides, adaptation of published criteria is a time-consuming process, so that accreditation continuously runs the risk of falling behind the state of the art. Then again, accreditation criteria tend to be a compromise between the participants in the decision-making process of the accreditation organisation, leading to the criteria being a *communis opinio*, but not challenging for the development of the best programmes or units. Finally, as accreditation judgements are based on passing threshold criteria, they would tend to discourage innovation and quality improvement. Innovative approaches to accreditation criteria and processes can overcome such disadvantages at least partly, as seen, for example, in the current practices in European EQUIS (www.efmd.be), in the American engineering accreditor ABET (www.abet.org/eac/eac2000.htm) and other professional accreditation organisations in the USA, as well as in the US regional accreditor WASC (www.wascweb.org).

Relations between Accreditation, Evaluation and Approval Schemes

Quite often, the picture depicted for foreign observers of steering quality in a country's higher education system seems to be that there is only one scheme. The country reports in this study clearly show that – as any student of the matter discovers upon closer contact with any single higher education system – the situation is never as simple as that. Even separating steering of quality from other instruments of higher education policy, as this study does, entails some distortion of the full picture. We try to overcome this limitation in two ways. One is to focus on the dynamics or driving forces. The other is to look at all (main) different supra-institutional schemes, focusing on their interaction.

For the mainly publicly-funded higher education systems that are the norm all over Europe, governmental recognition of study programmes or higher education institutions is the main decision that can be reached, as it comes with official recognition of degrees (often an important if not always necessary condition for degrees' *effectus civilis*) and with funding for the programme or institution as well as for students (i.e. student stipends, grants, loans, etc.). Governments almost invariably use a single scheme as the authoritative basis for (semi-)official recognition or approval of study programmes and/or higher education institutions. This is most explicit with governmental approval schemes and with 'state-sponsored' accreditation schemes (e.g. Flanders, the Czech Republic, Germany, France, Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland), but can be equally the case with evaluation schemes (Denmark, Sweden, the United Kingdom).

Other evaluation or accreditation schemes, in particular those under the control of the professions (as in Portugal and the United Kingdom), are important for students, as they influence their chances of entering the labour market, but are less clearly linked to governmental decision-making. In the United Kingdom, the influence of professional accreditation in some cases is offset by

the reputation of the university: degrees from prestigious universities will be sought after by students even if they are not accredited by the competent professional organisation. In Portugal, representatives of the professional *Orden* often take part in the review teams of the national evaluation as 'linking pins'.

Ownership of evaluation schemes by the higher education institutions (as in the United Kingdom, Portugal, the Netherlands pre-2003) seemed to result in less direct links with governmental decision-making than 'state-sponsored schemes', yet more direct than the cases where schemes are owned by professions.

Moreover, in what can only be analysed as their marketing efforts, higher education institutions are increasingly engaged in collecting multiple accreditations voluntarily. The areas of business schools (EQUIS, AMBA, AACSB are familiar 'kite marks' here) and faculties of engineering (turning mostly towards ABET or FEANI) provide prime examples across all European countries. Even in the very core of French higher education with its tradition of an 'économie concertée', signs of increasingly aggressive marketing are visible in the establishment of the *Conférence des Grandes Ecoles*.

When several accreditation or evaluation schemes exist in a country, one question becomes how they interact with each other. Is there a concerted system of one scheme complementing another, or is interference a better characterisation? Often, a fear exists in higher education institutions that interference may cause a bureaucratic overload leading to 'evaluation fatigue' because independent agencies involved in different schemes always seem to want information in their own particular format. Indeed, it seems that careful co-ordination is needed to achieve beneficial complementarity among schemes. Putting several schemes under a single agency may be a way to achieve this, as is seen in the Czech Republic. Yet there is a danger that one of the schemes will come to dominate the scene and attract most effort and attention, undermining the idea of complementarity.

The parallel existence of national evaluation or accreditation schemes with those of professions and voluntary schemes is one of the reasons for the 'evaluation fatigue' noted in our reports. In Portugal, conversations have been initiated to achieve more efficiency in this respect. In the United Kingdom, the perception of an excessive evaluation burden has been one of the main reasons for the higher education institutions' 'revolt' against the former QAA evaluation scheme, which led to the introduction of 'a lighter touch' after 2001. In the Netherlands, the existence of at least four (semi-)official evaluation schemes led to a consolidation of the three main research reviews into a single research review scheme in 2003, alongside the accreditation scheme for education.

There are, in addition, other issues of complementarity or interference than just the information delivery issue. For instance, in the Netherlands, the accreditation scheme introduced in 2003 is meant to maintain the quality improvement function that was such a prominent feature of the previous evaluation schemes. The accreditation scheme is sometimes portrayed as an addition on top of evaluation, i.e. as if they are complementary. It is not clear, however, if the knowledge that an evaluation process will be used for accreditation purposes will not lead to strategic behaviour (e.g. trying to hide weaknesses from accreditors instead of discussing them with peers). If that happened, accreditation would be interfering with the evaluation scheme.

Parallel evaluation schemes also lead to the question of whether the striving for more transparency actually leads to less transparency for the 'end users', i.e. for students, parents and employers, in other words, whether Europe's previous 'jungle of degrees' will be replaced by a 'jungle of

accreditations' (Haug, 1999).[14] However, the fear of uncertainty is not the only way to look at the issue. The other side of the coin is the increased information given by different types of accreditation judgements in 'open accreditation systems' (van Vught et al., 2002). Study programmes or higher education institutions may distinguish themselves by choosing one or another type of accreditation, and in principle the 'end users' would then know more about the qualities of the institution than when only a single quality 'kite mark' were available. However, in the developing practice among business schools, which seem keen on accumulating as many accreditations as they can (in a different meaning of a 'multiple accreditation system') it becomes unclear what the marketing message to potential customers will be from sporting a whole set of accreditations – although these schools are best placed to know about marketing…

The international scene: National steering of quality and transnational higher education

Both globalisation and the Bologna process – insofar as the two can be separated – call the relevance of national borders into question to some degree. International mobility of students and graduates is one of the aims of the Bologna Declaration. In the analytical scheme of GATS, one of the 'modes of delivery' of transnational education is the 'commercial presence' of foreign higher education institutions in other countries. How do approval, accreditation and evaluation schemes accommodate the cross-border aspects of higher education?

Under the new Norwegian accreditation scheme, the co-ordinating agency NOKUT has been given the brief to develop a recognition policy, focusing on Norwegian students' obtaining degrees from foreign higher education institutions. This seems to be a case where the quality assurance agency is also given tasks of ENIC/NARIC agencies, where the recognition of foreign degrees on an individual basis is the core task. A difference with normal ENIC/NARIC agencies may be that, in Norwegian higher education regulation, stress is laid on developing general criteria rather than case-by-case decisions.[15]

A different view on international aspects is given by the Netherlands Accreditation Organisation, which resuscitates the Renaissance meaning of the 'nether lands' (low countries) in that it includes both the Netherlands and Flemish Belgium. In fact, this is going to be a bi-national accreditation organisation, showing that national systems are no longer the only units to consider in the European higher education landscape. At the same time, this example shows the difficulty of working across state borders: the legal frameworks, although having the same intention, are not *quite* the same, and operationally the NAO is discovering that 'the devil is in the details'.

Virtually all accreditation and evaluation schemes apply to higher education institutions within the country. In some cases it was mentioned that foreign providers of higher education also have to be accredited in order to operate (Hungary, the Netherlands since 2003). On the other hand, the United Kingdom is the only country requiring (and evaluating!) British higher education institutions to apply quality assurance principles for their provision overseas.

Transnational aspects of higher education are addressed explicitly in cross-national initiatives such as the Joint Quality Initiative of a number of European countries (www.jointquality.org) and the *Tuning* project. But this is not our subject of study (cf. Farrington, 2001; Machado dos Santos, 2000; Middlehurst, 2001; Reichert & Tauch, 2003; Westerheijden & Leegwater, 2003). In most national quality assurance schemes, on the contrary, international aspects are not clearly visible

14 The same could be said about evaluation schemes, not just about accreditation schemes, but that is what the discussion focuses on most often.

15 Possibly, the difference with ENIC/NARIC decision-making may not be great at all and it may just be a matter of emphasis in the regulatory texts.

(such as regular use of truly international reviewers, application of explicitly 'international' standards and criteria, attention for internationalisation/Europeanisation of curricula, etc.).

3.2 Accreditation in More Detail

Coverage

As a rule, *all* higher education institutions and *all* programmes at *all* main levels of bachelor, master and (less often) doctorate in a higher education system are subjected equally to accreditation schemes. There may be differences by institutional category, e.g. only universities that offer master's degrees can apply for accreditation to obtain the right to offer PhD degrees (or PhD programmes), as in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland. In Germany, accreditation is limited to the new two-cycle structure (bachelor and master), leaving aside the traditionally structured programmes (Magister, Diplom, etc.) Another exception to the rule of universal application is found in Austria, where the new sectors of colleges (*Fachhochschulen*) and private, postgraduate, higher education institutions are subject to accreditation, while the traditional public university sector until now is exempt from it. Similarly, in Ireland only the non-university higher education institutions are subject to direct external control of programme quality comparable to an accreditation scheme by HETAC.

It goes without saying that voluntary and professional accreditation schemes, such as business studies associations in several countries (e.g. the United Kingdom, Italy) or internationally (EQUIS), only cover units in their own field, and that, being voluntary, higher education institutions are free to take or not to take such an accreditation. For some regulated professions in some countries however, professional accreditation is practically obligatory in order to ensure graduates' access to the labour market (e.g. accountancy or engineering in the United Kingdom, engineering in Portugal).

In the majority of countries, the *study programme* is the 'unit of analysis' in accreditation schemes in Europe. That is to say that the main judgements resulting from accreditation schemes pertain to individual programmes of study. However, the higher education institution as an organisational entity is the focus of accreditation if accreditation is used to confer a legal status on higher education institutions, e.g. as 'university college' or 'doctoral-granting university'.[16]

Table 6: Unit of judgement in accreditation schemes

Programme of Study	Higher education institution
CZ, HU, IT, NL, NO, PL, PT, GB, LT	AT, CZ, NO, SE

Apart from the unit or level decision, it is possible to choose *where in the educational process* to 'measure' quality, i.e. is the emphasis in the accreditation (or evaluation) scheme on input factors, process factors and/or output factors? While in our report we cannot go into that level in any detail, some contrasts are striking (Danish Evaluation Institute, 2003; the reader is referred to Hämäläinen et al., 2001; Vroeijenstijn, 2003). The countries taking part in the so-called 'Joint

16 One difficulty in applying these rules (hence in categorising countries for the table) lies in cases where smaller units such as faculties coincide with programmes.

Quality Initiative' all emphasise that, for them, accreditation ought to depend first and foremost on the proven quality of the graduates, which is the main output factor. The country report on Italy, for instance, shows a contrasting position, in that data required for recognition of study programmes' regulations – note that it is an *ex ante* recognition of *regulations* – of the new two-cycle type concentrate on input: numbers of teaching staff, available facilities, curriculum plans, etc.

The *addressee of decisions* is often the higher education institution's main governance body (rector/president, senate/council), yet the decisions and rights or obligations that follow from them are usually confined to a single programme area, e.g. the right to offer a master's degree programme in chemical technology. Furthermore, accreditation decisions almost invariably carry *consequences for the government*, such as the expectation that it will recognise the degrees awarded and, more materially, that it will fund (a number of) student places in the accredited programmes of study.

With their focus on study programmes, the main emphasis of accreditation schemes is education, or more specifically teaching. Especially in Central and Eastern European countries, the research prowess of the programme's academics as evidenced by their publications is used as an important indicator of input quality into the teaching process.

Actors and Ownership

Governments originated almost all accreditation schemes considered here.[17] Reasons for their interest in quality assurance were given above. In all cases, the academic community co-operated – willy-nilly perhaps, but co-operated. Willingness to co-operate may be surmised to have been fairly large in Central and Eastern Europe, given the widely shared opinion that after 1989 rapid transformation was highly desirable. The equally understandable desire to protect students in these countries from 'rogue' higher education provision regrettably was almost indistinguishable from 'market protection' by the established public higher education institutions. This resulted in a perverse system, in which the underpaid professors of public higher education prevented rapid expansion of the higher education system, thus letting the unmet demand of students persist. It was then catered for by the same professors who made up for their low official income by starting 'rogue' private provision of higher education ('garage universities').[18] Similar problems of planning through state quota or *numerus clausus* leading to large unmet demand can be found in Portugal and Greece for example.

In Western Europe, there was less collusion between the state and the academic oligarchy. Similarly, and more specifically focusing on accreditation, the Dutch addition of accreditation on top of the previously existing external quality assessment scheme was defended explicitly as a means to re-establish trust in quality assurance, which was seen by stakeholders as not providing transparent information on quality (the background for the accreditation pilot by the HBO Council) and as a system of 'mutual backscratching' by the academics from public higher education institutions.

The Dutch HBO Council in starting its pilot accreditation project reacted to signals from Dutch employers; this provides a clear example of indirect influence of stakeholders. It also provides one of the few examples of this phenomenon, as in most accreditation schemes the state

17 The exceptions are the professional accreditations in countries like the United Kingdom, Ireland and Portugal, as well as the accreditation (validation) of some (higher) education institutions by other higher education institutions in Ireland and the United Kingdom.

18 An argument made repeatedly and eloquently by the former president of the Free University of Amsterdam, Harry Brinkman.

and the academic oligarchy seem to be the only parties involved. Employers or students are mentioned only very rarely in the country reports. One exception is provided by the German *Akkreditierungsrat*, which counts representatives of stakeholders in its governing board (five representatives of professions and two students among the 17 members; there also is a 'students' accreditation pool'. Another is the Hungarian HAC, which counts two student representatives among its non-voting [sic] members.

HAC is also exceptional in inviting international confirmation of its accreditation scheme, most thoroughly in its international, external evaluation of 2001, and more permanently in its International Advisory Board. Another exception to the dominance of state and academe is professional bodies with accrediting power in the United Kingdom: here, the accreditation scheme is owned by the profession, i.e. by an organisation of stakeholders. These accreditation processes cover only a small part of well-organised professions and are intended to control the quality of new entrants into the professional practice. They are not linked directly to the main evaluation scheme in the United Kingdom (see next section). Similarly, engineers and some other professions in Portugal are (going to be) involved in accreditation-like schemes for higher education programmes for their respective professions.

The operational control over the process and quite often also over the criteria and standards in a national accreditation scheme lies, as a rule, with a national separate body which, at least in the operational aspects, is independent from both the government and the higher education institutions. These national accreditation agencies are usually located near the ministry of education, formal laws as a rule give accreditation its authority to make or propose binding decisions. The German *Akkreditierungsrat*, which is co-controlled by the rectors' conference and ministerial bodies, may be furthest from the state apparatus in our sample, but even this finds its basis in the Framework Law for higher education at the German federal level. There is a representative of the education trade union (GEW) in the board of trustees. This is an exception, approached but distantly by the consultation of the trade unions by the Netherlands Accreditation Organisation (NAO) in its initiation of frameworks. The co-decision between the Czech Accreditation Commission and the ministry of education processes on the content of decrees controlling the accreditation process may be an example close to the other extreme of little distance between government and accreditation agency.

The actual evaluation processes in accreditation schemes almost invariably involve external visiting teams. In most accreditation schemes, these are made up of academics and are under the control of the national accreditation agency (this is the general Central and Eastern European model). In Germany and the Netherlands, the 'field work' of evaluation is delegated to independent organisations. In Germany, these independent organisations are even given the right to accredit programmes, while the *Akkreditierungsrat* basically limits itself to recognising these accreditation agencies. In the Netherlands, the Netherlands Accreditation Organisation (NAO) retains the right to give final accreditations, and the 'fieldwork' organisations are called 'visiting and judging institutes'. In both cases, these fieldwork organisations can have different make-ups, including representation by stakeholders such as the professions. The more developed German case would show, however, that the academic oligarchy often controls the fieldwork organisations, especially the regional agencies such as ZEvA and ACQUIN, although the organisations that accredit a single academic area may well be under the control of the profession (explicitly so when they control access to the labour market, as in Portugal or the United Kingdom). Yet even in professions, governmental control is much greater on most of the Continent than in the two cases mentioned. For instance, German lawyers have to pass a *state* examination before being accepted in the labour market.

Formal Rules and Actual Implementation

As a rule, the process of accreditation follows the steps of self-evaluation resulting in a report used by the external review committee that will perform a site visit. The review committee's report will lead to a publication of some sort (van Vught & Westerheijden, 1994). However, in accreditation schemes the publication stage is more complicated. Review teams report to the fieldwork organisation that in turn reports to the national accreditation agency (Germany, the Netherlands), or report to the national accreditation agency directly (Central and Eastern Europe). After further deliberation that may include hearing the evaluated unit's response, the national accreditation agency then publishes its decision (accreditation yes or no – the 'no' often remaining implicit to avoid embarrassment) and in most cases also a more detailed review report.

The validity of an accreditation, once given, stretches from two to ten years. Both extremes are found with British professional bodies. More commonly, validity is four (France), five (NAO for Dutch programmes), or eight years (NAO for Flemish programmes). However, most accreditation schemes are too young to have gone through more than one cycle; therefore it remains to be seen whether the frequencies mentioned will be kept.[19]

Appeal Procedures

As accreditation, especially state-associated accreditation, may have serious consequences, including closure of existing units of higher education institutions, checks and balances may well be expected to be part of the scheme. One of the ways to achieve this is a two-step process, with an independent vetting of the external review team's judgement by the larger accreditation commission (customary in the US and the Netherlands). In schemes under private law and which are not obligatory, this may be the only checking needed. Another form, which may be more appropriate in cases of official links to governmental decisions, might be appeal to the normal judiciary system. Thirdly, special appeals bodies may be set up to handle complaints (Norway). Finally, incomplete schemes, without checks and balances, may exist as well (as in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland).

Consequences of Accreditation

The typical consequences of accreditation, already referred to briefly in § 0, include the accreditation agency or the government conferring on the higher education institution the status of a certain type of higher education institution, the right to offer a study programme for a certain academic degree as well as the duty for the government to distribute funds for the operation of the programme (often: for a certain number of student places). In the Netherlands, the government's pledge to link its funding to accreditation status is limited to public higher education institutions (in colleges only up to the bachelor's level).

In most countries, the statements made by accreditation agencies are seen officially as advice to the minister of education. However, this is advice is not to be taken lightly; in some countries (e.g. the Czech Republic), the minister's rights to diverge from the accreditation committee's advice are delineated in the law on higher education.

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19 Hämäläinen et al. rightly point to programme accreditation as a costly arrangement, and for that reason in the future institutional accreditation may become more common, after a first round of checking all programmes of study (Hämäläinen et al., 2001, pp. 12, 10) .

For higher education institutions, the funding effect may be seen from two points of view: first, accreditation as a prerequisite, but second, accredited status makes a programme or institution more attractive to students, which in systems where funding depends on student numbers may lead to more funded student places.
From the student's point of view, accreditation means the possibility of obtaining a recognised degree (in the *de jure* or *de facto* controlled professions this may be the only way to enter the labour market) and access to their usual rights (e.g. study grants or loans, free public transport).
Employers (including the public sector) may use the accredited status of a programme or institution as an argument in their decision to recruit one graduate rather than another – in professions with controlled access to the labour market, accreditation may even be a necessity. Similarly, evaluation results may influence employers' perception of the reputation of programmes or institutions, which again may influence recruitment decisions or decisions to close research or education contracts with certain higher education institutions. From a research point of view, these are, however, expectations or hypotheses rather than statements undergirded by empirical research results (Portugal).

Funding and Fees

There are different patterns of covering the costs of accreditations. On the one hand, there are cases (as in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland) where the government covers all costs. On the other, there are cases where the marginal costs for accreditations must be covered by the higher education institutions while the fixed costs for maintaining the national accreditation agency are borne by the government (e.g. Germany, the Netherlands).

3.3 Evaluation in More Detail

Coverage

As mentioned above (§ ycycl), the beginnings of quality assurance in Western Europe were in the area of evaluation, not accreditation. Because of the different policy interests, but also considerations of institutional autonomy, the emphases were different. In many cases, the programme level was targeted for evaluation ('quality assessment'), as it would give the most detailed information, whether for accountability or for improvement purposes. To stress the higher education institution's responsibility for quality as an expression of its autonomy, in some cases quality audits of the institution were the main mechanism of evaluation in Sweden and the United Kingdom (for some periods). In the United Kingdom, the size of the higher education system, and hence the costs of a programme level evaluation scheme, may have been another reason for the initial focus on the institutional level. In 2001, the 'evaluation fatigue' that spurred the 'revolt' of the higher education institutions against the QAA schemes of the late 1990s clearly focused on the costs (in terms of money and manpower) of programme level assessments for the universities.

Table 7: Unit of judgement in evaluation schemes

Programme of Study	Higher education institution
FR (sometimes), NL (pre 2003), PT, higher education institutions as a whole are evaluated, there is a tendency to analyse SE (after 2001), GB (1992 – 2002)	FI, FR (regular case), SE (pre 2001), GB (before 1997 + since 2002), IR (from 2003)

Where h the institutions' arrangements for quality assurance rather than their teaching or research directly (although this was the aim of the 'total evaluations' in Finland). Such 'quality audits' were the mainstay of evaluation in Sweden (before 2001), Ireland (university sector, from 2003 onwards),[20] and in the United Kingdom (especially England, since Scotland has its own arrangements) in the periods mentioned in the table.

Geographically, the aim of all countries' governments seems to be to cover all parts of the country. In federal states, therefore, a set of regional evaluation agencies is aimed at (Spain), although in Germany until bachelor's and master's programmes become universal, most of the country will not be covered by formal evaluation schemes (main exception: Lower Saxony with ZEvA).

As a rule, government-initiated or government-supported evaluation schemes covered all public higher education institutions or programmes. In Flanders and in the Netherlands, separate evaluation schemes existed for universities and for colleges (before the introduction of accreditation in 2003).

Actors and Ownership

In the sub-section on actors and ownership in accreditation schemes (§ 0), we mentioned that cooperation between state and academe was not very close. The 'ideal type' of this would be the development of evaluation schemes in the United Kingdom under the Thatcher government, which was a clear example of evaluation as an instrument which showed a dramatic lack of trust in the performance of the (university part of) the higher education system (Trow, 1994, 1996), while ostensibly maintaining the institutions' autonomy.

A logical prerequisite for any quality assurance scheme (accreditation or evaluation) to function properly is the existence of an internal quality assurance system within the higher education institutions. While this is not the focus of our study, it is interesting to note that internal quality assurance is mentioned explicitly in higher education laws in Hungary and Norway.

The evaluators, i.e. the members of review teams, mainly come from the academic world. However, involving a minority representation of other stakeholders (professions, employers) is widespread practice (Flanders, France, the Netherlands pre-2003, Norway, Portugal, Sweden). In fewer cases, student representatives also take part in the external review teams (the Netherlands pre- 2003, Sweden).

20 In 2003, the HEA announced it would begin to audit the universities' quality assurance arrangements (Conference of Heads of Irish Universities, 2003).

Formal Rules and Actual Implementation

The total duration of evaluation processes is about one year. This was also the approximate duration of evaluation schemes (Flanders, France, the Netherlands pre 2003[21]), although exceptions exist in many higher education systems for different reasons.

Consequences of Evaluation

Consequences of evaluation depended heavily on the functions for which it was introduced. If accountability was the main aim, and if governments stopped short of official recognition decisions (which would transform the evaluation scheme into accreditation), there may have been few direct consequences.

If quality improvement was a main aim, giving consequences to evaluation was normally in the hands of the higher education institutions being evaluated. After all, it is within the higher education institution that quality of education is 'produced'; paraphrasing Dill: quality cannot be 'inspected in' from the outside (Dill, 1995). One might equally question whether collecting officially required data – even setting up special *observatoires* for that purpose (France, Italy) – gives an impetus to the higher education institution's desire to engage in quality management, or whether it is seen as just another bureaucratic burden to be executed, bearing as little connection to the 'inner life' of the higher education institution as possible? (Higher education institutions have been known as 'loosely coupled' organisations anyway (Weick, 1976), but this could add to the looseness.)

In some countries, different official arrangements to monitor – and in that way ensure – follow-up were introduced (e.g. Flanders, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands pre-2003, Sweden) (Scheele et al., 1998). Research led to the conclusion, however, that 'really poor teaching' (as it was characterised in the United Kingdom) may have been weeded out but above the actual threshold level of quality (i.e. as long as one does not get too heavy criticism from the review teams) the impetus for quality improvement from external evaluations remained rare (Jeliazkova & Westerheijden, 2000; Jeliazkova & Westerheijden, 2002).

To the extent that information was aimed at through evaluation, the proof of the pudding would be that students made more informed choices in selecting their location of study. Actual empirical research on this question was not mentioned in the reports underlying the present study. Anecdotal evidence seems to suggest that for prospective students in well-provided public higher education systems such as in North-Western Europe, other arguments were more important in their choice than perceived quality differences (e.g. where did friends go to study, distance from the parents' home).

With regard to the consequences of evaluation for government decision-making, opinions still remain divided on the paradoxical situation (Westerheijden, 1990) between the standpoint that real consequences, i.e. incremental or decremental funding, are necessary to take evaluation seriously, and the standpoint that attaching real consequences to evaluation turns it into a power game where the results count more than the quality. As a way out of this paradox, many governments have stated that evaluation results may inform funding, but in a non-formulaic way (the United Kingdom, the Netherlands pre 2003), e.g. through contract negotiations (France).

21 This period was the rule in the Netherlands for the universities; with the substantially larger number of study programmes to be reviewed in the colleges, review processes from initiation to publication of the national report could take up to two years for the HBO Council.

Funding and Fees

In the United Kingdom and the Netherlands (pre-2003), for example, the costs of external evaluation are paid for by the higher education institutions, basically by subscribing to the umbrella body (VSNU, HBO Council) or quality assurance body (QAA). QAA is a hybrid case: most tasks (hence much of its funding) are contracted to it by the Funding Councils for England, Scotland and Wales – i.e. it is indirectly funded by the government.

In most other country cases, evaluation agencies are state agencies, funded by the government budget.

3.4 Approval in more detail

Approval was defined at the outset as granting a programme or unit the right to exist. In principle, this was the way to create new study programmes or (public) higher education institutions, faculties, etc. in state-controlled systems. Traditionally, approval was a task for a minister of education and the decisions were prepared, as all ministerial decisions, by civil servants. While the principles of bureaucratic decision-making (in its value-neutral, Weberian sense) are division of labour and application of expert knowledge, nowadays it is increasingly accepted that civil servants do not possess sufficient expert knowledge for their decisions (technically: proposals for ministerial decisions) to carry legitimacy with the academic community. This may have been one of the reasons for the rise of evaluation and accreditation.

From this arises the issue of the expertise needed for a legitimate approval decision. In other words, where is the borderline between approval and accreditation? In Weber's ideal type analysis, this question had a simple answer. Approval is advice given for a decision made by (permanent) civil servants, within the ministry, based on paper evidence collected either by the ministry or by its agent. This agent could be an intermediary body or a public higher education institution – in the ideal type state hierarchy it is not material where in the chain of command information is collected. At the other extreme, accreditation is performed by academic peers working in (*ad* hoc) committees in a collegial rather than a hierarchical manner (Clark, 1983) on the basis of site visits, including interviews, as much as on paper evidence. However, as Weber wanted to emphasise in introducing ideal type reasoning, the world is not as clear-cut. We find cases where external bodies involving academic reviewers prepare (and pre-judge) ministerial approval decisions on paper evidence without site visits (Lithuania), or with a site visit by quality assessment agency staff (Denmark). In contrast, in a curious mix of traditional bureaucracy, new public management and collegial academic control, we also find cases where civil servants negotiate recurrent contracts with higher education institutions about time-limited approval of study programmes, sometimes advised by experts from different intermediary bodies (France). In sum, it remains impossible to decide once and for all how much 'evaluation' is needed to call 'approval' 'accreditation'. In some cases, it depended on national political sensitivities or on the way the authors of country reports interpreted our definitions whether certain decision-making processes were called 'approval' or 'accreditation'.

Coverage

As a rule, approval is required for all higher education units, and often also for all individual study programmes. The essence of approval, i.e. the ministerial decision to grant programmes or

institutions the right to exist, remains a key element in European higher education systems. Especially, as higher education authorities in Europe have made clear time and again that higher education is seen as a public good. Moreover, other actors and stakeholders generally hold the same view: they want government recognition of the degree(s) and government funding of the programme or institution. Yet there are higher education systems in which private institutions can operate without government approval (e.g. Denmark, but not applying for approval implies no funding).

Private funding and private accreditation are generally only seen as equally or more relevant than governmental approval in some areas, such as postgraduate MBA programmes. Hence, the approval decision can be seen as the culmination of approval, accreditation and even some evaluation processes in the countries involved.

Actors and Ownership

The main actor in any approval scheme is, by definition, the top higher education authority in a higher education system. As a rule, this is the national government. Even in federal countries, where regional state governments may share part of the authority (e.g. Spain, Germany), national laws set the framework under which regional states operate. The extreme case of devolution may be Belgium, where the language communities each decide their own legal decrees, which may even include funding arrangements, independently from the national government.

Formal Rules and Actual Implementation

In the country reports, no indications were given of major discrepancies between formal rules regarding approval and their actual implementation. Although this may well be the case, it may also reflect the focus of attention of the country reports. We concentrated on the accreditation and evaluation schemes, taking the approval schemes as a point of departure and did not elaborate much on problems arising from them.

Consequences of Approval

Our definition of 'approval' was that it granted a unit or programme the right to exist. With this key decision invariably come other rights, unless accreditation or evaluation schemes have been introduced to help make those further decisions. These rights include the recognition of degrees (or the autonomy to award degrees), and government funding according to a given process or algorithm.

Funding and Fees

Governmental approval is free of charge in all higher education institutions in the countries under study. In other words, it is paid for by the government authority that performs it.

4. Drivers and Dynamics

Actors involved in an evaluation or accreditation scheme learn during its implementation (as one of us stated in Huitema, Jeliazkova, & Westerheijden, 2002). For example, staff and leadership in institutions learn the art of self-evaluation. Learning leads to changes in the way actors in the higher education system behave. This is what is intended: giving greater attention to the quality of teaching is a precondition for quality improvement. However, once the 'easy wins' have been called as a result of a successful first round of evaluations, a second (unchanged) round cannot add as much quality improvement or accountability as the first did. Routine, bureaucratisation and window dressing are dangers lurking behind. To counteract these tendencies, quality assurance systems need to be designed with a built-in facility for positive change. This can be seen as an *internal* drive for dynamism in evaluation and accreditation schemes. Moreover, there is a – loosely hierarchical – scale of perceived problems which quality assurance systems are expected to address. Tackling one problem (a political decision or compromise and a temporal state of affairs, not necessarily an actual solution to the issue) exposes another one. Attempts to address a 'subsequent' problem may be futile before a 'more basic' one has been brought to closure. We single out these changes in the *immediate* context of quality assurance systems as *contextual dynamics*. Both internal and external drives would lead any evaluation scheme to evolve from checking basic quality through accreditation-like processes, through efficiency-enhancing measures, to quality improvement and quality culture enhancing schemes (Campbell & Rozsnyai, 2002; Huitema et al., 2002). But this inherent logic is not visible in most countries' developments, which ostensibly do not follow the progression of phases proposed in that paper. External dynamics are apparently more important. What are the main drivers in the context of higher education policy that influence the dynamics of evaluation, accreditation and approval schemes, according to the country reports?

For Hämäläinen *et al.* a central question was 'Why has accreditation become a central issue?' They gave three answers (Hämäläinen et al., 2001, pp. 14–17):

- 'Trust and accountability', i.e. the New Public Management agenda;
- 'A common labour market and student mobility requirements', i.e. the Bologna agenda;
- 'Borderless markets for higher education', i.e. the globalisation agenda, leading to 'proliferation of accreditation systems' starting in the USA and even to the rise of some 'trans-national accreditation systems'.

Our findings underscore these earlier answers, even though we focus on the Bologna agenda.

Chronologically, the first main changes to traditional state-centred steering of higher education occurred in some Western European countries during the 1980s. Researchers on higher education have monitored and analysed these developments since (e.g. Neave, 1988, 1994, 1998, 2002; van Vught, 1988). Of course, governments had engaged in restructuring higher education systems before, but in contrast to the big reform projects of the 1960s and 1970s (cf. Cerych & Sabatier, 1986), the 'philosophy' underlying the changes in the 1980s was the rise of New Public Management (amongst many others, cf. McKevitt & Lawton, 1994; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2000). For higher education, this implied more emphasis on self-regulation, apparently inaugurating a renewed era of institutional autonomy. However, this new autonomy was only given in exchange for increasedgreater accountability to (the rest of) government and society, and thus evaluation schemes were introduced in one Western European higher education system after another, as the country reports in this volume show.

The first large-scale appearance of accreditation in the higher education systems of Europe was an immediate consequence of the post-Communist transformation in the Central and Eastern

European countries from 1990 onwards (see also § 0 above). As long as higher education was under strict government control, i. e. until 1989 in Central and Eastern European countries, accreditation as an independent check on minimum quality was not necessary for those societies. It was only when the market was opened to private and foreign providers, and in a period when government control was suspect because the transition from Communism was still incomplete, that accreditation surfaced as the option that carried most credibility in society. Its character of independent, non-political, academic expert opinion was highly valued. In theoretical terms, this can be seen as a mixture of the globalisation agenda (foreign providers) and the neo-liberal ideas that were popular in reaction to Communism and underlied the New Public Management agenda (private higher education provision, less government intervention).

Before then, and continuing alongside the large-scale accreditation schemes, some professions in certain countries were already accrediting study programmes. This required two enabling factors: on the one hand a certain level of organisation and self-regulation within the professions, and on the other a certain degree of independence from state control. Hence, the bar association in the United Kingdom and Ireland had developed accreditation schemes, while in Germany and similar countries entry to the legal profession was controlled by the government through a *Staatsexamen*. In this German examination, legal professionals set the standards and take the examinations, but under the authority of the state, not of their own profession. In addition to these enabling factors, a demand factor was needed, as shown by two of the other standard examples: business studies and engineering. These fields have a relatively highly developed international labour market. Demand from employers and students for clear information about the qualities of the study programmes (and their 'typical' graduates) may therefore also be expected to be highly developed. This paragraph, then, points to another aspect of the development of an international or European labour market, which is not clearly encapsulated in the Bologna process, and although encompassing many aspects, remains focused on state-driven and state-oriented evaluation and accreditation schemes, rather than on the independent role of the professions.

It was only with the Sorbonne and Bologna Declarations that a situation arose in Western European countries' higher education systems that was somewhat similar to the one in the Central and Eastern European countries, and led to introduction of the same instrument of accreditation. Although it was an assumption that underlied our entire project, so that we could be accused of being biased, the country reports underline that the Bologna Declaration was a key driver for the change towards accreditation schemes in Western Europe. At the same time, the fact that all the countries in this volume are signatories of the Bologna Declaration implies that it influences all European policies with regard to evaluation and accreditation. Yet, given that the starting positions of the countries were so different, the impact of the Bologna Declaration varies across the countries. In Western Europe, a discussion about accreditation has been launched, leading to reactions ranging from rejection (Denmark) to rapid introduction (above all Germany). In Central and Eastern Europe, the Bologna process occurs in the context of the region's reintegration in Europe and the preparation for membership in the European Union (e.g. Latvian and Polish country reports). Reintegration has been part of the outlook since 1990, so this European dimension may have been strengthened since 1999, but it did not require a very great change of direction in the accreditation schemes.

Its importance at the level of policy-makers does not automatically entail that the Bologna discussion permeates all the European higher education systems. The *Trends III* report notes that, according to its survey:

In Estonia, Lithuania, Sweden, Germany, Ireland and most strongly the UK, deliberations on institutional Bologna reforms are even less widespread than in the other Bologna signatory countries (Reichert & Tauch, 2003, p. 9).

First of all, this implies – in its almost sarcastic phrasing – that the Bologna discussion is not high on the agenda beyond the circles of those who have a professional interest. Second, this finding mingles countries from all over Europe with and without two-cycle study structures as less than averagely interested in the Bologna discussion. Hence, what may be the driving factors for the Bologna discussion being high on the academic community's agenda cannot be found in obvious systemic factors and our country reports do not give insight into this question either. The insights that they do give are the subject of our final section.

5. Conclusions

5.1 System Dynamics

In Central and Eastern Europe, the main driving force for introducing accreditation was the transformation after 1989. In Western Europe, the Bologna Declaration spurred new design activities with regard to quality assurance, often in the form of accreditation schemes (Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain and most recently Portugal). In some Western countries, the self-organisation of some professions must also be mentioned as a driver for (non-state) accreditation and evaluation schemes (the United Kingdom, Portugal).

Internal politics were among the main driving forces in Germany. The federal system with shared responsibility of higher education between the states (*Länder*) and the federal level (*Bund*) made the higher education system extremely resistant to change. The Sorbonne and Bologna Declarations may thus be interpreted as creating external pressure to overcome internal inertia (van der Wende & Westerheijden, 2001).

An additional impetus to establish or improve quality assurance schemes with an official nature seems to come from the press. University rankings are a major seller for weekly magazines in several countries (e.g. Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Sweden, the United Kingdom), and the sometimes scathing methodical comments from higher education institutions or researchers (e.g. Yorke, 1998) and ministerial officials seem to call for an attitude that could be summarised as: 'we had rather do something (better) ourselves'. Partly as a response to this attitude, partly as a driver for magazines to become interested, in many countries ministries of education or umbrella bodies of higher education institutions publish annual 'performance indicator' lists (e.g. France, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands). International agencies also publish regular information often regarded as performance indicators for countries in international competition (OECD's annual *Education at a Glance*, EU's recent 'open co-ordination mechanism').

5.2 Development and Reform

The Bologna process is an obvious driver for change with regard to quality in steering mechanisms.[22] Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Spain are cases where accreditation has been introduced on Bologna-associated arguments. In France, the introduction of a new master's degree has been argued on the same grounds and will be accompanied by some form of accreditation, although the scheme is still being debated. In the United Kingdom, it seems that in a recent policy paper entitled the 'Future of higher education' Bologna and European issues can be glossed over when making reference to international issues.

Already in the 1990s, active 'mimicking' or borrowing of evaluation and accreditation schemes took place on a large scale (Robertson & Waltman, 1992; van Vught, 1996). In some cases, there seemed to be just one obvious example in the world, which explains why in practically all documentation on accreditation schemes the USA plays an important (if often misunderstood) role. In most cases, however, there were several possible role models, but only one was chosen. For instance, Irish arrangements were and still are based on (some parts of) the British example because much of the Irish institutional arrangement for steering higher education was similar to the higher education system in the United Kingdom (the occasion for which cardinal Newman formulated the 'British' higher education philosophy was the opening of a university in Ireland). Accordingly, similar effects could be expected from borrowing new policy instruments, thus increasing the chance of achieving desired aims and decreasing the chance of unintended and undesired consequences. Similar patterns of cultural and institutional predispositions to turn to a certain model can be found elsewhere – this is the very reason why we are able to recognise certain regions within Europe. On the other hand, some proponents of certain evaluation schemes were active 'sellers' of their model; the popularity of the 'Dutch model' of evaluation in the 1990s can to some extent be explained by this (Flanders, Denmark, Portugal).

However, in borrowing (some elements) of models for evaluation or accreditation from other countries, adaptations have to be made to the new context in which the model is being introduced. This is good policy, as instruments have to be fitted into an existing legal, institutional etc. framework, yet it makes the question of what one higher education system can learn from another much more difficult. Thus, while both Denmark and Portugal claimed to have used the Dutch evaluation as a model, they were rather different from one another as well as from the original. Moreover, some complexities of the American accreditation and evaluation schemes cannot be copied easily in European countries, e.g. those that have to do with the limited influence of the government in the USA and with the differential treatment of professional as against other programmes of study.

The dynamics of quality assurance schemes (evaluation and accreditation alike), explaining how they are connected to social problems/situations to which they are supposed to respond, have been mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Yet, there are also internal dynamics involved, with 'easy wins' being made in early iterations and dangers of 'bureaucratisation' and 'window dressing' lurking if quality assurance schemes are copied without sufficient modifications (Jeliazkova & Westerheijden, 2002). The importance of internal dynamics and how they relate to the development of evaluation or accreditation schemes can be demonstrated clearly in the United Kingdom as well as in Greece, where after many years of controversial preparation, the es-

22 In some of these countries, broader changes have been initiated as well, notably in degree structures (e.g. Italy, the Netherlands, to some extent Germany). Ireland is a major case, showing the influence of the European level in the expansion of the higher education system.

tablishment of a National Quality Assurance and Evaluation Committee was proposed in March 2003.

Finally, we should remember that in whatever form we put the assurance of quality, quality of higher education is one of the main drivers of the Bologna process: together with the preparation of graduates for a European labour market, it is the improvement of academic quality which is seen as the most important driving force of the Bologna process, not just at the institutional level but also at the level of governments and rectors conferences (Reichert & Tauch, 2003, p. 100)

Seen from that perspective, that is to say looking at our subject from the opposite point of view, accreditation and evaluation schemes are major factors in shaping the European Higher Education Area. Our hope is that readers, arriving at the end of this chapter, may have a clearer picture of where developments are taking us – and where they themselves may take developments.

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Country Report Austria

Hans Pechar, Cornelia Michenthaler

1. The Characteristics of the Austrian Higher Education System

1.1 Main Components and Size of the System

Austria has eighteen public universities, twelve of which are research universities (*Wissenschaftliche Universitäten*) and six are universities of arts *(Universitäten der Künste)*. Since 1999, private uniersities have been authorised. Up to 2003, six (very small) private universities – all not-for-profit – have been accredited. 177,000 students were enrolled in the research universities, and 7,500 in the universities for arts, in 2001-02, but no figures were available for the private universities. At present, there is no division into undergraduate and graduate studies. There are only a small number of bachelor's (*Bakk*.) programmes.

The most important and dynamic part of the non-university sector is the *Fachhochschulen* (colleges), established in 1993. Colleges are 'hybrid' institutions: they have private legal status, but public bodies dominate the associations or, when colleges are organised as companies, public bodies are the main shareholders; about 95% of their funding comes from public sources. At present, there are nineteen providers (*Erhalter*), offering a total of 125 study courses. The college sector offers programmes in economics (including administration), technology (including engineering, telecommunication), tourism and now also humanities (e.g. social work).

In addition, there are teacher training colleges (*Pädagogische Akademien*), which only train teachers for compulsory schools, since *Gymnasia* teachers are trained at universities. The teacher training colleges are not considered part of the higher education system. However, it is planned to upgrade these institutions by 2005. There are also colleges for social workers (*Sozialakademien)* and schools for the paramedical professions (*MTD-Schulen*) which have a similar status. They are all public institutions.

Student enrolments for 2001/02 in the non-university sector represented 14,000 in *Fachhochschulen* and in the teacher training colleges, and about 4,000 in the schools for social work and the paramedical professions.

All universities are based on the principle of the 'unity of research and teaching'; teaching and (basic) research are supposed to have roughly equal importance. In colleges (*Fachhochschulen*), the emphasis is on teaching, but they also play a role in applied research. The teacher training colleges, the schools for social workers and the paramedical professions are pure teaching institutions.

1.2 Name and Length of Degrees Offered in Each Sector

For all the institutions mentioned above, the entry requirement is to pass the final upper secondary school examination (*Matura*); as an alternative, students may pass the vocational *Berufsreifeprüfung* (which basically has the same requirements as the Matura). At present, some 40% of the age group meet one of these entry requirements.

The traditional first degrees at universities are the *Magister* and *Diplom Ingenieur* (at Technical Universities), after four, in some disciplines five, years of study. This degree is considered to be equivalent with a master's degree.

At *Fachhochschulen* the first and only degree used to be the *Magister (FH)* after three or four years of study. Academic job-oriented education is the aim of these programmes. Degree programmes are accredited by the College Council, as will be explained below, for at most five years. The programmes take on average eight semesters (240 ECTS), with at least one semester of practical professional training.

Since Austria has joined the Bologna process, universities and *Fachhochschulen* are free to change their degree structure and to introduce *Bakkalaureats* (three or four years) and (a new type of) *Magister* (one or two years) programmes. The first bachelor's and master's programmes will begin in the academic year 2003/04. The development of new curricula in the *Fachhochschule* sector is decentralised and the College Act and the College Council regulate the procedure.

Only universities have the right to offer doctoral programmes (*Doktoratsstudien*) (two years). College graduates are entitled to enrol in doctoral studies at a university (Ph.D.). This is an important 'bridge' to the Austrian university system. Yet when college graduates decide to take their Ph.D., they have to fulfil additional requirements.

1.3 Institutional Governance Structures in Universities

The decision-making structure is in transition, since the legal basis for universities will change in 2005 when the law that was passed in 2002 (UG 2002) will be implemented. The present context is based on the previous law, the UOG 1993:

- Rectors (who are joined by one to four vice-rectors) are the university executive. However, they have only limited executive powers, since universities are state agencies. Rectors are elected by the university assembly (based on a proposal made by the Academic Senate).
- The Academic Senate has the main responsibility for academic matters at the level of the university and mainly consists of representatives of professors and a minority of junior faculty and student representatives.
- The university assembly (Universitätsversammlung) consists of senior academics (25%), junior academics (25%), students (25%), and non-academic staff (25%). It elects the vice-rectors (the rector makes a proposal), and it can recall the rector.

- The Faculty Senate (*Fakultätskollegium*) consists of representatives of senior academic staff (50%), junior academic staff (25%), and students (25%) in a broad academic area. The Faculty is run by a Dean who is elected by the Faculty Senate.
- Institutes are the main disciplinary units. The Institutes Council (Institutskonferenz) mainly consists of senior academic staff and representatives of junior academic staff and students. The Council elects the Head of the Institutes. Compared with the departments of Anglo-Saxon universities, most institutes are quite small.
- An Advisory Board (Universitätsbeirat) consists of representatives from business, the region, and university graduates and only has an advisory function.

The most important changes of the new law (UG 2002) are that a University Board (*Universitätsbeirat*) will be introduced as a decision-making body, a kind of supervisory board, which appoints the rector (out of three candidates nominated by the Academic Senate) and the vice-rectors. Second, rectors will become the employers of all university staff, they will have full authority over the university budget, which, in future, will be a lump sum budget. Third, the number of junior academic staff and student representatives in most collegial bodies will be reduced. Furthermore, at present the Faculty Senate elects the dean. In future, the organisational structure of each university will be a matter of university statutes; the rector will appoint the heads of all organisational units (whatever their name).

2. Accreditation Schemes and Other Types of Evaluation Activities

For some years now, the issues of accreditation and evaluation have ranked highly on the higher education policy agenda. Austria only has a brief history in accreditation and evaluation in specific areas of higher education. Nevertheless, Austria has a highly elaborated form of quality assurance mechanisms. Public universities are still searching for their position concerning quality assurance, but the *Fachhochschul* sector and the private universities have developed internationally recognised forms of accreditation and evaluation schemes, and continue to develop them further.

2.1 Accreditation by the Austrian Fachhochschul *Council*

The Rane of Activities

The accreditation scheme of the Austrian *Fachhochschulen* (college sector) only applies to degree programmes of Austrian *Fachhochschulen*. Every college institution that wants to offer degree programmes must have recognition by successfully completing the accreditation procedure. A politically independent council – the college council – oversees the whole Austrian territory. The accreditation procedure encompasses both teaching and research.

The Actors

The organisations in charge of accreditation are the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and the College Council. On October 1, 1993, the *Fachhochschule* Studies Act (*Fachhochschul-Studiengesetz*, or *FHStG*) came into force. In it, the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture laid the cornerstone for the creation of the accreditation scheme. The new sector in Austrian

higher education was to be characterised by decentralisation and deregulation. Colleges were privately organised, just as companies with limited liabilities, associations or non-profit organisations. The state competence was restricted to co-financing and quality assurance. Regarding finance, the attitude of the Austrian government differed fundamentally from the usual form of higher education funding. The government decided not to pay a huge sum every year, but to finance the costs of an agreed number of study places.

For quality assurance, the politically independent *Fachhochschulrat* (College Council) was established. It is responsible for initial accreditation, evaluation and re-accreditation of college degree programmes. The creation of the College Council as a 'quality-guard' over the college institutions was a novelty in the history of Austrian higher education. All members of the college council are appointed by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. The College Council does not receive instructions, but the ministry can overrule its decisions, for example when they are in opposition to the ideas of the state or the government. Concerning financial affairs, the whole college sector is controlled by an official body called *Rechnungshof* (court of accounts), which ensures compliance with the principle that the college sector must operate economically, efficiently and functionally.

The College Council comprises sixteen members. Half have an academic background and are qualified as university lecturers (*Habilitation*). The other half are from business or industry. At least four Council members must be women. The term of office for members is three years. The College Council elects its president and vice-president among its sixteen members. The College Council is a member of a number of international quality networks, viz.:

- INQAAHE – International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (since 1995);
- EURASHE – European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (since 1996) ;
- ENQA – European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (since 2000);
- DeGEval – Deutsche Gesellschaft für Evaluation (since 1999).

The Austrian government controls the work of the College Council. There is no meta-evaluation. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture covers all costs of the College Council and its office. All members of the College Council are engaged part-time. They are paid for their participation in meetings; travel and accommodation costs are refunded.

Every applicant for accreditation could be seen as a customer of the accreditation scheme. The main stakeholders in the accreditation scheme are the providers of college courses. Students, their parents, industry and the economy are also potential stakeholders of the accreditation scheme.

The College Council tries to find a balance between evidence and assurance in its fields of work. To achieve this, the office of the College Council invests a great deal of time and probably money in public relations.

Rules, Regulations and Deadlines: Procedures in Accreditation

1. Confirmation of Government Funds:

An important preliminary step before the procedure of accreditation can start is to clarify if the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture intends to co-finance a certain degree programme. To find out, the college institution has to send a summary[1] of the application to the

1 The summary has to include inter alia: the name of the college-degree programme; the number of study places; the form of delivery (part-time, full-time or both); the thematic orientation of the programme; its innovativeness; a description of the professional field and a brief assessment of how the future needs of the labour market will be met; a

College Council. The annual deadline for the summary is October 1. The summary is the basis for the decision as to whether co-financing will be approved or not. Each member of the Council rank-orders the applications. The College Council then transmits the results of its consultations to the Ministry. Based on the results of the College Council and on inner ministerial discussions, the Ministry decides which programmes will be financed and which will not. The Ministry informs the colleges before the end of the year. Accordingly, this step takes about three months.

2. Application:

Once the ministry guarantees co-financing, the college must engage in more preparatory work. Every applicant (every course providing body) has to fulfil a number of guidelines defined by the Law. To support applicants, the College Council publishes a brochure on the topic.[2] An application for approval of a college degree programme has to contain the following sections:

- One of the first stages for the application is the composition of the development team. The team consists of at least four persons – two qualifying as university lecturer (Habilitation) and two with a background in a field that is relevant to the proposed college programme. Members of the development team must be mentioned by name in the application. The priority assignment of the development team is to design a new degree programme that fulfils all legal rules.
- The development team has to elaborate a detailed description of the professional field, the curriculum and examination regulations. This is one of the crucial parts of the application.
- The description has to demonstrate reflection on the teaching methods to be used to ensure academically sound, practice-oriented professional higher education, providing graduates with the required professional skills.
- It has to include an analysis of the courses offered in the post-secondary sector relating to the proposed college degree programme.
- One high-ranking aim of the college sector is to offer alternative ways for students to gain admission to higher education. Hence, the admission regulations have to be described and the criteria for selection of applicants in case the number of applicants exceeds the number of study places have to be explained.
- A relevant point is the demand and access survey. This survey should answer the question as to whether a sustainable pool of applicants is available for the proposed degree programme and whether there is a sustainable demand for graduates on the part of business, society or industry. When first accrediting a degree programme, this study has to be made by an appropriate and independent institution.
- In the application, the composition and the development of the teaching staff and their academic, professional and teaching qualification profiles must be indicated. A minimum of four members of the development team is legally required. They have to be named in the application.
- The measures for programme-specific applied research and development have to be described.
- Regarding financing of the applied college degree programme, each application must contain a financial plan, detailing how the costs will be covered for the duration of the approval period (the state only co-finances college programmes). Furthermore, a calculation

profile of graduates; the place of the programme in the already existing offer of college education; applied research and development (R&D); planned composition of the development team.

2 The brochure can be found at www.fhr.ac.at.

of costs per study place must be included. Another important point is the existence of sufficient teaching facilities (rooms and equipment).

- Concerning the involvement of students, measures to obtain their evaluation of teaching have to be presented. It has to be indicated in which way the results of the students´ evaluations will be used to further develop the programme pedagogically.

An application consists of approximately 120 to 180 pages. Persons who will assume leading positions in the college degree programme must also be named. In addition, a short (not longer than four pages) statement of why the institution wants to launch a programme must be included. The short presentation must also describe the medium and long-term conceptions of the programme.

3. Accreditation :

The complete application has to be submitted to the College Council before the 1st of July. The office of the College Council checks the completeness and correctness of the documents and seeks to make the applicant remedy deficiencies. Every member of the College Council is presented with a copy of the application. In brief, the accreditation by the College Council is its procedure to verify the compliance with given and published requirements that ends in a positive or negative decision. A positive decision, to be made by the plenary College Council, is only possible when the application fulfils all legal requirements and when the Council is convinced that the proposed programme enriches the college landscape. The College Council informs the respective college institutions about its decisions by the end of the year.

In the next step, the office of the College Council forwards all applications (including negative decisions) to the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. When the Ministry agrees with the decisions of the College Council and confirms its co-financing, the accreditation is valid for a maximum of five years. The College Council has to send the positive or negative replies to the colleges concerned before the end of March. All in all the College Council and the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture have nine months to take a decision as to whether the application is approved or not. The period of approval for new degree programmes starts on 1st August every year.

After receiving a positive accreditation decision, the college is responsible for implementing the new degree programme and for assurance of its quality.

One year before the first approval phase expires, the degree programme will be evaluated, because an application for re-accreditation requires the submission of an evaluation report.

To sum up, the Austrian college sector is still developing and is currently searching for a stable position in the Austrian and European higher education landscape. In the academic year 1994/95, college studies started with ten degree programmes. Today, in 2003, nineteen colleges offer 124 degree programmes.[3] Twenty-two more have applied for accreditation for the next academic year (2003/04).

The fact that the College Council accredits while the Federal Ministry approves each application could lead to problems. Upon closer inspection it seems that the autonomy of the 'politically independent' and 'free from order' College Council is reduced through this arrangement.

3 Data can be downloaded from the College Council web site: www.fhr.ac.at.

Tasks of the College Council after Initial Accreditation

The evaluation concept of the College Council is based on international standards, combining internal evaluation by the college, external evaluation by a peer review team, a comment of the evaluated college leadership on the external evaluation report, a follow up process and the publication of the results of the evaluation.

One year before expiration of the accreditation period the college has to make an internal evaluation of the programme's quality. The main aim of the self-evaluation is to improve the quality of the courses offered. 'Fitness for purpose' is the basic concept of quality in these evaluations. The internal evaluation report must be about 30 to 40 pages. The College Council prescribes that self-evaluation reports describe, analyse and assess the programme as implemented (summarised in a SWOT analysis), and list improvement suggestions and planned measures.

The college submits the self-evaluation report to the College Council. The College Council then appoints a review team, consisting of three or four persons with relevant academic and professional qualifications and at least one foreign member, plus an assistant. Site visits last two to four days. On the basis of the internal evaluation report and discussions with management, staff and perhaps with students the peer review team forms its opinion. The review team's report and the statements of the college in response to the team's findings are presented to the quality committee of the College Council.

The College Council deals in detail with the results of both evaluations in a plenary session. It decides about the measures needed to improve the quality of the programme. If the college is not able to remedy the deficiencies, the College Council decides to let the recognition expire. If the college institution remedies all deficiencies the College Council proposes to prolong the approval period.

In the next step, the College Council sends its decisions to the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, which decides whether the financial support will be prolonged for the next approval period. If this decision is positive, the college can formally apply for re-accreditation. The application must include the evaluation report and be submitted at least six months before expiration of the approval period. The final step in the procedure of re-accreditation is the approval of the application by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

In addition to the programme-based evaluation as described above, the College Council also wants to implement an institution-based evaluation in the year 2003 to increase quality demands of the sector.

Other Quality-Relevant Activities

Beyond accreditation and evaluation processes the college sector is committed to ensure its quality as follows:

- annual statistical analysis by the College Council;
- observation of final examinations by members of the College Council;
- evaluation in the form of interviews;
- students' assessments of pedagogical training in the academic subjects;
- implementation of an internal quality management system in every college.

2.2 Accreditation by the Austrian Accreditation Council

The Range of Activities

The realm of activities of the Austrian Accreditation Council (AAC) is confined to private universities. Whoever wishes to run a private university with the right to confer academic degrees must obtain state recognition in the form of accreditation by the AAC. Accreditation by the AAC covers both the teaching and the research functions of private universities. There is no limitation with respect to subjects and disciplines.

The Actors

The AAC was established in 1999 by the Austrian Parliament. The main aim was to open the university sector to private suppliers. The AAC is not an advisory committee, but an independent body with full decision-making powers concerning accreditation of private universities and is not subject to directives from any other actor.

Legal supervision of the AAC is the responsibility of the Federal Minister who has jurisdiction over higher education (at present: Minister of Education). The AAC must submit an annual report of its activities to parliament through the responsible Federal Minister. Upon request, the Council is also obliged to supply the Minister with documents and to allow inspection of its premises. As a public authority, the AAC is subject to legal control by the audit division (*Rechnungshof*) of the Republic of Austria.

The AAC comprises eight members, who are acknowledged experts in the field of international higher education. They are appointed by the federal government. Four are nominated by the Austrian Rectors' Conference. An appropiate number of women must be considered when the AAC is being appointed. The basic period of office for AAC members is five years.

The Minister appoints a president and a vice-president of the Council from among its eight members. The president and the vice-president are appointed for three years. At the end of this period, the Minister can re-appoint the same persons once for another three-year period.

The AAC is not subject to reviews of any other accrediting body ('meta-accreditation'). However, it is a member of various professional networks, in particular:

- The European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).
- The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE).
- The Network of Central and Eastern European Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEE Network)
- A Project to form an accreditation network between German-speaking countries in order to establish procedures for the mutual recognition of accreditation processes.

Potential applicants are customers of the expertise and service of the AAC. An important and useful stage in the run-up to applying is a series of detailed consultations. During preliminary discussions with the applicant, the office attempts to clarify which preconditions an application must fulfil as regards both content and form, as well as a suitable application time scale. In addition, the office is able to offer expertise relating to the elaboration and formulation of the application.

Students and their parents as well as employers are the main stakeholders of the AAC. The AAC provides transparency in a field of endemic uncertainty with enormous cost to obtain

sound information. It guarantees reliability with respect to the quality of education and the recognition of degrees.

Rules and Regulations: Procedures in Accreditation

The legal foundation of the AAC is the Federal Act on the Accreditation of Educational Institutions as Private Universities (*University Accreditation Act* or *UniAkkG*). The federal government covers the costs of maintaining the AAC and its office. The applicants for accreditation must reimburse the expenses of the experts involved in the application procedure. This covers travel and accommodation costs, as well as remuneration for the inspection and the production of a report. The total costs to be reimbursed amount to approximately € 6000.

Before the formal procedure, applicants can consult the AAC and present the planned project at a Council members' meeting. The formal stages of the procedure comprise the following.

1. Application:

The institution seeking accreditation as a private university must apply to the AAC. The application must contain detailed documentation concerning the structure and organisation of the private university, such as a mission statement, information about its legal status, statutes and constitution, organigram and its administrative and academic decision-making structures. If the applying educational establishment is part of a foreign or an international educational institution or the franchisee of one, further details are required about this institution (including its accreditation) in order to establish the relationship with the applicant institution. The application must also include proof that minimum standards will be fulfilled:

- The institution must have a permanent staff that is contractually bound for at least two years. Permanent staff must be able to cover at least 50% of the teaching of each study course, and should normally have a doctoral degree. In accordance with international standards, each study course or discipline on offer requires at least three members of permanent staff whose minimum capacity is half-time employment. This minimum is set to ensure academic discussion and exchange.
- The institution must carry out research. The application must list current research projects and contain information about planned projects involving international co-operation in research and teaching. For this purpose too, the institution needs a critical mass to ensure the institutionalised production of knowledge and corresponding feedback from its research into its teaching activities.
- The selection process for all academic staff must be transparent, competitive and quality-based.
- Curricula (in detail) and examination regulations must meet material, specialist and formal requirements in accordance with international standards. The institution's minimum entrance requirements must be in accordance with Austria's general requirements for university admissions.
- Space and material resources will be judged according to international standards for adequate academic resources.
- The institution should be in a position to offer a reasonable range and variety of study courses.
- The institution must be able to prove that its medium and long-term funding is ensured.

The six-month period within which the Council must complete the procedure begins on the date the application arrives at the office. The application is first checked with respect to formal shortcomings.

2. Inspection by Peers:

As a rule, the AAC appoints two to three experts, selected for their professional position, their specialisation, their academic reputation and expertise. The institution making the application will be informed of the names of the experts. The experts will carry out an inspection of the educational institution on the basis of the written documents submitted with the initial application letter. This usually lasts one day. The Council appoints one of its members as an inspector to coordinate and monitor the inspection.

Each inspector writes an independent report. Guidelines for the authors of these reports have been set out by the Council in order to guarantee uniformity of method and comparability. The reports are communicated to the applicant institution by the Accreditation Office. The institution has the right to submit a written comment on the reports by a certain date within the framework of a party hearing.

3. Accreditation:

On the basis of the application documents, the inspection, the report and the institution's comments, the inspector prepares a decision proposal for the Council plenum. The Council then makes a decision on the application, which must have a minimum majority of five votes.

The decision is communicated to the applicant institution by means of a written notification. The AAC makes a press release in order to inform the public about success or failure of accreditation. However, no details of the process are made public.

Official notification by the AAC must be approved by the responsible Federal Minister. Approval can be refused if the decision of the AAC is against the interests of national educational policy.

There are no formal links between accreditation and approval of other subsequent decision-making processes. The federal government is prevented by law from financing the establishment of private universities. However, it can purchase individual services from an accredited private university on demand (e.g. the provision of study courses which supplement the range of studies offered by state-funded universities and are of general interest). The ban on public financing of private universities does not apply to provinces (*Bundesländer*) and local authorities.

Accreditation comes into effect as from the date of the official notification. It expires automatically at the end of the period set by the AAC (a minimum of five years) if an application for extension is not made in time.

Tasks of the AAC after Initial Accreditation: Supervision and Re-Accreditation

The AAC has the duty to monitor the quality of accredited private universities. It has the right to inspect the institutions whenever there is cause for concern, and may also demand specific information. The private university is obliged to provide information on all matters and to give access to all its documents and business records.

Furthermore, each academic year, the private university must submit an annual report to the Council. The report must ensure the AAC that the conditions on which accreditation was granted are being fulfilled. Assessments of report results can, in certain cases, lead to checks by the AAC. Minimum requirements for the annual reports include:

- Number of students and graduates for each course.
- List of university teaching staff, detailing their academic or artistic qualifications and achievements, as well as copies of the relevant employment contracts.
- Results of evaluation procedures on the quality of research and teaching. These must be carried out by the institutions at least every two years (description of the evaluation procedure used, follow-up of results of the evaluation procedure).
- Changes in personnel, space and equipment since the last report, or since the application.
- Clear presentation of the development of financial structures.
- Should there have been areas that did not yet fulfil the criteria of the University Accreditation Act at the time of accreditation, these will be recorded in the official notification of accreditation and their development must be clearly outlined in the report.
- Description of continuous quality control measures (quality management system).

In any case, accreditation expires after a certain period of time. Extension of accreditation must be granted in an official notification before the period of initial accreditation has expired. Accreditation of a private university can be extended for a further five years after initial accreditation. After ten years, accreditation can be renewed for a further ten years. As in the initial application, when applying for re-accreditation, the institution must document its compliance with all legal requirements. Special emphasis should be put on developments since initial accreditation.

2.3 Other Schemes than Accreditation

Strictly speaking, there are no other approval schemes in Austria. Only in a very limited sense can one speak about 'approval' of the Ministry of Education with respect to the study courses of public universities. At present,[4] the rector has to inform the Ministry about the university's decision to start a new study course and provide all relevant information regarding the curriculum. The new study course does not need approval by the Minister. However, the Minister can refuse the new course for two reasons: if the course – or the procedure to establish it – is at variance with the law, and if the necessary resources to implement the course are not available. The Minister has two months to consider the new study course; if it is not rejected within two months, it is legally valid. Obviously, the supervision of the Ministry is limited to a check of formal correctness and legality. This procedure is not an approval extending to issues of quality of the course.

The new organisational act (*UG* 2002) will become effective as from 2004. With respect to approval of study courses, there will be only minor changes. The role of the Ministry will still be limited to check the formal correctness of the new course. The role of the rector will be strengthened, and a new actor, the University Board (*Universitätsrat*), will play a significant role. However, under present regulations, this does not add up to a governmental approval of the curriculum and its quality.

With respect to supra-institutional evaluation on a regular basis, in principle, the law allows the Minister to take the necessary steps for an external evaluation either of one university or of the whole system.[5] However, there is no infrastructure for regular supra-institutional evaluations. For some years now, there has been a debate about an 'evaluation agency'; the Ministry has repeatedly announced the establishment of such an agency, but so far it has not been created. System-wide evaluations of single disciplines are occasionally carried out (on average every two or

4 The legal basis until the end of 2003 is UOG 1993 and UniStG.
5 This is the case both under the present and the new laws (UOG 1993, § 18 and UG 2002, § 14).

three years). The most recent was of mechanical engineering (see *Österreichisches Universitätenkuratorium* 2001).

As a consequence, quality assurance schemes for the sector of public universities are at present quite loose, although this sector is by far the biggest and most important sector of Austrian higher education. In 1997, the tight ministerial ex-ante control of university studies (*AHStG*, supplemented by a huge number of detailed study laws and decrees) was replaced by a new study law (*UniStG*), which granted a significant degree of autonomy to the universities and their study commissions. The latter are committees that establish and maintain study courses. However, until now this was not balanced by external supra-institutional evaluation.

3. Underlying Patterns and the Logic of Different Accreditation Schemes

During the 1990s, Austrian higher education moved away from the traditional pattern of a homogeneous system and became more diverse. The main route to diversity was the establishment of new sectors[6] (*Fachhochschulen*, private universities) which now complement the still dominant sector of public universities. Obviously, the establishment of different sectors requires that policy makers draw certain lines between them and treat them differently. Assignment of a distinct role and profile to each sector and different treatment according to that profile are an attempt by the government to limit competition between the sectors. By doing so, the government maintains a relatively high steering capacity, even in a liberalised system. In our context, the differences with respect to quality assurance are of particular interest. The federal government has established distinct rules for quality assurance in each sector. So far, there have been no comprehensive procedures for the higher education system as a whole. Each sector has its own logic and deserves a separate description.

3.1 The Rationale to Establish the College Council

Compared with other OECD countries, a non-university sector was established relatively late in Austria. The main reason for the creation of *Fachhochschulen* in 1993 was the policy-makers' conviction that Austria could not avoid diversifying the range of educational profiles in higher education. *Fachhochschulen* should offer relatively short study courses with an explicit vocational orientation. However, besides curricular innovation, the *Fachhochschul* policy was also a deliberate attempt at organisational reform.

It is worth remembering that the legal basis for the *Fachhochschul*-sector, the *FHStG*, was the result of a heated controversy about the organisational structure of the new sector. In a nutshell, there were two opposing concepts. One saw colleges as state agencies, basically a copy of universities (as they were in the early 1990s) in organisational terms, but with just a different curricular profile. The other was to establish colleges as public enterprises with a lump-sum budget, greater institutional management, and – what is most important in our context – greater autonomy in curricular affairs. The latter concept finally prevailed and was incorporated in the 1993 law. During the reform debate of the early 1990s, this concept was labelled the 'accreditation model'. This

6 In addition to sectoral diversification, one can also observe growing diversity within each sector. Until the late 1980s the policy was to keep differences between institutions of the same kind as small as possible. With the introduction of UOG 1993 and in particular with UG 2002 universities are expected to develop a distinct profile.

is a clear indication that the actors involved in the reform process attached much importance to this aspect of the model. Accreditation was a new feature in the Austrian context, which must be linked to the new curricular development in *Fachhochschulen*.

The remarkable degree of room for manoeuvre at *Fachhochschulen* must be compared with the heavy state regulation of universities with respect to curricular affairs. In 1993, when the *FHStG* was passed, universities were still subject to hierarchical regulation of study courses in four stages: two federal laws, one ministerial decree, and finally 'fine-tuning' by the university itself. It goes without saying that this complex procedure did not foster rapid adaptation of study courses to new demands. The *FHStG* was a tremendous step towards a new understanding of quality assurance in higher education.

One important aspect of this change is a new understanding of the appropriate and feasible responsibility of the political system (parliament, government, ministry). Until the early 1990s, political authorities claimed to define the 'one best solution' for each level of education. Of course, it was not always easy to say what exactly was the 'one best solution'. Views on appropriate curricular measures differed widely, due to contradicting expert opinions and political convictions. Policy-makers and academics became increasingly unsatisfied with the resulting slowness of curricular reforms.

Step by step a more liberal attitude replaced the paternalistic tradition of quality control. Public opinion leaders, the general public and finally policy-makers no longer believed in the 'one best solution'. It seemed increasingly uncertain that such an 'optimum curriculum' existed at all; and even if it did exist, how could it be identified if experts did not agree? For these reasons it made sense to allow a certain amount of competition between different curricular profiles; instead of over-emphasising an 'ex-ante approach' of quality control it seemed more promising to pay attention to the outcomes of competing profiles and to judge which one proved a success.

However, the main actors promoting this liberal approach to quality control agreed that it would be necessary to protect students against offerings with unacceptably low quality. If institutions obtained a high degree of autonomy to shape the curriculum, study courses needed a 'mark of quality' guaranteeing that they met at least minimum standards. This was the policy context in which a need for accreditation arose. The accreditation model was strongly influenced by the example of the British polytechnics and the Council for National Academic Awards (cf. § 4 below).

3.2 The Rationale to Establish the AAC

Until the establishment of the college sector, maintenance of higher education institutions was a monopoly of the federal government. Each university with the right to confer academic degrees was explicitly mentioned in the university organisation act (*UOG* 1975, later *UOG* 1993). *Fachhochschulen* were the first academic institutions that severely undermined the traditional governance patterns in Austrian higher education. However, although, formally, they were privately owned, public bodies still exercised strong influence on their development. This sector could not be regarded as private in a strict sense. Almost all funding for colleges comes from public sources, either from the federal government or from the provinces and municipalities. It makes more sense to regard *Fachhochschulen* as 'public enterprises'.

During the late 1990s the legalisation of private higher education institutions in a narrow sense became a policy issue. Already in the late 1980s the first private university (Webster University) was set up in Austria, but due to the legal position, its degrees were not recognised in Austria. During the late 1990s it became obvious that Webster would not remain an isolated case. There

was a growing number of initiatives from inside and from outside the country to establish private universities.

This development must be seen against the background of increasing internationalisation of higher education. From a global perspective, the emergence of trans-national student markets was a new phenomenon with strong repercussions on those systems (basically the Anglo-Saxon countries) which had successfully established higher education as a major 'export industry'. Even if Austria – as most European countries – did not participate in this market as an exporter, the new entrepreneurial spirit shaped the dominant policy paradigms, which at least indirectly influenced all nations. In Europe, internationalisation did not have such strongly commercial features. It was mainly driven by the mobility programmes of the European Union. The goal of these programmes was to strengthen European integration, not only in economic terms but also with respect to culture and a 'European identity'.

In any case, internationalisation undermined the capacities and powers of the nation state. It was no longer feasible for national authorities to shape their own education systems without taking into account international trends and developments. The Bologna process is a striking example, because, from a formal point of view, each government is still free to decide sovereignly upon its priorities. Practical constraints, however, secure a high degree of convergence and adjustment.

Austrian authorities had to take into account that in the new framework of a 'European higher education space' it no longer made sense to prohibit private universities. The (non-monetary) cost to legitimise a state monopoly (to the Austrian public and to potential providers who might take legal action against the Austrian government) was much higher than the potential disadvantages of a private sector. In the past, the view on private universities had been ideologically distorted in many cases. Opponents regarded them as a threat to an egalitarian higher education system; proponents advertised them as superior to the public sector. Opponents and advocates alike took it for granted that private universities would constitute an elite sector of the higher education system. More recently, this polarised view gave way to a rather matter-of-fact assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of a private sector. Policy-makers became aware that – in a comparative perspective – private elite sectors are the exception rather than the rule (see Geiger 1986), and that in Austria, as in most European countries, private universities would constitute a 'marginal segment' which could not seriously challenge the predominance of the public sector.

A new accreditation scheme was regarded as an imperative precondition for the legalisation of private universities. In designing such a body, the Austrian authorities could rely on the experience they had gained with the *Fachhochschul* Council. The possibility to enhance the range of activities of the College Council instead of creating a new accreditation body was never discussed seriously. One reason was that, compared with the *Fachhochschul* sector, accreditation of private universities would require slightly different criteria. For *Fachhochschulen* it was important to prove that the study courses applying for accreditation met sufficient demand from the labour market. Additionally, colleges had to demonstrate that their curriculum did not duplicate already existing study courses at universities, but created a new educational profile.[7] Accreditation of private universities does not make such demands. This difference can be explained by the fact that *Fachhochschulen* are predominantly funded by public sources (thus there is an understandable interest of governments in the coherence and effectiveness of the sector), while private universities are almost exclusively funded by private money.

7 This was the practice during the first six years of the Fachhochschul Council. Since then, this criterion was relaxed somewhat.

3.3 Consequences of Accreditation for Students

Accreditation of private universities has consequences with respect to the rights of students and the recognition of examinations and degrees:

- Students of private universities have the same rights as students of Austrian state universities as far as residence permits and study grants are concerned. The same laws also apply to students of private and state universities as regards family allowance, health insurance of children and taxation. In addition, students of private universities are members of the Austrian Students' Union (Österreichische HochschülerInnenschaft, ÖH). Students of Fachhochschulen have their own union.
- Accreditation by the College Council includes the guarantee of an education with a degree compatible to the European Union.
- Examinations taken at private universities are recognised by the state. Should a student move from a private university to a state university, then the examinations already taken at the private university (providing they are of the same standard or level) will be recognised by the state university.
- The degrees and titles awarded by colleges as well as by private universities have the same legal validity as those from Austrian state universities. It is therefore neither necessary nor possible to have these degrees validated at an Austrian state university. The graduates of private universities have the legal right to use the degree title awarded. College graduates are entitled to use the appropriate academic title with the addition of the letters 'FH'.
- Colleges and private universities can only legally award those academic degrees and titles that have been allowed in their accreditation.

4. Policy Transfer from the United Kingdom to Austria

The *Fachhochschul* policy of the Austrian government followed the broad global trends and fashions of the late 1980s and early 1990s, as found in the higher education literature or in the recommendations of international organisations such as the OECD. The OECD played a crucial role in shaping the *Fachhochschul* policy. Its examination of the Austrian higher education system focusing on the new *Fachhochschule* concept proved very influential. In the spring of 1993, the OECD presented its review, which expressed strong support for this concept (OECD 1995). A few weeks later the *FHStG* was passed by parliament. The policy debate referred increasingly to one particular national model of non-university higher education, i.e. the British polytechnics. To be more precise, it was the idea of accreditation and the role and function of the *Council for National Academic Awards* (CNAA) that attracted the interest of Austrian reformers (see Pechar 2002). There is some irony in the fact that the CNAA served as a kind of role model for Austria at the time when it was abolished by the British government. But it is even more interesting that the CNAA and the British polytechnics should exercise such a strong influence on Austrian higher education policy. This is by no means self-evident; on the contrary. Due to quite different political and legal traditions, policy transfer from Britain to Austria had been very rare until then. In the 1960s and 1970s, when Austrian policy-makers searched for models and examples from abroad, they turned to the European continent, in particular to Germany.

At the level of organisation and technical procedures, a comparison between the CNAA and the College Council (*Fachhochschulrat*) reveals many similarities and some differences. Most obvi-

ous are the almost identical functions of the two bodies. The main task of the College Council, laid down in the *FHStG*, is validation of courses, award of degrees, and assurance and maintenance of quality in the new sector of higher education. In both cases, they have the main and final responsibility for quality assurance in the non-university sector.

There are strong similarities with respect to the composition of the two bodies. The College Council consists of sixteen members appointed by the Minister of Education. The members of the College Council need a high-ranking theoretical or practical qualification: either a *Habilitation* (second thesis) if they are academics or practical experience of similar rank if they come from the business community. The composition of the bodies reflects that in both cases there was a balance of tasks and functions at stake: both the CNAA and the College Council should represent external demands, but at the same time should also ensure academic strength.

There are equally strong similarities regarding the procedures of approval and validation of courses. *Fachhochschulen* have to submit a precise description of the course, its structure and content, and prove it has sufficient facilities and adequate academic staff. If satisfactory, the course is approved for five years. As with the CNAA, the validation procedures of the College Council are rigorous. Many applicants fail at first submission. It goes without saying that not all applicants took a favourable view of this rigorous approach. But it is equally clear that this insistence on quality is one of the key factors for the success of the *Fachhochschul* sector.

The most important difference between the CNAA and the College Council regards the size of the body and its co-operation with the external community of experts. The CNAA was a large bureaucracy, with the twenty-five members being just the core, and many hundreds of experts from higher education and industry involved through boards and panels. The validation procedure was the main responsibility of the boards and panels. The College Council, on the other hand, only occasionally involves outside members. The members of the body undertake the validation procedure themselves, resulting in a permanent overload.

A comparison between CNAA and College Council at the level of political legitimacy is much more difficult. Here, the different constitutional and legal backgrounds in Britain and Austria and the different traditions in public administration and policy become apparent. The accreditation model sought to change some of these traditions. It is not surprising then that it faced a great deal of opposition. Let us just touch on a few of these points before we finally ask why and how the *Fachhochschul* policy could succeed in spite of this opposition.

A crucial point is the role of the government in higher education in Austria and the UK. Let us first look at the university sectors of both countries before non-university sectors were introduced. They both have traditions of autonomy, although in a very different sense. Austrian universities are state agencies, and academic autonomy is defined as a constitutional right of the individual academic, not of the university as an institution. Rather, the institution is subject to intense legal regulation regarding the design of the curriculum, the admission of students, the employment of academics, the spending of public money, etc. In the British autonomous tradition, there was no 'university law' and no effective legal power to control it.

These different starting points are important if we compare the relationship between the accreditation body and the institutions of the non-university sector in Britain and Austria. Both the CNAA and the College Council were external, non-governmental bodies. In the British case, the validation procedure of the CNAA was a necessary requirement, because the polytechnics were not part of the autonomous tradition and thus were subject to external control. Compared with universities, this was not an increase, but a limitation of autonomy. In Austria, universities never enjoyed the same degree of institutional autonomy as the British ones. In this very different context, the College Council was to relieve the institutions of the non-university sector from legal

control by the government. As a result, *Fachhochschulen* in some respects enjoyed more autonomy than universities.[8]

It was clear that *Fachhochschulen* should be subject to external control. But what kind of control? It was probably the most controversial aspect of the *Fachhochschul* policy that this control was not exercised by the government, but by a non-governmental body of experts. The main issue at stake was: is the College Council a legitimate advocate of public interests? The concept of the College Council was questioned by some on the grounds that it was not democratically legitimised (Mrkvicka & Kaizar 1994). Only a body that resulted directly or at least indirectly from general elections should be allowed to act in the public interest. This was based on the suspicion that all autonomous or intermediate bodies which undermine the clear distinction between the private, self-interested sphere of society and the state as the representation of the general will of the people generally favoured the upper strata of society. Other objections to the College Council were that employers, who were interested in the quality of the graduates, would not trust the judgements of a non-governmental body.

We cannot find a comparable process of policy transfer with respect to the AAC for private universities. In this case, policy-makers used the already existing experience with the first accreditation agency in Austria. Subsequently, we can see a policy transfer in an opposite direction. Many countries are in the process of establishing an accreditation body, and some want to use the Austrian experience. Authorities from countries as different as Switzerland, the Netherlands, Serbia, Macedonia, Canada[9] and Japan have established contacts with the AAC and made inquiries in order to inform their policies.

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8 As mentioned, Austrian universities have their own tradition of academic autonomy. The autonomy of the individual academic, as it is embedded in the Humboldtian tradition, is much stronger in universities than in Fachhochschulen.

9 At present, Canada does not have an accreditation body for private universities.

Appendix

Table 1: Enrolments in the Fachhochschul sector

	1996/1997	1997/1998	1998/1999	1999/2000	2000/2001	2001/2002	2002/2003
Techniques	2100	3065	3948	4974	5943	7213	data
Economy	1347	2304	3339	4337	5085	6077	not
Tourism	306	402	408	396	467	621	available
Human fields			185	270	271	527	at the
Total	**3753**	**5771**	**7880**	**9977**	**11766**	**14438**	moment

Source: Federal Ministry of Education

Table 2: Number of accredited Fachhochschul study courses

Federal state	94/95	95/96	96/97	97/98	98/99	99/00	00/01	01/02	02/03
Burgenland	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	2
Kärnten	0	2	0	2	0	0	3	1	1
Niederösterreich	3	0	1	0	1	2	0	7	3
Oberösterreich	2	1	1	0	1	1	4	5	7
Salzburg	0	2	1	0	1	0	0	3	1
Steiermark	0	4	3	0	2	2	1	5	3
Tirol	0	0	1	2	1	0	2	1	3
Vorarlberg	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1
Wien	2	0	5	1	1	4	1	3	9

Source: Fachhochschul Council

Table 3: Students, new entrants, and graduates of private universities (2001)

	Students			new entrants			graduates		
	female	male	total	female	male	total	female	male	total
Kath.-Theol. Privat-universität	154	172	326	83	49	132	4	8	12
Webster University	177	161	338	74	85	159	36	40	76
International University	84	90	174				23	16	39
Private Universität f. Medizinische Informa-tik u. Technik Tirol	6	13	19	6	13	19	0	0	0
IMADEC University	no information available			no information available			no information available		

Source: Federal Ministry of Education

Table 4: Courses of studies at Private Universities

Theology courses					
Course	**Modus**	**Duration**	**s. hrs**	**Academic degree**	**Private University**
Theology	Undergraduate	10	173	Master of Theology	Katholisch Theologisch Privatuniversität Linz Bethlehemstraße 20 4020 Linz
Independent Religious Education	Undergraduate	11	184	Master of Theology	
Combined Religious Education	Undergraduate	9	108	Master of Theology, provided the dissertation topic chosen is relevant to the subjects offered for examination in Theology	
Licentiate	Licentiate	4	40	Licentiate of Theology	
Doctorate	Doctorate	4	24	Doctor of Theology	
Law, Social Sciences and Economics					
Course	**Modus**	**Duration**	**s. hrs**	**Academic degree**	Private University
International Master of Laws (LL.M.):	Masters	2	46, 4	International Master of Laws (LL.M.):	IMADEC University Handelskai 388 1020 Wien
International MLE	Masters	2	43,2	International MLE	
Executive MBA	Masters	2	46, 4	Executive MBA	
Business Administration	Undergraduate	8	128	Bachelor of Business Administration (B.B.A.)	Webster University Vienna Berchtoldgasse 1 1220 Wien
Business with an emphasis in Business Administration	Undergraduate	8	128	Bachelor of Arts (B.A.)	
Management (without an emphasis):	Undergraduate	8	128	Bachelor of Arts (B.A.)	
Management with an emphasis in					
- International Business	Undergraduate	8	128	Bachelor of Arts (B.A.)	
- Marketing:	Undergraduate	8	128	Bachelor of Arts (B.A.)	
Finance	Graduate	3	36	Master of Arts (M.A.)	
International Business	Graduate	3	36	Master of Arts (M.A.)	
Marketing:	Graduate	3	36	Master of Arts (M.A.)	
Master of Business Administration with emphasis in Graduate					
- Finance	Graduate	4	48 – 57	Master of Business Administration (M.B.A.)	
- Marketing:	Graduate	4	51 – 60	Master of Business Administration (M.B.A.)	
- International Business	Graduate	4	48 – 57	Master of Business Administration (M.B.A.)	
Master of Business Administration (without an emphasis)	Graduate	3	36 – 45	Master of Business Administration (M.B.A.)	
General Business	Undergraduate	8	129	Bachelor of Business Administration (General Business)	The International Private University Mondscheingasse 16 1070 Wien
Management:	Undergraduate	8	129	Bachelor of Business Administration (Management)	
Marketing:	Undergraduate	8	129	Bachelor of Business Administration (Marketing)	
Business Computer Information	Undergraduate	8	129	Bachelor of Business Administration (Business Computer Information)	

Course	**Modus**	**Duration**	**s. hrs**	**Academic degree**	Private University
Master of Business Administration	Graduate	6	45	Master of Business Administration (MBA)	The International Private University Mondscheingasse 16 1070 Wien
Master of International Business	Graduate	4	36	Master of International Business (MIB)	
Advanced Master of Arts in Diplomatic and Strategic Studies	Graduate	6	45	Advanced Master of Arts in Diplomatic and Strategic Studies	
Master of Arts in Diplomatic and Strategic Studies	Graduate	4	36	Master of Arts in Diplomatic and Strategic Studies	
Human Resource Management and Organizational Development	Masterstudium	3	37,5	Master of Science	PEF Consulting für Management Brahmsplatz 3 1040 Wien
Master of Science in Construction Management	Masterstudium	3	37,5	Master of Science	
Master of Business Administration Intra- und Entrepreneurship	Masterstudium	3	37,5	Master of Business Administration	
Information Technology Courses					
Course	**Modus**	**Duration**	**s. hrs**	**Academic degree**	**Private University**
Computer Science (without an emphasis)	Undergraduate	8	128	Bachelor of Science (B.S.)	Webster University Vienna Berchtoldgasse 1 1220 Wien
Computer Science with an emphasis in Information Management	Undergraduate	8	128	Bachelor of Science (B.S.)	
Medizinische Informatik:	Bachelors	6	120	Bachelor of Science	Private Universität für Medizinische Informatik und Technik Tirol Anichstraße 35 6020 Innsbruck
Medizinische Informatik:	Masters	2 – 3	40 – 60	Master of Science	
Medizinische Informatik:	Doctorate	4	37,5	Doctor of Medical Information Technology	
Humanities and Cultural Studies					
Course	Modus	Duration	s. hrs	Academic degree	Private University
International Relations	Undergraduate	8	128	Bachelor of Arts (B.A.)	Webster University Vienna Berchtoldgasse 1 1220 Wien
Psychology	Undergraduate	8	128	Bachelor of Arts (B.A.)	
International Relations	Graduate	3	36	Bachelor of Arts (M.A.)	
Diplomatic Studies	Undergraduate	8	129	Bachelor of Arts (Diplomatic Studies)	The International Private University Mondscheingasse 16 1070 Wien

Source: AAC

Quality Assurance and Accreditation in the Flemish Community of Belgium
Country Report Belgium

Dirk Van Damme[1]

1. Introduction

1.1 Some preliminary remarks

For European readers of this national report two important preliminary remarks have to be made. Since in 1988 education became an autonomous competence of the three Belgian communities (Flemish Community, French-speaking Community, German-speaking Community), the development of educational policies went in separate directions in these communities. In this 'national' report we therefore will only focus on the developments in the Flemish community of Belgium.

At this very moment a new, comprehensive law[2] is in the making in Flanders, implementing the Bologna-Declaration by transforming the degree structure into a bachelor/master-system, introducing a system of accreditation and redefining the relationships between universities and *hogescholen*[3] by establishing so-called 'associations' between them. It is expected that this law will be approved by the Flemish Parliament in April 2003; its actual implementation by the start of bachelor/master-types of programmes is foreseen by the 1st of October 2004. In this report we will take into account the policies and developments this new law will enact. Where appropriate, a clear distinction will be made between the actual situation at this moment and the new situation which we be in place after the new law will have been implemented.

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2 A law of a community of region in Belgium technically is called a 'decree'. We will use the two terms interchangeably.

3 Since there is no satisfactory English translation, we will use the Dutch word hogescholen to indicate the Flemish non-university higher education institutions, which can be compared to their Dutch homologues or the German Fachhochschule.

1.2 A note on definitions

Despite the growth of practices and systems and the increasing public interest in this issue, there is not yet a generally accepted set of concepts and definitions on the international level. Even in Europe concepts and terms as quality assurance, assessment, accreditation, evaluation, etc. are used in a divergent way. In this paper we will use these concepts in the following way. Evaluation is in our view a very broad, generic term that refers to a broad range of practices where the performance of students, professors, programmes, departments, institutions and even entire systems is measured and appreciated. Quality assurance is referred to as a set of practices and schemes that have the objective of assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining and/or improving quality in higher education institutions and programmes. They have the functions both of accountability (including information provision) and improvement. Usually we make a distinction between internal quality assurance practices within programmes and institutions, and external quality assurance schemes operating at a systems level. By assessment we indicate the actual processes of reviewing and judging quality aspects in programmes or institutions. Basically, in internal quality assurance practices this is done by self-evaluation. In external quality assurance schemes by the evaluation activities of panels doing peer-review and site visits. That is the reason why we will label the external quality assurance schemes active in Flanders also as 'visitation schemes', literally translating what their common name in Flemish vocabulary is. Finally, accreditation is defined here as a formal approval of an institution or programme that has been found to meet predetermined and agreed standards, through a process of evaluation, eventually resulting in an accredited status granted to that provider or programme by responsible authorities. In the Flemish system, as in the Netherlands, it are the established quality assurance schemes that provide the evaluation input for the accreditation system.

In Flanders all processes and schemes of quality assurance and accreditation refer to programmes. There is no public system of institutional evaluation or accreditation. Flemish institutions do participate in other, mostly international schemes of institutional evaluation, such as the CRE/EUA institutional evaluation programme or specialised accreditation schemes provided by bodies such as ABET or EQUIS, but these activities are completely voluntary and based on the free initiative of institutions. They fall outside the scope of this report, which only deals with public, i. e. state controlled or recognised, schemes.

In Flanders, higher education institutions and programmes are recognised by law. This means that in the higher education laws the institutions are listed, as well as the disciplines in which each of them can offer programmes. No other institutions can call themselves 'universities' that those in that list and no other institutions can award officially recognised degrees or diplomas. This kind of *ex ante* 'licensing' of institutions and programmes is not (yet) linked to a system of quality assurance. Under the current legal provisions the government actually has the power to take sanctions after a clearly negative quality assessment and remove the programme from the recognised list, but in practice this has not happened yet. The introduction of accreditation will change this, as we shall describe in the section of this report on accreditation.

The new higher education law also includes a system of registration of non-recognised institutions. Other providers than the state recognised ones will be able to get themselves registered and under certain conditions will be in the possibility to present themselves to accreditation. Positive accreditation also will lead to recognition of their programmes and degrees in the bachelor/master degree system, without however resulting in other consequences such as funding.

1.3 Structure of the report

After a general description of the Flemish higher education system in section 2, we will describe the three evaluation schemes under operation or under development in Flanders in section 3. There are two existing schemes, designated as external quality assurance or visitation schemes. The first and the oldest addresses the university sector; the second the *hogescholen* sector, but they are very similar in design and functions. In the new higher education law an accreditation system is developed on top of the existing quality assurance schemes. That accreditation system will be developed together with the Netherlands and is linked to the introduction of the bachelors'/masters' degree system from 2004 onwards. In section 4 we will try to analyse the systems' logic and rationales. In section 5 the international features of the evaluation schemes and systems will be described. And, finally, section 6 deals with some other practices and activities of evaluation in the Flemish higher education system.

2. The Flemish higher education system

2.1 Institutions

Flanders has a binary system of higher education and chooses to keep a binary divide, at least regarding institutions and to a certain extent also regarding programmes. In Flanders, which has a population of nearly 6 million, there are six universities, of which two – Ghent and Leuven – are comprehensive, full-fledged universities with approximately 25.000 students, another two – Brussels and Antwerp[4] – are middle-sized with around 10.000 students, and finally there is a small – the University Centre of Limburg – and a very small university college. In line with the Humboldtian tradition prevalent on the European continent Flemish universities integrate teaching and research. Research, especially fundamental research, is assigned to the universities and, a few specialised institutions excepted, there are no major public funded research institutes outside the universities.

After a major operation of mergers in the mid-nineties, there are now some 23 *hogescholen* in Flanders, but mergers still are going on. The size of these *hogescholen* varies from a few thousand to 11.000 students. The mission of *hogescholen* basically is teaching, in more professionally and vocationally oriented programmes than those at universities, but they are also active in applied research and development. Outside the higher education sector, some adult education centres also can organise part-time programmes and award degrees which nearly are similar to those of *hogescholen*, but on their status and their eventual integration in the higher education sector there is a debate going on.

All higher education institutions are fully recognised by government. Their educational and degree-awarding capacities are defined by law and are therefore restricted. In general however, Flemish higher education institutions have a comparably high amount of autonomy on the basis of the legislation enacted in the 1990s. Although their legal position varies from 'public' – i. e. established by public authorities – to 'private' – i. e. established by private bodies such as the Church –, with some mixed forms in between, all institutions are treated equally by law, are

4 Antwerp University actually is a merger of three independent university centres; the Parliamentary Act endorsing the merger is expected for spring 2003.

funded according to the same principles and rules and have equal degree-awarding capacities. Institutions differ from each other mainly in their philosophical backgrounds, are developing their own profile and have a restricted territorial capacity and therefore also a regional identity, but on the whole differences among them are less significant than in other European countries. There are no provisions yet for for-profit institutions or new providers to enter the publicly defined and delineated higher education space in Flanders, although under the new law they can get their programmes accredited under certain conditions.

2.2 Programmes and degrees[5]

As said, in the Flemish higher education system the universities and *hogescholen* recognised by the state are listed in the relevant laws. These laws also list the disciplinary domains of study in which each institution can offer programmes and award degrees. The actual programmes and degrees offered are not listed themselves in the law, but in a government act. All state recognised programmes thus can award official degrees, which are fully recognised by the state.

Whereas the institutional landscape can be described as binary, that of the programmes is of a 'ternary' nature, meaning that there are three categories of programmes. At the moment *hogescholen* can offer three-year professionally and vocationally oriented programmes, leading to a degree of „geaggregeerde". These so-called 'one-cycle' programmes prepare students for middle-rank professions in commerce, nursing, teaching, industry, applied arts, social work, etc. *Hogescholen* also offer four-year, 'two cycle' programmes, which are of a more scientific and academic nature and lead to „licentiaat" qualifications, which are similar or sometimes even completely equivalent to university degrees.

University programmes also are organised on a two-cycle system, with an intermediate „kandidatuur" qualification after two (in some cases three) years of study, and a second-cycle of another two of more years of study, resulting in a degree of „licentiaat" or appropriate disciplinary titles (medical doctor, engineer, pharmacist, etc.). University degrees thus are obtained after a nominal period of study which ranges from minimal four year to maximum seven (medical doctor).

Hogescholen and especially universities also have post-initial programmes which are of a specialised nature or of a more broadening, generalising nature. Doctoral training programmes and doctoral degrees are awarded only by universities.

According to the new law,[6] higher education programmes will be organised in a bachelors'/masters' degree system from the academic year 2004-05 onwards. After successful completion of a programme of three years (180 ECTS-points), a student will be awarded a bachelors' degree. In this first degree a distinction will be made between a professional and an academic bachelors' degree, the first being awarded by *hogescholen*, the second by universities and, in the framework of an 'association', also by *hogescholen*. Studies leading to a masters' degree will be of minimal one year and always will be academic, integrating scientific education, research and a masters' dissertation, but professional objectives can have their place as well. Masters' degrees will be awarded by universities and, in the framework of an 'association' also by *hogescholen*. Thus, 'associations' serve to strengthen the research base in the *hogescholen* for academic bachelors' and masters' programmes by integrating the research activities of *hogescholen* into those of universities.

5 An overview of the current Flemish higher education degree system is charted in Appendix 1. For a detailed list of qualifications and degrees in Flemish higher education, see: Ministerie, 2001.

6 The programme and degree structure after implementation of the new law is charted in Appendix 2.

Bridging courses will provide in opportunities for students with professional bachelors' degrees to enter masters' programmes.

2.3 Students, access, success and educational attainment of the population

In the current academic year 2002-2003 the universities and *hogescholen* together have enrolled 157.898 students in initial programmes (Ministerie, 2001a, 2002a, 2002b), of which 71.987 are male and 85.911 (54,41%) are female. Universities count 56.586 (35,84%) students; *hogescholen* have 101.312 (64,16%) students, divided between 75.451 (47,78%) for the three-year programmes and 25.861 (16,38%) for the 'two-cycle' four-year programmes. The gender distribution ranges from 57,90% females in the three-year programmes in *hogescholen*, 55,42% in university programmes to 42,01% in four-year *hogeschool* programmes. *Hogescholen*, who had 93.976 students in 1996-1997, have grown by 7,8% in six years.[7] In the same period universities remained more or less stable. Due to demographic factors, the growth of student numbers in higher education seems to approach its limits. Seen from a longer time-perspective however, this growth is enormous: in 1960-61 *hogescholen* counted 20.624 students and universities 12.195. In forty years the massification of higher education participation led to a rise in student numbers of almost 500%![8]

Looking at those students who in October 2002 entered higher education for the first time after graduating from secondary school,[9] we count 26.376 (67,17%) in *hogescholen* and 12.893 (32,83%) in universities, 39.269 in total in the current academic year. More than half (53,79%) of these students choose three-year programmes. Between 1996 en 2001, the number of first-time students in universities dropped with 10,80%, that in *hogescholen* rose with 5,34%.

The net entry rate to higher education is 70% (1999) in Flanders, 64% for boys and 75% for girls (OECD, 2002). In comparative perspective, this is rather high and shows the high participation to higher education among the young age cohorts. Indeed, Flemish higher education traditionally is a very open and accessible system, with no entry restrictions except for medicine, civil engineering and arts where entry examinations apply. Low entrance fees and study grants for disadvantaged students further increase the accessibility of Flemish *hogescholen* and universities. There is, however, a social divide between the two types of institutions with lower-class students preferring *hogeschool*-programmes. Flemish higher education also witnesses a kind of 'waterfall'-system whereby many students first try university programmes and, when failing, try in *hogeschool*-programmes.

The open character of Flemish higher education has its drawback in the massive nature of first-year teaching and the very low success rates in the first year. In *hogescholen* and universities alike, newcomers have an average success-rate of approximately 48%, but there are differences between disciplines. For first-year students who repeat their year in the same or another programme, the average success rate is higher (approximately 50%). In the second and further years the success rate rises to 90%. In the non-selective Flemish higher education system, succeeding in the first year holds the key to a higher education degree. The overall survival rate, as defined by the OECD, in Flanders is 60% for the tertiary type-A (four-year) programmes and 88% for the type-B (three-year) programmes, compared to a OECD country mean of 70 and 77 respectively.

Each year Flemish universities and *hogescholen* together award some 30.500 initial degrees, more of half for one-cycle programmes. Furthermore, almost 4000 post-initial degrees are awarded,

7 Due to different counting procedures since 1999 there is a very slight error in these evolutionary data.
8 For further analysis, see: Verhoeven, 1995.
9 Called 'generation-students' in Flemish higher education statistics.

mostly by universities. According to OECD statistics, Belgium[10] is a country with a highly qualified population (OECD, 2002). Of the 25-64-years 27% holds a higher education degree (15% type-B and 12% type-A or higher), compared with an OECD-mean of 23%. In the younger age-cohorts of the 25-34-years olds this figure rises to 36% (19% and 17% respectively), against an OECD mean of 28%.

2.4 Qualifications on the labour market

In Belgium, as in most continental-European countries, there is no general system of professional accreditation. This means that higher education degrees and qualifications normally give entry into the corresponding professions. Some organised professions, such as medical doctors, medical specialists, accountants or lawyers, have developed specific additional training systems, to which graduates have to comply in order to enter the profession. In recent years this phenomenon becomes more widespread as more and more professions tend to impose additional requirements for higher education graduates. Recently, such is the case for example for accountants and psychotherapists.

In general, the labour market position of Flemish higher education graduates is satisfactory to good. There are important differences between the disciplines and the economic conjuncture has a powerful influence on this, but overall the labour market seems to absorb graduates from Flemish higher education institutions rather well. Especially in the public sector, but to a great extent also in the private sector, the hierarchical degree system is mirrored in the jobs and wages hierarchy. Because of the open and free entry to higher education, there are several disciplines in which there is a mismatch between supply and demand on the skilled labour market. Clear examples of this are shortages in engineers, natural sciences in general, or nurses. The oversupply of medical doctors in the nineties led to the establishment of an entrance examination that limited the number of students and, after seven years, the number of graduates.

2.5 Governance and stakeholders

As said, Flemish higher education institutions, also those which derive their powers directly from government, have a comparably high autonomy. Autonomy, deregulation, decentralisation and quality were the key-words of the legislative and policy developments in the 1990s. Quality and autonomy are seen as intrinsically linked. The steering by the Flemish government concentrates mainly on the general regulatory framework, decisions regarding planning of the supply of programmes by institutions, and funding. The ministry also has a direct representative in all institutions and monitors the results of quality reviews and the evolution of financial and other quantitative indicators. Finally, the state tries to influence institutional policies by different forms of programmes and incentive funding, for example in the field of innovation of teaching and learning processes. Despite the high autonomy, the state still exerts a strong influence on institutions (Van Heffen a.o., 1999). Because the nature of Belgian society and polity as consensual and pacification-oriented, there are intensive contacts and dialogues between the institutions and policy-makers.

10 In these figures OECD makes no differentiation between the Flemish community of Belgium and other parts of the country.

The institutions join forces in sector associations, namely VLIR (the Flemish inter-university council) and VLHORA (the Flemish council of *hogescholen*). Because of institutional autonomy, together with the political will to promote cooperation among institutions and to control divergences in the system, these associations have a powerful impact on policy-making processes. Governments expect that institutions settle their disputes among themselves and advance policies based on a consensus. Governments also want to protect exchangeability of courses and programmes and inter-institutional mobility of students, so they are interested in cooperation and consensus among institutions. So, these associations act as mediators between the institutions on the one hand and the state and stakeholders in society on the other. Important in this is that these associations also function as quality assurance agencies. Besides these sector associations, there also are other organisations with an official advisory capacity, such as the VLOR (the general Flemish education council), where representatives of personnel/unions, employers, students and parents are represented, and SERV (the Flemish social and economic council) where social partners are present.

There is a huge interest among stakeholders and social pressure-groups in higher education and its development. Especially issues dealing with access, success and equity in higher education are high on the agenda of political parties, unions and various organisation in civil society. Politicians and various organisations also can be mobilised by the ambitions and aspirations of institutions in their region. Other powerful issues regarding higher education in the political and public domain are: funding, internationalisation, quality, flexibility and innovation, and lifelong learning.

3. Quality assurance and accreditation systems

3.1 Introduction

In this section, the systems of evaluation applicable to higher education in Flanders will be described. In the first instance the quality assurance systems of universities and *hogescholen* will be analysed. Strictly speaking, these schemes are not to be labelled accreditation, since they do not lead (yet) to a formal judgment leading to any kind of formal approval process. Next, the newly developed accreditation system will be analysed. This will be put in place in the next years on the basis of the new legislative framework and in close cooperation with the Netherlands. In fact, these are not two separate systems; the accreditation system build further on the existing quality assurance schemes already in place.

3.2 Quality assurance of university programmes: the VLIR quality assessment scheme

Origins and development

From the late eighties onwards, quality became a central preoccupation in higher education in various countries. The Flemish universities particularly were influenced and challenged by the development of a system of external quality assurance in the Netherlands since 1989. The 'Dutch model' of quality assurance of university programmes, based on self-regulation and aiming at improvement, was inspirational for Flemish university leaders. Flemish peers were invited to join

Dutch panels, and, from 1990 onwards, Flemish universities started to participate in the Dutch system of 'visitations', organised by the Dutch rectors' conference, the VSNU. Within the Flemish rectors' conference, the VLIR, plans were made to start up a similar system of quality visits by independent teams of peers. In 1992, an agreement between VLIR and VSNU made joint Flemish-Dutch visitations possible. In the meantime, the important university decree of 1991 introduced the legal basis and obligation for the Flemish universities to organise the external quality assurance system, coordinated by the VLIR. In exchange for autonomy and on the basis of a negotiated agreement, the state asked the universities tot jointly set up a system of external quality assurance of programmes aiming both at improvement and accountability.

The VLIR quality assurance system serves a number of goals:

- Quality improvement: the process of external assessment builds on and reinforces the internal quality assurance mechanisms within institutions and departments; review panels point to weaknesses of programmes and formulate recommendations to remedy or improve;
- Accountability: programmes and institutions, which have autonomy, rely on public trust and receive public funding, have to be accountable to the state and the general public; accountability is realised by providing reliable information on the quality of study programmes;
- Information: the quality assurance system provide information to students, families, the press and the general public and promotes the transparency of the system; in the second round this information is presented in a comparative way in order to further increase transparency;
- Benchmarking: quality assurance is seen as a mechanism to position the programmes and institutions to comparable programmes and to generally accepted standards; in the second round this benchmarking function is improved by the comparative approach and the use of minimal standards;
- Optimalisation of the supply side of the higher education system: outcomes of the VLIR quality assurance system are not yet used in any other policy device, but play a role in policy debates regarding inter-institutional rationalisation of the supply of programmes.

Basically, the VLIR visitations are assessments of programmes by an independent panel of 'peers'. The universities, assembled in the VLIR, decide on the composition of the panel, but certain general rules apply in this. The visitation, as exponent of the external quality assurance, build on the internal quality assurance arrangements within institutions. The basis of the evaluation is the self-assessment report, which each individual programme has to compile, on the basis of a detailed questionnaire provided by the VLIR. During a site visit of several days the panel critically reviews the programme, by questioning the self-assessment report, by critically analysing relevant documentation, and by interviewing all relevant actors and stakeholders. The findings of the panel are then published in the visitation report. The responsibility then returns to the programme directors in the university that have to give a follow-up to the visitation and to report on the actual decisions and actions they take in order to improve the programme.

This assessment is carried out every eight years, but the first round was in fact carried out over a total period of ten years. Between 1991 and 2001 all university programmes – except the post-initial ones – were reviewed in this system of 'visitations' by panels of peers, using a prescribed protocol developed by the VLIR. At several moments evaluations have been made of the quality assurance system of the Flemish universities. In 1995 Flemish tertiary education was evaluated by a team of OECD experts (Ministerie, 1996). The report contained several critical remarks regarding the quality assurance system. In 1996 an international commission instituted by the VLIR evaluated internal quality assurance arrangements for scientific research in the Flemish universi-

ties. Although not focusing directly in the system of visitations, the report 'Van Duinen', named after the chairperson of the commission, encouraged the quality culture in Flemish universities to a great extent (Ministerie, 1997). In 1997, the department of education set up an international review team, chaired by the Dutch inspector Mertens. This commission had to audit the quality assurance system at place for the programmes at Flemish universities. The basis for this was laid down in the university decree of 1991, where the 'meta-evaluation' of the quality assurance system was assigned to the government. The commission's report was on the whole positive of the system, but it also pointed at some of its weaknesses (Mertens a.o., 1998). Finally, in 1997 the VLIR carried out an evaluation of the protocols and methodologies of the quality assurance system itself. The report pointed at a number of elements in the system that could be approved (VLIR, 1998; Van Lindthout, 1998). An important discussion in the subsequent debates concerned the possibility of quantification of quality indicators. In the framework of a larger process of 'optimalisation' of the Flemish university area, led by the special commissioner of the minister Dillemans, a joint working group of the government and university representatives, proposed a scheme of quantifiable quality indicators that could be used to provide more transparency in the quality reports and eventually also to compare programmes on these quality indicators.

On the basis of these evaluations and reports and on the subsequent internal discussions, the VLIR changed the visitations system and its protocol quite drastically. For the so-called 'second round', starting in 2002, a new handbook was published. The main changes in the system were:

- The use of quantification in quality judgements: each of the 17 quality aspects and indicators now are judged on a scale from 'A' to 'E'; in the report comparative tables are included with the scores of the programmes under review on each of the indicators;
- The inclusion of the 'research base' on which the programmes under review rely, as one of the quality aspects and indicators.
- The explicit formulation of a frame of reference by the expert panels and the presentation of this frame of reference to the programmes that are going to be assessed.

At the moment that the second round started, plans became more concrete regarding the establishment of an accreditation system in Flanders. It is to be expected that the introduction of accreditation on top of the existing quality assurance arrangements will lead to further adjustments to the protocols and methodologies of the visitation scheme for the Flemish universities.

Descriptors

In this section the formal characteristics of the quality assurance scheme for the Flemish universities, coordinated by the VLIR, will be described, using the analytical framework put forward by the project coordinators. The present protocol, used for the 'second round' of visitations, will be the basis, but when describing new features of the current protocol, discussions and recent changes will be clarified.

Range:

- Types, subjects & disciplines: According to the law of 1991 and VLIR-regulations, all programmes at the Flemish universities, leading to diplomas and degrees of the first and second cycle have to be evaluated. At this moment, all programmes have been visited in the first round. In most cases individual disciplines are the object of the quality assessment, but in some cases disciplines that have many similarities are grouped in one assessment. For the moment the programmes of the so-called 'third cycle', i. e. the post-initial programmes, are not included in the scheme, but plans are under way to include them in the future. Also,

the post-initial teacher training programmes – followed by students who want to become a secondary school teacher after having completed a specific disciplinary degree – are not yet assessed, but this is planned to happen in the following year.

- Geography: The six universities of the Flemish Community of Belgium fall under the VLIR-scheme. As stated in the law of 1991, they are obliged to assess their programmes and to do it on an inter-university basis, under coordination of the VLIR. There have been several attempts to broaden the quality assurance scheme to a more international approach. In some cases joint assessments have been set up with the Netherlands, under a VLIR-VSNU agreement. In these cases all Dutch and Flemish programmes in a specific discipline were assessed at the same time by the same panel. The VLIR and VSNU protocols basically are the same and highly compatible, but sometimes some minor adjustments had to be made. The VLIR-protocol for the second round is slightly more different from the Dutch one than that used in the first round. In exceptional cases, for disciplines with very few programmes, such as veterinary sciences, participation in an international quality assessment can be used as substitute for a Flemish visitation. A Flemish physics programmes joined the cross-border quality assessment project together with Dutch and German programmes in 2000.
- Functions: Strictly speaking, the VLIR visitations scheme is addressing only educational programmes of Flemish universities; research is not directly evaluated. Reality however is a bit more complex and shifting. In the past years, the Flemish universities are discussing and negotiating specific quality assurance arrangement for their research function (Spruyt, 2002). There is no parallel visitation scheme for research as is the case in the Netherlands. Emphasis is given to the internal quality assurance systems within universities, but in several disciplines bibliometric analysis have been carried out and the research output gradually is taken into account in several research funding mechanisms. Reference is already made to the audit of quality assurance mechanisms of research in Flemish universities by the commission 'Van Duinen' in 1996. When evaluating the first round of visitations of programmes in 1997, the VLIR discussed the relationship between quality assurance of programmes and quality assurance of research. The outcome of this discussion was that, from the second round onwards, research would not be directly assessed in the visitation scheme, but that the visitation would have a closer look at the degree to which the academic programme was based upon recent scientific research. The 'research base' of programmes thus has become a separate quality aspect evaluated in visitations from the second round onwards, started in 2002. Data regarding the research output of staff involved in programmes, for example, now are integrated in the quality indicators assessed in a visitation.

Actors:

- Actors and institutions: The main actors in the process of quality assurance in the Flemish universities are:
  - In the university decree of 1991, the *state* has included a legal obligation for the universities to establish a coordinated system of quality assurance and to continuously review and monitor the system. The state has the legal capacity to formally induce sanctions when a visitation report leads to a worrying conclusion. The Flemish government also has the capacity to do a meta-evaluation of the total system of internal and external quality assurance in Flemish universities, as has been done by the commission Mertens in 1997-98. In its annual reports on the state of higher education, the department of

education informs the Parliament and the general public on quality assurance of universities and *hogescholen*.

- The association of universities, the *VLIR*, is legally responsible for organising and monitoring the quality assurance scheme. The VLIR is established by law in 1974, but is a private association. It has a legal capacity to advice public policies and to promote co-operation between universities. Quality assurance is one of the main tasks of the VLIR. The roles of the VLIR are to design the system, to develop and to continuously update the protocols and guidelines, to appoint the expert panels, to receive the reports of the panels, to publish them, etc.
- The institutions, that individually are responsible for the quality of their programmes and that have the legal obligation to engage in internal quality assurance mechanisms and to participate in external quality assessments. The institutions are also collectively responsible, since they own the system jointly and have to collaborate in the VLIR to organise the visitation system and to publish the results. Each of the universities has what is called an 'institutional coordinator' for the visitation system. They regularly meet and discuss the development of the system. Finally, the institutions are responsible for the follow-up to a visitation report. They have to report on the follow-up in their annual reports.
- The programme directors within the institutions, who organise and monitor the programmes within faculties and departments and are therefore responsible and accountable for their quality within the institutions. Each university has different ways to organise this, but most have committees consisting of professors, other teaching staff and students, that form together the responsible body for the organisation and monitoring of a specific programme. These committees are also held responsible for the organisation of the internal quality assurance. In some universities they are assisted by specific quality coordinators at the level of faculties or departments. For each self-assessment and visitation a responsible coordinator is appointed among the academic staff within the institution, who is responsible for the organisation of the self-assessment and the visitation. The programme directors also are responsible for the organisation of the follow-up to the visitation report.

▪ Ownership: The ownership of the visitation system clearly is given to the universities collectively. The VLIR, as the association of universities, owns and is responsible for the visitation system on behalf of the institutions. This is a deliberate choice, as was the case in the Netherlands. The idea that formed the basis of the 'Dutch model' in quality assurance, was and is that external quality assurance is the collective responsibility of the university sector and that quality assurance has to be placed in a perspective of self-regulation of a sector. When reviewing the newly established accreditation system, we will point to recent discussions regarding self-regulation and independence of quality assurance from the institutions and the sector. Also in the new law the responsibility for quality assurance is given to the institutions, associated in the VLIR.

▪ Organisation: As has been said, the visitation system of the universities is owned and organised by the VLIR, the Flemish inter-university council. Regarding the organisation of the visitation system, the following bodies and components of the VLIR are relevant:

- The Council: all university rectors and a second representative, except for the two small universities, meet regularly in the Council. This is the highest body in the VLIR and is responsible for all decisions. In the field of quality assurance the Council approves the visitation protocol, decides on the calendar of the visitations, appoints the visitation

panels, etc. After a visitation report is finished, the panel hands it over to the chairperson of the Council.

- The VLIR has several standing working-groups, with representatives of universities, who define the protocol of the visitation system, monitor the functioning of the system and discuss its improvement.
- The VLIR has nominated a university professor as special administrator for the management of the visitation system. He inaugurates the visitation panel, instructs them in the visitation protocol, supervises the work of the quality assurance secretariat, etc. He meets regularly with the institutional coordinators of the universities.
- The secretariat of the VLIR, especially its quality assurance section, is responsible for the practical organisation of the visitations. To each panel one of its staff members is assigned, who also is responsible for editing the visitation report. The reports are published on the VLIR website.

▪ Reviewers:

- The VLIR nominates a *panel* of independent external experts that does the visitations in the universities participating in a disciplinary review. Normally a panel consists of four peers from the same discipline, including the chairperson, and an educational expert. The peers mostly are academics, but regularly someone coming from the relevant professional field is also included. The profile of the experts invited to join a panel is that they must have a good scientific record, an insight into the discipline and the educational design of the disciplinary programmes and a capability for a sound and critical judgement.
- The main tasks of the review panel are: (i) to give a judgment on the various quality aspects and indicators listed in the VLIR-protocol;[11] in the new protocol for the second round of visitations, this also implies giving a letter mark to each of the quality aspects for each of the reviewed programmes; (ii) to identify the quality aspects that could be improved and to give recommendations to the programme directors on quality improvement; (iii) to compare the programmes under review in the form of descriptive comparisons and comparative tables with letter marks for each of the quality aspects; (iv) to inform the academic community, students and the general public of their findings and recommendations by publishing the visitation report.
- There are certain rules that have to be taken into account when composing the visitation panel. At least one, normally two, experts come from abroad, in order to guarantee the international dimension. The chairperson may not have in the present or in the past any links whatsoever with one of the institutions participating in the review. For the other members, this restriction is less severe, but when a panel member does have a certain link with one of the institutions under review, he remains absent during that specific visit.
- The composition of the panel is decided by consensus in the VLIR-council, on the basis of proposals made by the programme directors. The nomination procedure makes it possible that a certain person, proposed by one of the institutions, is refuted by another, but overall the independence and critical nature of the panel members is guaranteed.
- One of the critical aspects of the VLIR visitation system, according to several of the evaluations, is the recruitment of reviewers. Although many academics still see participation to a quality assessment panel as a part of their professional responsibilities and feel honoured by the invitation, in some areas it becomes more and more difficult to con-

11 In Appendix 3 the seventeen quality aspects and indicators used in the VLIR visitation scheme, are listed.

vince experts to devote a large amount of time and energy to this kind of activity. There is also a specific issue regarding retired academic personnel, who do have the time but lack some of the contemporary insights into the development of their discipline and the necessary innovations in teaching and learning practices.

- Customers and stakeholders: Of course, not only university administrators, academic staff, reviewers and VLIR-personnel are involved in the visitation system. The following stakeholders also play an important role:
  - Students and graduates: In Flemish universities students play an active role in the management and quality monitoring of study programmes, although the actual participation of students in internal quality assurance processes sometimes is problematic. As already said, in most universities students are represented in the committees that are responsible for programmes and their quality assurance. They are included in the panels, set up by faculties and departments, to do the self-assessment. During the actual visitation process, an important period of the time of the panel is allocated to talks with students and graduates. Although not done systematically, most self-assessments include a survey of graduates, focusing on their employment and their critical feedback. Student representatives generally push programme directors and programme committees to critically take into account the findings of visitation reports into improvement or remedial actions.
  - Parents: Parents are not addressed or affected by internal or external quality assurance processes in Flemish universities.
  - Social partners: Some self-assessment reports, especially in disciplines with a strong relationship to the professional labour market and professional associations, give attention to the opinions of socio-economic stakeholders. When this is the case, opportunities are given to employers to express their criticisms, demands and expectations regarding the study programmes and their graduates. Trade unions are involved in this only occasionally.

Rules and regulations:

- General rules and legal regulations: The basic regulatory framework for the VLIR visitation system consists on the one hand of the relevant articles in the law on universities of 12 June 1991, namely articles 122 to 124, and of VLIR-decisions and regulations, laid down in a protocol and handbook, on the other hand. In the new law on higher education the legal framework of quality assurance basically will remain the same, but it is supplemented by accreditation, dealt with further in this report. Essentially, the regulatory framework includes the following elements:
  - The universities have the responsibility for the internal and external quality assurance. The external quality assurance of study programmes is done inter-institutionally and is coordinated by the VLIR. The external quality assurance is compulsory for all study programmes and disciplines.
  - Starting-point of any quality review is the self-assessment carried out by each programme individually. A panel of independent experts visits each of the programmes and carries out a critical quality review.
  - A report stating the findings of the review panel is published by the VLIR. Nowadays, publication is on paper and on the VLIR-website.
  - Follow-up of the report is the responsibility of the programme and the institution, that has to give an account of its follow-up actions in the annual report of the university.

The VLIR-guidelines concern mainly the operational management of the assessment process. Procedures and guideline are written down in a VLIR-protocol and handbook.

- Financing: Universities pay for the cost of the VLIR quality assurance system. This cost is not included in the normal funding of the VLIR, which consists of a fixed percentage of what universities receive as basic funding from the state, but is yearly calculated based on the actual visitations that have to take place. The permanent VLIR staff in the quality assurance section also is financed via this system. Besides staff costs and operational expenses for the site visits, the remuneration of the experts is the main charge.
- Stages of the procedure and their duration: Four main phases can be distinguished in a process of quality assessment within the VLIR visitation scheme:
  - The first phase can be seen as a preparatory phase, but nevertheless is very important. On several levels of the visitation system, the review process is prepared. Firstly, within the VLIR, the process is planned and the review panel appointed. More important is, secondly, the preparatory work within the programme. A responsible committee is appointed that starts the work on the *self-assessment report*. Following the rules and guidelines laid down in the VLIR-protocol, a questionnaire is designed and answered by the academic, administrative and technical staff, students, graduates and representatives of the labour market and professional stakeholders. The findings and the critical self-analysis of the programme directors are then integrated in a self-assessment report. This report serves three main functions: (i) providing an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the programme in order to stimulate the internal quality assurance processes, (ii) preparing all people involved internally in the management of the programme for the visitation by the review panel, (iii) presenting all necessary information to the review panel. The self-assessment report has to go in depth into all of the quality aspects and indicators asked by the VLIR protocol. The programme directors are instructed and guided by the VLIR staff in the design and editing of the report. Thirdly, the review panel is installed by the VLIR and meets several times to prepare the site visits. One of the crucial things to do at that moment, is to define a common frame of reference by which the review panel will interpret and critically analyse the information and on the basis of which its judgements will be taken. In general, this phase has a duration of one year.
  - The second phase is that where the actual site visit of the review panel takes place. Normally, a visit takes two days and a half. During these days, the panel conducts interviews with the categories of personnel and students involved with or affected by the programme under review. These interviews concern topics that the panel finds relevant on the basis of their analysis of the self-assessment report, the documentation provided (samples of dissertations, coursework, examination questions, etc.). At the end of the visit, the panel gives an oral report to the committee that has prepared the visitation and people from the management of the faculty and university. The total duration of this phase depends of the number of programmes under review in one visitation. Normally, visits to the various institutions are planned within a rather short time period.
  - The third phase consists of the publication of the report. The chairperson of the review panel hands over the report to the VLIR-chairperson. The press is informed and the report is published both on the internet and on paper. A visitation report has reports on each of the programmes reviewed and a general, comparative report. For each of the quality aspects and indicators the conclusions and recommendations of the panel are given. The publication of the report follows mostly after four months after the last visit

by the review panel, time that is necessary to write the report and to incorporate the feedback of the reviewers on draft versions.

- Finally, the fourth phase is that of the follow-up by the programme directors within each of the institutions. With regard to the improvement function of the VLIR visitation system, the quality assessment process is a continuous process that has its focus internally within the institution. The institution has a legal obligation to reflect on the outcomes and recommendations listed in the report and to give an account of the actions that it has taken.

- Rules for objection: There are no formal rules for objection or appeal within the procedures of the VLIR visitation system. However, since it is a self-regulated process, driven and monitored by the universities themselves, there are always opportunities for raise objections against whatever part of the process or procedure. There are also in-built elements in the procedures that prevent formal objections. The review panel is chosen according to the proposals of the various programmes and nominated by the VLIR Council by consensus. During their site visit, the review panel devotes a lot of attention to listen to the programme directors and stakeholders involved and comes to a conclusion only after hearing counter-arguments. Drafts of the final report – only of the chapter referring to the specific programme, not of the chapters dealing with the other nor of the comparative part – are sent to the programme directors, which can correct mistakes. It is not felt that these practices jeopardise the independent and critical judgements of the review panels, but they do further the acceptance of the results of a visitation by the academic community as a whole and the departments and programmes involved in a specific review.
- Rules for information distribution: As said, the visitation report is published both on paper and on the VLIR website. A press paper is sent to the press, summarising the main findings and recommendations of the report. All departments and universities involved receive a number of reports, but additional copies can be bought. The report is also sent to the minister and the department of education.
- Links with accreditation: The accreditation system in development in Flanders will be described in more detail in section 4 of this paper. In essence, the idea is that the visitation system of the VLIR 'feeds in' into the accreditation system. Accreditation is meant as an independent formal decision, made by the Dutch-Flemish accreditation agency, on the basis of the judgements made by the visitation panels and published in their report.

Implementation of rules and regulations:

- Practical application of rules and regulations: The rules and regulations governing the VLIR visitation scheme, normally are applied without major problems. Rules and regulations have been negotiate and agreed with the universities and major stakeholders, so that they are applied by consent. The most frequent practical problems have to do with the recruitment of reviewers.
- Financial constraints: The financial basis of the system is rather small, because the universities want to control the cost of quality assurance. Rising costs for paying reviewers, who receive only a symbolic remuneration and no 'commercial' fee, put some pressure on the financial basis.
- Time frames: Overall, the timing of the various stages of the procedures is well respected. Programmes take care in delivering self-assessment reports in time. Some prolongation of the total process may arise from the final editing of visitation reports.

4. Quality assurance of hogeschool programmes: the VLHORA quality assessment scheme

4.1 Origins and development

The *hogescholen* in the Flemish Community have developed and introduced a quality assurance scheme which is highly comparable to that of the universities and of the Dutch *hogescholen*. Because of the many similarities with the VLIR scheme, not all of its features will be described as extensively.

The Flemish *hogescholen* sector was drastically reformed in the mid-nineties. The decree of 1994 realised not only a major process of mergers between institutions, but also an important reorganisation of the management of institutions and the sector itself, much to the example of the university sector. Among many other things, the decree thus also introduced a system of quality assurance comparable to and compatible with that for the universities. This means that the internal and external quality assurance were devolved to the responsibility of the institutions. However, a period of transition was built in, during which the old system of government-driven inspections for the three-year programmes was continued. Historically, these three-year programmes developed from embedded in a secondary school context and policy framework into the higher education system and therefore had an established system of quality assurance via inspections. Finally, this system was discontinued by a decree of 2000. From that moment on, the *hogescholen* sector itself had full responsibility over the external quality assurance system, just as the universities. The council of *hogescholen*, the VLHORA, just as the VLIR for the universities, got a coordinating role.

In the second half of the 90s, there were a lot of initiatives and developments regarding internal and external quality assurance in the Flemish *hogescholen*. Models from the corporate sector, such as the ISO-9000 scheme and EFQM-inspired models, were adapted and implemented. They proved useful instruments especially for internal quality assurance within the institutions, but for the external quality assessment system the sector had to develop its own model on the basis of various experiences and influential examples. The VLHORA established a working group on quality assurance in 2000, which developed a conceptual framework, a protocol, an operational set of procedures and a timetable for the visitations that have to be finished by 2008.

As in the VLIR system, the VLHORA quality assessment scheme focuses on programmes or clusters of programmes. Joint visitations of related university and *hogeschool* programmes are possible. Assessments of programmes will be done by panels of external experts, who provide a public report of their findings. The panels consist of educational experts and representatives from the professional and labour market stakeholders. The process starts with a self-assessment report. During the site visit the panel of experts critically examines the self-assessment report against the reality it faces and against the expectations of the professional and social context.

According to the VLHORA, the external quality assurance scheme serves the following basic functions (Van Dingenen & Van de Velde, 2002):

- Quality control: the scheme helps institutions and programmes to secure good practices, to guarantee continuity and to assure the external world of their quality;
- Quality improvement: the quality assurance system should assist programmes in continuous improvement and innovation; the conservative and lethargic risks that quality assurance entails, should be avoided as much as possible;
- Accountability: institutions should be accountable to the state, the students and the general public on the quality they can deliver for the financial support and the trust they receive.

Public reporting and information are a necessary component of the quality assurance system.

Internal and external quality assurance should be very closely linked and their combined action should strengthen the institutions and programmes. VLHORA also stresses the need for flexibility and rejects uniformity.

On the basis of these starting-points a protocol has been elaborated, with a list of quality aspects and indicators,[12] checklists, guidelines for the design of the self-assessment report and procedure, rules for the work of the expert panels, timetables, etc. The first assessments started in 2001. The current planning to review all *hogeschool* programmes has its end in 2008.

4.2 Descriptors

Range:

- Types, subjects & disciplines: As for the universities, there is a legal obligation for the hogescholen to develop a quality assurance scheme that reviews periodically all programmes. Also the post-initial programmes are covered by this. Of particular relevance are the arts and music programmes, which are situated in the hogescholen in Flanders. Specific elements will have to be included in the quality assurance scheme in order to deal with these programmes adequately.
- Geography: At this moment there are 23 hogescholen in the Flemish Community of Belgium, which are all member of VLHORA and thus covered by the quality assurance scheme. There are not yet plans for international collaboration in quality assurance, although a particular hogeschool has joined the experimental accreditation initiative of the Dutch sister-organisation HBO-Raad in 2000.
- Functions: The quality assurance scheme only deals with the educational functions of hogescholen. However, two of its quality indicators refer explicitly to the other two functions, namely the research and social service function. The quality assessment protocol does not directly address these two functions, but, as is the case in the universities, invites the self-assessment report and the expert panel to analyse those functions in their relations with programmes and teaching and learning processes. Nevertheless, institutions have to give a full picture of their activities in these other two functions and it can be expected that the quality assessment scheme will affect the quality of activities in these other functions as well.

Actors:

- Actors and institutions: The main actors in the process of quality assurance in the Flemish hogescholen are:
  - The state has introduced a legal obligation for the *hogescholen* to establish a coordinated system of quality assurance in the decree of 1994 under the coordinative responsibility of VLHORA. Sanctions can be imposed when a visitation report leads to a disquieting conclusion. As said, the Flemish government also has the capacity to do a meta-evaluation of the total system of internal and external quality assurance in Flemish higher education.
  - The association of *hogescholen*, the VLHORA, has the responsibility to coordinate and the organise the quality assurance system. Besides working out protocols and guidelines,

12 See Appendix 4.

this means in practice that VLHORA is developing a database of experts, appoints the expert panels, receive the panels' reports and continuously evaluates and improves the system.

- The institutions are individually are responsible for the quality of their programmes and have the legal obligation to engage in internal quality assurance mechanisms and to participate in external quality assessments. Via VLHORA the institutions also are collectively responsible. The institutions can suggest experts for the panels, have to produce a self-assessment report, have to prepare the experts panels' visit and, of course, have to organise the follow-up to the findings and recommendations of the experts. There is no fixed procedure for the institutions for the internal organisation of the scheme.

- Ownership: In the same way as with the VLIR for the universities, the VLHORA owns and organises the quality assurance system for the *hogescholen* in Flanders.
- Organisation: Regarding the organisation of the visitation system, the following components of the VLHORA are relevant:
  - The general assembly and the board: all general directors of the Flemish *hogescholen* are assembled in the general assembly of VLHORA. Out of this a board is elected. The board nominates the expert panels and is responsible for the overall organisation and monitoring of the quality assurance system.
  - The VLHORA has a working group on quality assurance, consisting of quality assurance professionals from the institutions. It is this group that develops the protocols and coordinates the quality assurance scheme under supervision of the board.
  - The secretariat of the VLHORA comprises a staff member responsible for quality assurance. In contrast with the VLIR, this person is not responsible for the secretariat of expert panels and writing/editing of reports.
- Reviewers:
  - The VLHORA nominates a panel of independent external experts that does the visitations in the *hogescholen* participating in a disciplinary review. A panel consists of five persons, which are chosen for their educational and professional expertise in the relevant sector. VLHORA tries to assure the diversity in gender, age and background of the experts. The experts have to guarantee complete independence from the institutions an programmes under review. Because of the high number of individual programmes in one review process, VLHORA tries to make panels sufficiently big, so that subgroups of experts can divide the actual work of visiting the institutions and programmes.
  - The main tasks of the panel basically are the same as in the VLIR quality assurance system, except that scoring of quality aspects and indicators and comparative evaluations are not (yet) included in the VLHORA protocol.
  - The composition of the panel is decided by consensus in the VLHORA-board, on the basis of proposals made by the programme directors and the availability checks of the VLHORA secretariat. VLHORA has formulated a profile with competences to be expected from candidate panel members. The nomination procedure makes it possible that a certain person, proposed by one of the institutions, is refuted by another, but overall the independence and critical nature of the panel members is guaranteed.
  - Customers and stakeholders: Given the similar design and approach of the system, full reference can be given to this section in the VLIR quality assurance scheme.

Rules and regulations:

- General rules and legal regulations: The basic regulatory framework for the VLHORA quality assurance system is in the relevant articles in the law on hogescholen of 13 July 1994, namely articles 58 to 60. Specific VLHORA-decisions and regulations are laid down in a protocol and handbook, which can be found on the VLHORA website. The two legal regulations dealing with quality assurance in universities and hogescholen will be integrated in the new law on higher education, but supplemented by accreditation, dealt with further in this report.
- Financing: As is the case for universities in the VLIR scheme, hogescholen pay for the cost of the VLHORA quality assurance system. The VLHORA manages this, but the financing for quality reviews is supplementary to the normal VLHORA funding by institutions and calculated on basis of actual visitations to be organised in a particular year.
- Stages of the procedure and their duration; Rules for objection; Rules for information distribution: The elements are very similar in the VLIR and VLHORA quality assurance systems. Reference can be made to what is said in the section on the VLIR system.
- Links with accreditation: The accreditation system in development in Flanders will be described in more detail in section 4 of this paper. Also the VLHORA visitation reports will form the basis for accreditation decisions in the new framework. Accreditation is meant as an independent formal decision, made by the Dutch-Flemish accreditation agency, on the basis of the judgements made by the visitation panels and published in their report.

Implementation of rules and regulations:

- Practical application of rules and regulations: At the moment of writing, actually no visitations in the VLHORA quality assessment scheme have been finished. Several panels have begun their work, but no final reports have been published yet. Therefore, it is too early to report on eventual problems in the practical application of rules and regulations.
- Financial constraints: It is clear that the VLHORA quality assessment scheme is a rather heavy financial burden on Flemish hogescholen. Because of the fixed funding of the sector and rising student numbers, Flemish hogescholen face a hard financial situation at the moment. The start of the quality assurance system further aggravates these financial difficulties.
- Time frames: The current time table and planning of visitations in the VLHORA quality assurance scheme is very tight. A very high number of programmes in various locations have to be assessed in a rather short period of time. Early experiences already show that the risks of delay and transgressing of time limits will be serious.

5. Accreditation in Flemish higher education

5.1 Origins and development

In the second half of the nineties, critical remarks could be heard addressed to the VLIR quality assurance system. Some of these critical remarks, voiced by policy makers, employers and journalists, tackled the vagueness of the visitation reports and the lack of a clear overall conclusion. The general reaction of the academic community to this criticism was that the quality assurance system was meant first of all to serve the internal quality improvement functions. However, a grow-

ing awareness for the external functions of quality assurance could be noticed (Weusthof & Frederiks, 1997). There was a growing concern that the existing quality assurance system didn't provide sufficiently accurate information and was not satisfactorily discriminative against deficient quality. As said, the VLIR adjusted it quality assurance scheme for the second round of visitations in order to be able to provide more transparent and comparative information on the quality of programmes. In some countries – not in Flanders though – some newspapers and journals entered the market with the publication of rankings, that satisfied the public need for clear and easily readable information on relative quality of study programmes. It was in this context that – starting in the Netherlands and next in Flanders – a debate on accreditation emerged.

Of course, this debate was fuelled by the Bologna Declaration and its plea for transparency, convergence and compatibility of European higher education systems. Cooperation in the field of quality assurance was one of the objectives of the Bologna process. Internationalisation of quality assurance rapidly became one of the main challenges of the higher education systems in Europe and worldwide (Van Damme, 2000). In the Netherlands, which again was going to be very influential for the developments in Flanders, the minister announced his political decision to work out a system of accreditation of higher education programmes, alongside the introduction of bachelors' and masters' qualifications. Also Germany introduced accreditation as a means to safeguard more solidly the international trustworthiness of the new qualifications. These international developments were observed and discussed intensively in Flanders.

The new Flemish government, taking office in the summer of 1999, included the implementation of the Bologna Declaration in its political programme. This included the introduction of an accreditation scheme. However, there was a growing consensus that the Flemish Community was too small to develop its own accreditation system and that within the context of internationalisation and the Bologna Declaration accreditation should be situated at the international level. Also the VLIR and VLHORA supported this point of view. The Flemish minister of education decided to collaborate with her Dutch colleague. When the Dutch minister installed a commission of 'trailblazers' in November 2000, with the task to develop a concrete proposal for an accreditation system in the Netherlands, some Flemish observers joined the commission. At about the same time a working group of Flemish higher education experts and representatives started the work for a new higher education law. The Netherlands and Flanders also started an initiative within the Bologna process to promote international cooperation in quality assurance and accreditation, which soon was followed by several other countries: the 'Joint Quality Initiative'.

In the spring of 2001, the institutions and their sector organisations furthered the political debate by issuing some policy papers. The VLIR adopted in February 2001 a statement on accreditation, in which they pleaded for an international accreditation scheme, operating independently from the quality assurance system but using the results of the visitation reports (VLIR, 2001). According to the VLIR, accreditation could fulfil many functions, but priority should be given to the need for guaranteeing basic quality through public and independent forms of accreditation of programmes. Via these and other policy statements, gradually a consensus developed in the Flemish higher education community on accreditation. Also the students' organisation expressed itself in favour of accreditation, as an instrument.

The already mentioned new legal framework for higher education in the Flemish Community consists of three main parts:

- The introduction of the bachelor/master degree structure in the whole higher education system, covering all programmes of universities and hogescholen;
- The introduction of an (international) accreditation system for all programmes;

- The establishment of 'associations', frameworks for close cooperation between a university and several *hogescholen*, in the areas of research, study trajectories for students and quality assurance.

The new decree hasn't yet been voted in the Flemish Parliament, but after a long process of negotiation and debate the Flemish government approved it in December 2002 and introduced it in Parliament, where the vote is expected for the spring of 2003. The new legal framework will be implemented rather soon, because the new bachelors' and masters' degrees will be introduced already in the academic year 2004-2005, replacing the old degree system. In the same year the accreditation system should start.

Regarding accreditation, the new higher education law closely follows the Dutch law on accreditation of 2002, so that for many aspects reference can be made to the Dutch country report. In the middle of 2002 the Dutch government founded the Dutch Accreditation Organisation (NAO) and appointed its chairpersons. It is the ambition of the Flemish government to join this accreditation organisation as soon as possible after the adoption by Parliament of the new law. For this, a treaty between the two states will have to be negotiated, which itself will have to be adopted in both Parliaments. In the meantime a Flemish observer has been appointed to the presidency of the Dutch accreditation organisation. In its current talks and discussions with the higher education organisations, the NAO also includes the Flemish organisations. The accreditation system will have slightly different characteristics in both countries, depending on variations in degree systems, specificities of the higher education system, legal conditions, etc., but basically the accreditation system will be the same in standards, criteria and protocols, allowing highly comparable and compatible accreditation decisions by one public body.

The main characteristics of the new accreditation system in Flanders will be:

- All programmes in the new bachelor'/masters' degree system will have to be accredited in order to assure their basic quality to the students, stakeholders an wider society.
- Accreditation will follow the bachelors'/masters' degree system. This implies that the binary divide in programmes, which is maintained in the Flemish degree system at bachelors' level,[13] will result in different accreditation standards and criteria.
- Accreditation decisions will be taken by an independent, public organisation, jointly established between the Netherlands and Flanders.
- Accreditation will be given to programmes if there are sufficient guarantees that they meet the basic standards and criteria of the accreditation frameworks issued by the accreditation organisation.
- Accreditation will be given on the basis of the results of existing quality assurance schemes, coordinated by the VLIR and VLHORA. Visitation panels will have to comply to the accreditation frameworks issued by the accreditation organisation. In this sense, accreditation will become a kind of meta-evaluation of existing quality assurance systems.
- Accreditation will have external effects on the public recognition of the programme and its degree. Public institutions cannot organise a non-accredited programme.
- New programmes will have to submit themselves to a specific kind of *ex ante* accreditation procedure, organised by the accreditation organisation.

In the next section the characteristics of the new accreditation system will be described more in depth. It has to be noted that many elements still are provisional, since the Flemish higher

13 In contrast with the Netherlands, in the Flemish bachelors'/masters' degree system, there are no professional masters' programmes and degrees. All masters' will be academic. The binary divide thus is limited to the bachelors' degree level. Also hogescholen will be able to award masters' degrees on the condition that they closely work together and integrate themselves with universities via the so-called 'associations'.

education law still has to be approved in Parliament, the treaty with the Netherlands still has to be negotiated, and the accreditation organisation has to finalise its consultation and decision making processes on its own regulations. The following section is based on the provisional texts, but it can be assumed that in its basic characteristics the accreditation system will not change drastically anymore.

5.2 Descriptors

Range:

- Types, subjects & disciplines: Accreditation will be compulsory for all programmes offered by recognised universities and *hogescholen* in the new bachelors'/masters' degree system, which will gradually replace the existing qualification system from 2004 onwards. Transition to the new degree system also will be mandatory. Accreditation will also cover the post-initial programmes in the ba/ma-system, but not the professionally oriented programmes and continuing education courses that universities and *hogescholen* can offer. A novelty in the legal framework is that also non-traditional providers, such as foreign institutions or for-profit providers operating in Flanders, can submit their bachelors'/masters' degree programmes for accreditation, given that they are registered at government level. These institutions and programmes, hitherto operating completely outside any legal context, will not be recognised nor funded by the state, but their programmes and degrees can have the same *effectus civilis* as those from recognised institutions if accredited by the accreditation organisation.
- Geography: Accreditation will be compulsory for all institutions operating in the Flemish Community of Belgium. Since the accreditation organisation will be a jointly established one by the Netherlands and Flanders, the accreditation decisions most probably will have the same legal significance in both countries, although this will have to be decided when negotiating the treaty. In the context of the Joint Quality Initiative it is the ambition of the Dutch and Flemish governments to build a larger network and platform for joint quality assurance and accreditation. The Flemish-Dutch accreditation organisation also closely cooperates with other accreditation agencies in the European higher education area and will join the newly established European network of accreditation agencies. There are hopes that in some time the cooperation between Flanders and the Netherlands can be broadened and that the accreditation organisation can become a more international one. The two governments see this as an important contribution to the Bologna process and consider themselves to be in the forefront of the European higher education area with regard to international accreditation.
- Functions: The accreditation system will only address programmes and will thus cover only educational functions of universities and hogescholen. However, since both the visitation schemes of VLIR and VLHORA address the other functions of institutions in their impact on teaching and learning processes, there is an indirect reference to other functions in the definition of quality. It is clear that especially in academic bachelors' degree programmes and in masters' programmes the scientific and research base will be an important criterion for accreditation. In the Flemish context there will be a specific emphasis on the research base of the masters' programmes of hogescholen: the old four-year programmes will be transformed to masters' programmes under the condition that within the framework of an 'association' these hogescholen collaborate closely with an university with regard to scien-

tific research. It is expected that in the accreditation frameworks – and in the quality assurance systems preceding accreditation – some specific controls will be integrated to check the research base of these programmes.

Actors:

- Actors and institutions: The main actors in the process of accreditation in the Flemish Community are:
  - In the new decree, the state has the legal capacity and obligation to set up an independent accreditation system and organisation. However, it is excluded that the Flemish Community will do this on its own; it can only develop accreditation in an international context. This practically means that, if the negotiations with the Netherlands on the establishment of a common accreditation organisation should fail, there will be no accreditation system in Flanders. The state also will have a meta-evaluative role in the whole system of quality assurance and accreditation. Whereas in the Netherlands this is handed over to the Inspectorate; in the Flemish system, there no longer is an inspectorate for higher education. This meta-function is assigned to the government administration in general.
  - The accreditation organisation will be established together with the Netherlands by means of a treaty between the two states. At this moment the Dutch accreditation organisation already is set up and is cooperating on an informal but politically endorsed basis with the Flemish Community, the institutions and the stakeholders on a similar basis as with the Dutch. A Flemish observer is appointed to join the directorate of the accreditation organisation. The agency will have four major tasks: (i) accreditation of existing bachelors'/masters' programmes; (ii) ex ante evaluation of new programmes to check whether they will meet the basic quality standards; (iii) assessment, on demand of the institution, of specific quality aspects of the programme; and (iv) the promotion of the European and international dimension in the Dutch accreditation and the development of international contacts in order to achieve coordination and collaboration. In this report we will focus on the first function, but the differences in procedure between the first and second functions are only minor.
  - To start the accreditation process, an accreditation framework with basic quality standards and criteria is under development (NAO, 2003b). In the Dutch law the accreditation organisation is competent to develop the accreditation framework, that subsequently has to be approved by the minister. In the Flemish context however, because of the constitutional freedom of education, the basic conditions and criteria have to be defined by Parliament and therefore included in the new law. The relevant articles are based on the so-called Dublin descriptors developed within the Joint Quality Initiative. Also the preliminary versions of the accreditation framework developed by the NAO depart from the Dublin descriptors. No major contradictions are expected between the two formulations, so that they can be integrated in one accreditation framework in the near future.
  - The associations of *hogescholen* and universities, the VLHORA and the VLIR, still organise and coordinate the quality assurance schemes described in previous sections of this report. They will not have a direct responsibility in the accreditation system, but the reports from their quality assurance schemes will feed in into the accreditation process. Accreditation will not develop its own quality review and assessment operations, but will be based on the reports of so-called visitation organisations. These will have to

comply to the frameworks and rules of the accreditation organisation. So, the panels operating in the VLIR and VLHORA quality assurance schemes will have to follow the basic conditions and criteria of the accreditation organisation, in order for their reports to be acceptable for accreditation decision-making processes. They also will have to advance a kind of provisional conclusion on the question whether on the basic quality aspects defined by the accreditation organisation the programme under review meets the predetermined standards. In the eyes of many, this means that the visitation panels will act themselves as accreditors. The rationale for this delicate relationship between quality assurance and accreditation, is that double work has to be avoided as much as possible and that accreditation has to be developed on top of already existing and highly valued quality assurance schemes. In this sense, accreditation becomes a kind of independent approval of the conclusions of the visitation panels operating in the quality assurance schemes.

- In accreditation there will be no monopoly for the VLIR and VLHORA quality assurance schemes. As in the Netherlands, other agencies may well apply and get recognition from the accreditation organisation to act as a visitation organisation. In the Dutch accreditation system, the quality assurance agencies have to become independent from the sector organisations. Because of a concern for strict independence of quality assurance reports, the sector organisations VSNU and HBO-Raad will have to outsource their quality assurance departments. In Flanders, this call for independence has provoked a lot of debate. In the current approach, quality assurance is seen as a self-regulatory process within the higher education sector, which implies the ownership of quality assurance processes by its associations. Of course, strict independence of the review panels and decision-making processes has to be guaranteed. This approach is still maintained in the new Flemish decree, despite of the differences with the Dutch legal framework. In fact, the decree states that in quality assurance the VLIR and VLHORA maintain their coordinating responsibilities. This means that the joint accreditation organisation will have to apply different recognition procedures for the Dutch and Flemish quality assurance systems. It is expected that this will not pose major difficulties.
- In the first instance, the institutions will not face major changes in the system of quality assurance. The accreditation system will follow the timetables of the quality assessments already planned by VLIR and VLHORA. In the longer run, there is some risk that the introduction of accreditation will change the attitudes of programmes towards quality assurance. Programmes and institutions will increase their 'window-dressing' activities and will perhaps reduce their transparency in the face of highly critical procedures. The accreditation organisation tries to minimise this risk by getting into trust-building dialogue with the institutions' associations VLIR and VLHORA.
- Accreditation will be gradually introduced in Flemish higher education. From 2004, programmes will receive a transitional accreditation until the moment their visitation is planned, according to the timetables of VLIR and VLHORA quality assessments.

▪ Ownership: Formally, the accreditation is 'owned' by the Flemish and Dutch governments and Parliaments that have instituted the legal framework and the organisation. The accreditation organisation has to report to the two Parliaments. The important role of the state in the higher education systems in both countries and the amount of public funding are two important justifications for that. The accreditation organisation has a very great autonomy for the rest. Informally, a close partnership is developed with the higher education community. It is felt as impossible that an accreditation system would be operating without

trust from institutions that are very autonomous themselves. In reality, there thus is a mixed ownership.

- Organisation:
  - The accreditation organisation has a presidency consisting of a chairperson and two vice-chairpersons. All three persons are former leaders of institutions, representative for the higher education community. For the moment the presidency is all Dutch. Their appointment by the Dutch minister in the summer of 2002 provoked some unease and discomfort to the Flemish side. As said, a Flemish representative is added to the presidency as an observer at the end of 2002.
  - The accreditation organisation is in the process of selecting and appointing its staff. It is the intention to form a rather small organisation with a restricted number of staff.
- Reviewers: As said, the accreditation system will not develop its own quality assessment and visitation activities, but will build upon the existing schemes of VLIR and VLHORA. There is a possible exception in the case the accreditation organisation is in the impossibility of taking a decision. It then can do some additional reviewing. The conditions and rules for this still have to be designed.

Rules and regulations:

- General rules and legal regulations: The basic rules and regulations are laid down in the new decree on higher education. Compared to the Dutch law, the Flemish decree goes a little further in regulating the procedures and standards of accreditation. An important element for the joint Dutch-Flemish accreditation system to take of, is still missing, namely a treaty between the two states. This treaty will be negotiated in the coming months and is expected to be voted in the two Parliaments before the summer of 2003. Of course, also the accreditation organisation itself will develop and impose its own rules and regulations. The NAO has issued a concept-paper on the basic rules of the accreditation system and is negotiating it with the higher education community and external stakeholders (NAO, 2003a). Formally, the accreditation organisation does not have to find consensus, but has the competence to decide on its own on its standards and procedures. The standards and accreditation frameworks still have to be approved by Parliament (the Netherlands) or the government (in Flanders).
- Financing: The basic funding of the accreditation organisation is financed by the state. The exact financial conditions will have to be negotiated in the treaty. Institutions will have to pay for an accreditation, on top of the cost of the visitations. The actual cost of an accreditation to institutions is still unclear.
- Stages of the procedure and their duration: The whole process leading to accreditation has the following components:
  - An institution asks a quality assessment agency (VLIR, VLHORA or another) to do a review and a visitation according to its protocols which meet the NAO requirements.
  - Programmes proceed to a self-assessment and produce the self-assessment report, that will be transmitted to the review panel.
  - The actual external review and site visit take place, according to the procedures en guidelines of the quality assessment agency.
  - Al least six months before the old accreditation for that programme comes to an end, the institution submits a demand for a new accreditation. Its demand includes its self-assessment report and a recent (not older than one year) external quality assessment report.

- The accreditation organisation examines the reports and takes a decision within three months following the demand. Before formally confirming its decision, it is presented to the institution, which has two weeks to present its reaction.
- The accreditation organisation publishes its decision.

In total the process will take about one year and a half.

In the Flemish higher education law, accreditation is given to a programme for a period of eight years. This is different from the Netherlands, where accreditation is valid during only six years.

- Rules for objection: In any case, institutions have all legal possibilities to object to accreditation decisions before court. In order to minimise the risks for judicial conflicts on accreditation, some procedures of appeal are built in into the Flemish higher education law.
  - The procedures within the quality assurance systems that allow the programmes and institutions to react to the findings and reports of the quality review panels, still apply.
  - The institution does not have to agree with the statements of the visitation panel. It is possible that there are fundamental disagreements, resulting from divergent approaches and quality frameworks. In that case, the institution can produce an well argued reaction to the visitation report and include it in its demand for accreditation.
  - As said, the accreditation organisation will present a preliminary version of its accreditation decision to the institution, which will have two weeks to react.
  - In the Flemish higher education law, absence of an accreditation doesn't mean automatically that a programme has to stop. The minister can give a temporary recognition to a non-accredited programme which can last maximally for three years. The minister can take this decision on the ground of considerations of public good, such as when it is about programmes that are unique, when non-accreditation would endanger the access to education for students, etc. In any case, this is an emergency treatment.
- Rules for information distribution: Accreditation decisions will be published. Accredited programme will be listed in a higher education register.

Implementation of rules and regulations:

Accreditation is not yet in operation, so it is too early to say anything about the actual implementation of rules and regulations regarding accreditation.

6. Analysis

6.1 Introduction

In the sections before we included already some analysis on actors, driving forces, considerations and rationales behind the three schemes in the Flemish system. It was felt necessary to expose briefly on the origins and development of each of these schemes before entering into detail on their descriptors. In this short section, we will expand on these analytical questions a bit more in detail.

6.2 Driving forces and rationales behind the introduction of accreditation

In this section the driving forces behind the introduction of the accreditation system and the rationales used by various stakeholders to address specific policy issues in this context, will be analysed. As described already, the introduction of a system of accreditation of higher education programmes in Flanders was the result of two main, closely related rationales:

- To continue, to strengthen and to improve the existing schemes of external quality assurance, operated by VLIR and VLHORA. The accreditation system in Flanders – following the Netherlands – was designed as a system 'on top of' the existing quality assurance schemes, which were seen as well functioning and of high quality themselves. At the same time however, accreditation was also seen as an answer to tackle some of the shortcomings of the existing quality assurance schemes, namely their lack of clear conclusions and their limited capacity to make the higher education system more transparent. The feeling was shared among many stakeholders, including the higher education community itself, that the rapid internationalisation and globalisation of higher education urged policy makers to revise and to strengthen the existing arrangement, introduced in the beginning of the nineties as an exchange between institutional autonomy and external quality assurance, and to supplement it with a new framework of accreditation. More specifically, to existing quality assurance arrangements accreditation could add a clear final decision by an independent agency whether it meets the predetermined standards for that type of qualification.
- To implement the Bologna Declaration in the Flemish higher education system. Although accreditation was not mentioned explicitly in the Bologna Declaration, Flemish higher education leaders saw accreditation from the beginning as a necessary instrument to realise the ambitions of Bologna in general and those in the field of quality assurance in particular. A trustworthy system of accreditation, installing an independent system to award higher education programmes with a quality label, was seen as necessary to guarantee the new bachelors'/masters' degrees in an open European higher education area. As in many other countries, Bologna provided a catalyst and an additional external trigger to give way to arguments and driving forces which were developing in the Flemish higher education policy system internally already.

These two main rationales were especially relevant seen against the background of the particular challenge in the Flemish bachelors'/masters' degree system, namely the transformation of the two-cycle four-year programmes of *hogescholen* into masters'. In contrast to the Netherlands, these four-year programmes have to be incorporated in the academic qualifications and upgraded to masters' degrees. This has to be done by strengthening the research base underlying these programmes, a challenge for which the 'associations' between *hogescholen* and universities are designed more specifically. In the Flemish context, the accreditation system is seen as a safeguard of basic quality levels of academic masters qualifications, especially coming from the former four-year *hogeschool* programmes. Programmes failing to succeed in the challenge to transform themselves into research-based academic programmes and to meet the standards of masters' qualifications, are expected to fail the test of accreditation.

The discussion on quality assurance and accreditation incited various stakeholders also to voice other arguments, that can be seen as second-order rationales for accreditation:

- The desire of 'social partners', trade unions and employers' organisations alike, to strengthen their control on higher education programmes and curricula. They felt that institutions designing curricula did not care enough for the legitimate demands of the labour market stakeholders. Institutions' autonomy over curricula always has been very large in

Flemish higher education system, leaving not much room for social and economic actors to influence them. The external 'approval' of programmes implied in accreditation, was seen as an opportunity to increase opportunities for control over curricula. However, institutions opposed to this view. This rationale is an element in the development of the accreditation system without however being very dominant.

- From the start of the debate onwards, students' associations have taken a rather positive stance towards accreditation. They see it as a necessary instrument for transparency in the Flemish higher education system in a European context and as a tool of information to students. Students should have a clear view on the quality of a programme and accreditation is seen as a safeguarding mechanism to that.
- Finally, the government itself and the civil servants consider accreditation as a device to recognise programmes in a different manner. In an accreditation system, programmes no longer will be recognised ex ante by the state, leading to an automatic recognition of the degrees awarded to successful students, but will get a recognition based on an assured and externally guaranteed quality mark.

6.3 Relationships between quality assurance and accreditation schemes

We already analysed the complex relationship between the two existing visitation schemes and the accreditation system. The accreditation system is designed to follow 'on top of' the existing VLIR/VLHORA schemes by issuing a publicly stated decision on the question whether the programme under review meets the predetermined standards for bachelors'/masters' qualifications formulated in the higher education law and developed by the Dutch-Flemish accreditation agency.

The precise relationship between quality assurance and accreditation still is topic for debate. As said already, the accreditation organisation will not develop its own visitation procedures, but will ask the quality assurance schemes to come with clear assessment reports on the basis of guidelines developed from the accreditation framework. The visitation reports will thus have to lead to a kind of final judgment. The accreditation procedure will consist of a marginal assessment of the validity of this judgment and the compliance of the processes and criteria used with the prescriptions of the accreditation organisation. In practice, the accreditation decisions will be taken by the quality assessment panels in the first instance. To some critical observers, this induces a mix-up of responsibilities between quality assurance and accreditation (Van Damme, 2001b). The higher education sector also fears that the improvement function of the existing VLIR and VLHORA quality assurance schemes will be jeopardised if the review panels have to come to a final judgment. On the other hand, there is the argument that a duplication of quality assessment processes would increase the evaluation burden to programmes and institutions. A subtle balance will have to be found between quality improvement and supportive functions of quality assurance on the one hand, and external accountability functions and the requirements of accreditation on the other.

The introduction of accreditation will necessitate VLIR and VLHORA to adapt their quality assurance procedures – quality aspects, indicators, etc. – to the requirements set by the accreditation organisation. They will still have a fair amount of freedom on the condition they meet the standards of the accreditation organisation. Practically, VLIR and VLHORA will adjust their protocols so that they self and the programmes and institutions under evaluation face minimal risks in the accreditation process. It is not expected that these changes will be very fundamental or

challenge the essential characteristics of the quality assurance systems. Especially the VLIR has prepared itself to accreditation in revising the protocol for the second round of visitations.

In both the Dutch and the Flemish legal frameworks for accreditation, the possibility for quality assessment and visitation organisations other than those established by the sectors' organisations is inscribed. If it meets the standards, criteria and minimal requirements regarding its protocol set by the accreditation organisation, whatever organisation – also for-profit ones, which is in contrast to the German system – can enter the system and present its quality assessment reports for accreditation. It is believed that this open character of the quality assurance market will induce an element of competition and prevent existing schemes to achieve a monopolistic position. In practice however, many believe that it will be very difficult to compete with the existing quality assurance schemes or to achieve sufficient trust at the levels of institutions and accreditation organisation. It would also imply double work and double costs for the programmes and institutions which have to participate in the VLIR and VLHORA quality assurance schemes anyway.

6.4 Consequences of the set-up of accreditation

Consequences for higher education institutions

Financial consequences and the increase of the 'quality burden':

The introduction of an accreditation system is expected to raise the overall cost of the total quality assurance system for Flemish universities. The rise can be attributed to three elements:

- The direct cost of accreditation: institutions will have to pay for a demand for accreditation. A price of the accreditation of one programme has not yet been set. Regarding the high number of programmes to be accredited, a certain direct cost for accreditation will have to be included in the institutions' budgets.
- The rising cost for visitations: the introduction of accreditation will necessitate the VLIR and VLHORA visitation schemes to adapt their protocols. It can be expected that this will increase the workload of the visitation schemes. Since institutions already pay for programme visitations, also this cost will have to be paid by them. The introduction of accreditation will force VLIR and VLHORA also to examine other critical issues of the visitation schemes, for example the issue of paying reviewers. For the moment reviewers are paid not much more that the actual costs and their time investment is legitimated by an appeal to academic responsibility and collegiality. It is uncertain whether this point of view will be sustainable in a context of accreditation and professionalisation of the overall quality assurance system.

Besides the purely financial effects, the introduction of accreditation will also affect other 'costs' in institutions. Academics will have to spend more time on self-assessments in order to comply to the higher standards that will be expected from such documents. They also will be enforced to improve the quality of teaching and learning processes and their environmental conditions, so that programmes meet the quality standards set by accreditation. Because of the high quality of Flemish higher education programmes, it is not expected that the introduction of accreditation will necessitate institutions to invest much in quality improvement, but certainly the internal quality assurance systems will be updated.

All this involves also a 'hidden cost': the time of academics, the bureaucratic burden inside institutions involved in internal quality assurance, and eventually also a risk of de-motivation and 'quality fatigue'.

Changes in attitudes towards evaluation:

As has been said before, from a rather superficial point of view accreditation will not change dramatically the current approaches and procedures towards quality assurance in institutions in the short run. Provisions have been taken that the accreditation system follows up on the already scheduled visitation calendar of VLIR and VLHORA. Running reviews will continue as they have been set up.

In the medium term, VLIR and VLHORA have to adjust their visitation protocols to the accreditation frameworks and rules of the Dutch-Flemish accreditation agency. This will affect the way in which programmes an department will have to conduct a self-assessment. More information will be needed and the information will have to be structured differently. The information will also have to allow the peer review teams to arrive at sharper conclusions, so the discriminatory character of the information will have to be increased. This will ask for good diagnostic and analytical competences and for a good amount of honesty, self-criticism and open-mindedness on the part of programme directors.

In a longer perspective, many observers expect a change in the attitudes of institutions, departments and programme directors towards external evaluation because of the impact of accreditation. It is anticipated that they will have a less open and self-critical attitude towards their own programmes and that they will become 'experts in window-dressing'. Counter-arguments to this somehow pessimistic view, are that quality assessments by peer review teams, which include respected colleagues from the same subject field, will be capable in distinguishing rhetoric from reality, that the VLIR and VLHORA visitation systems will continue to have an improvement orientation and a supportive attitude towards programmes, and that accreditation only is concerned with checking the basic quality standards, the lack of which will be clearly visible.

Consequences for students

Students' organisations have supported the introduction of the accreditation system in Flanders, because they favour robust and effective quality assurance systems and because accreditation promises to induce more transparency into the higher education system. Better information and clear statements whether basic quality levels are guaranteed are expected to result from the accreditation system. Students expect from accreditation that they will have a stronger voice to address institutions, departments and academics that still have a high tolerance for low quality.

In the discussion on quality assurance and accreditation, students also pleaded to include a student in the visitation panels of the VLIR and VLHORA schemes. Referring to many other countries where this is a normal practice, they asked for the inclusion of a student in each programme review team. This demand has been met in the new Flemish higher education law. So, students will have a direct impact on the quality assessments that will be fed in into the accreditation system. They consider this to be an important aspect of the empowerment of students in the quality field and an important condition to arouse interest among students in quality-related matters.

Ultimately, students are interested also in strengthening the international recognition of their degrees. Especially in a small country with an international labour market and an open economy, students demand qualifications that are recognised and respected. They expect that accreditation can improve this in the internationalising context. Especially with the new bachelors'/masters' degrees, students feel that the international basis of these degrees should be safeguarded in order to protect students and families that invest in studies leading to these degrees.

Consequences for other stakeholders and the general public

It is yet unclear what the other external effects of the introduction of accreditation will be. As said, 'social partners' have their own agenda of demands and expectations in the debate on accreditation, but it is uncertain whether these demands will be realised in practice. It is foreseen that in the board of the accreditation agency Flemish representatives from these stakeholders will be included, as is already the case in the Netherlands.

The strong political support for the introduction of accreditation in Flemish higher mirrors that belief that accreditation will lead to more transparency and to internationally better recognised qualifications.

7. International activities and aspects

7.1 International examples and role models

In our description of the VLIR quality assurance scheme, we already mentioned the international context in which the universities developed an external quality assurance scheme. In particular, the Netherlands was a very influential model in this. In these days, the Dutch system of external quality assurance was a very influential international model for many countries, including the Flemish Community of Belgium. Also in its operational phase, many forms of cooperation with the Dutch colleagues developed. The Dutch influence was also clearly visible in the emergence and development of the VLHORA external quality assurance scheme. VLHORA and the Dutch sister-organisation *HBO-Raad* developed a close cooperation in the field and many elements of the VLHORA scheme were borrowed from them.

As has been indicated before, the introduction of the accreditation system in Flanders was equally heavily influenced by the developments in the Netherlands. When in 2000 the Dutch minister Hermans announced the introductions of accreditation in his country and installed the so-called trailblazers committee, chaired by Jan Franssen, there was a huge interest for this development among Flemish policy makers and higher education leaders. The Flemish minister Marleen Vanderpoorten, belonging to the similar political party as her Dutch colleague (liberal party) and in many fields in intense contact with him, showed interest in joining this Dutch move. In the meantime the Flemish associations on universities and *hogescholen*, VLIR and VLHORA, adopted a policy approach that welcomed accreditation but urged the minister to put in from the beginning in an international perspective. It was seen as highly unlikely to develop a purely Flemish accreditation system; if accreditation was something to be developed out of concern to strengthen the international recognition of Flemish bachelors'/masters' degrees, it had to be organised at an international level itself. Early 2001, the Dutch and Flemish ministers agreed to have some Flemish observers in the Franssen committee and to keep a close contact on the issue.

Since then, a close cooperation on accreditation developed between the Dutch and Flemish ministers and civil servants. There was even an ambition, inspired by the strong will of the Dutch minister to take the lead on accreditation within the Bologna group of countries, to broaden the international cooperation. It was the belief of minister Hermans that a core group of countries within the Bologna group should make some more advanced steps than the majority of Bologna countries would be willing to, especially in the highly sensitive domain of quality assurance and accreditation. In the spring of 2001, Flemish and Dutch civil servants set up a number of visits to

other countries in order to investigate the possibilities of cooperation. Visits were undertaken to agencies and policy makers in the Czech Republic, Catalunya, Sweden, Germany, Italy and Spain and a report was published in April 2001 (Vroeijenstijn & Schreinemakers, 2001). From this report it was clear that some countries expressed a high interest in developing cooperation in the field of quality assurance, but also that it was too early to expect a structural cooperation or integration of accreditation systems between countries in the short run. The Dutch and Flemish governments then agreed to start a more voluntaristic cooperation project in the field of quality assurance, the 'Joint Quality Initiative', which had a number of highly successful meetings and conferences and produced some interesting output, for example the so-called 'Dublin descriptors' for bachelors' and masters' types of programmes and qualifications.

As has been described above, the Flemish government aspires to negotiate and to conclude a treaty with the Netherlands on accreditation. The recently established Dutch accreditation organisation NAO will then be transformed into a Dutch-Flemish one and will the official agency for accreditation in the two countries. In the meantime, the NAO is discussing policies, accreditation frameworks, etc. already with relevant Flemish stakeholders and in consulting the Flemish agencies and partners involved in all relevant matters.

The NAO still aspires to broaden the cooperation in the field of accreditation to other European countries in the context of the Bologna process. There are plans under development to establish a European network or consortium of accreditation agencies. Contacts have been taken with relevant agencies in Germany, Austria, Norway, Switzerland and Spain. In June 2003 a meeting is planned at which the new network will be launched.

7.2 The impact of Bologna and the GATS

The quality assurance scheme of the VLIR developed in a context in which Bologna still was far away in the future. However, the adaptation of the VLIR quality assurance scheme in the late nineties was decided in quite a different international context. Ideas about accreditation even international accreditation were discussed. The Sorbonne and Bologna Declarations began to exert a growing influence on higher education policy-making processes. The protocol for the so-called 'second round' in the VLIR scheme was certainly influenced by these developments, without however explicitly referring to them. It was felt as necessary to anticipate on future developments by strengthening the transparency of the quality assurance protocol and reports.

As has been said already, Bologna was a very powerful policy imperative in the development of accreditation in Flanders. Early 2001, the VLIR and VLHORA adopted policy papers which welcomed the Bologna process and indicated the way in which the sector associations wanted to see Bologna implemented in the Flemish higher education system. In these policy papers the main elements of the Bologna Declaration were endorsed and even the principle of accreditation was supported. In a more comparative perspective and looking at the passive and active forms of resistance to Bologna in many European countries – including the French-speaking Community – , it is clear that there was already at an early phase a very positive stance towards Bologna in Flemish universities and *hogescholen* as well as among policy makers. The process of implementation of Bologna was heavily influenced by the sector associations which stood in close contact to the minister and the responsible policy makers. In fact, from 2001 onwards the general director of the VLIR was seconded to the office of the minister to chair a working group that actually wrote the new law.

The impact of the GATS is much less clearly visible in the policy developments regarding accreditation. GATS has not yet been a major topic of debate in Flemish higher education policy, also because the minister took a rather firm statement in the European debates regarding the public nature of the educational system. However, there is a feeling that in the development of an accreditation system in Flanders the context of transnational and for-profit providers has to been taken into account. That's why, as has been said, the possibility is included in the new law that private – i. e. non state recognised – providers can be registered and can present themselves for accreditation. When accredited, their degrees can be recognised by the state. A direct impact of GATS in this issue is not clearly perceptible; this arrangement would probably have been worked out without GATS in the background as well.

8. Other evaluation practices

In Flemish universities and *hogescholen* there are a number of other evaluation practices, that need to be mentioned:

- Universities and hogescholen are obliged by law to regularly evaluate professors and teaching staff. Every five year each professor and teaching staff member has to be evaluated by the institution. Each institution is free to develop its own methodology to do this. Some universities have increased the tempo; in some universities teaching personnel is evaluated every two years. Results of evaluations are included in the individuals' files and can have consequences on wages and opportunities for individual promotion. In some universities tenure professors have been fired as a consequence of consecutive negative evaluations. The VLIR has tried to achieve some minimal convergence in the procedures developed in the universities and universities are requested to give a regular report on how they do this and what the results are.
- In the framework of internal quality assurance procedures have been developed in many institutions for the evaluation of professors and teaching staff by students. A number of methodologies have been developed in this regard, but questionnaires to be filled in at the end of each year or semester are very common. The results of student evaluations, when meeting certain statistical minimal conditions, are included in the personal files of each professor. The overall results often are included as information in self-assessment reports for the VLIR and VLHORA visitations.
- There is no elaborate system of quality assurance of research as do exist in other countries. Some information has been given on research evaluations in Flemish universities. At the moment universities are discussing various systems of research evaluation. Emphasis is given to the intra-institutional approach, where research councils include evaluations of research teams' and departements' previous work when assessing research proposals. Some institutions invite peer review teams to do research assessments, but this is a completely voluntary and autonomous activity. More and more bibliometric tools are used as indicators in research assessments. At the moment the minister has asked the VLIR to set up an audit of research evaluations in the institutions. There is no interaction between research assessments and the systems of quality assurance and accreditation for educational programmes, but it is clear that when dealing with topics such as the research base of masters' programmes departments and external visitation teams will have a look at these materials and indicators.

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Relevant websites

www.vlir.be
www.vlhora.be
www.nao-ho.nl
www.vlaanderen.be/onderwijs
www.jointquality.org

Country Report Czech Republic

Helena Šebkovà

1. Size of higher education system

At the present time (December 2002), 57 higher education institutions belong to the Czech higher education system. There are 24 public institutions, 4 state and 29 private higher education institutions. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (further Ministry) represents the state in relation to higher education institutions. The activities of the state higher education institutions (3 military ones and Police Academy) are partly regulated by the legislation of the appropriate ministry (Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Interior).

Table 1 gives the very characteristic picture of the student´s number, which was approximately doubled during the last decade.

Table 1: Number of students in higher education institutions

Year	**1989/90**	**1991/92**	**1993/94**	**1995/96**	**1997/98**	**1999/00**	**2001/02**	**2002/03**
Number of students	110 021	109 219	118 842	152 148	177 723	198 961	223 013	243 756

Private higher education institutions currently enable studies for about 8 000 students mostly in bachelor study programmes. There is not expected significant increase of the number of students, the sector is considered as the complementary offer to the public higher education. At the same time it is considered as the positive challenge and competition for public institutions. The total number of newly enrolled students in higher education institutions (about 58 000) related to the 19 years old cohort of population (136 780) reaches approx. 42% in the academic year 2002/03. One of the main goals of the governmental policy requires to make possible for the half of this group of population to be enrolled to some type of tertiary education till 2005. The support of lifelong learning including the broad use of ICT will be the overall trend in accordance with the joint European higher education area vision.

1.2 Types of higher education institutions

Higher education institutions of university type are focused on the three level composition of their study offer – bachelor, master and doctoral study programmes. *Higher education institutions of non-university type* provide primarily bachelor study programmes. They may, if they meet accreditation requirements, to provide master study programmes but they are not allowed to implement doctoral study programmes. The authority to decide about the type of a higher education institution has the Accreditation Commission (further AC). Both types of higher education institutions may be public, state and private. The state higher education institutions are those military ones and the Police Academy. The private higher education institutions has been very new, mostly still very small and currently only of the non-university type.

1.3 Main types of study programmes and degrees

Higher education is based on three level construction involving three types of accredited study programmes – bachelor, master and doctoral. In accordance with the Bologna process a bachelor programme should enable the graduates or to enter the job market or to continue their studies (immediately, or after some work experience).

Bachelor study programme lasts at least 3 and at most 4 years. The academic degree on the bachelor level „bakalár" (Bc.) is awarded on the basis of due completion of a study programme by a State final examination.

Master study programme is aimed at presenting new theoretical findings based on scientific knowledge, research and development. Students are required to master the application of these findings and to develop skills for creative and scientific activities. Master study programmes are completed by a State final examination, and in most cases by the presentation of a diploma thesis. The length of a continuing master study programme (after completion bachelor study programme) is 1-3 years. In exceptional cases, the so called „long" master study programme takes in average 5 years (6 years in medicine, veterinary medicine) and does not require the previously completed bachelor study programme. The academic degree on the master level „magistr"(Mgr.) is awarded in the field of humanities, education, social sciences, natural sciences, pharmacy, law, theology and arts. The act enables to pass the State rigorous examination in the field of graduation and to present the dissertation for the purpose of acquiring a further academic degree „doktor" in the relevant field. In technical fields of study, economics, agriculture and chemistry, master study programmes lead to the academic degree „inženýr" (Ing.). Medical studies/veterinary studies lead to the academic degree „doktor medicíny" (MUDr.)/"doktor veterinární medicíny" (MVDr). All above mentioned academic degrees are equivalent to the master level.

Doctoral study programme follows an individual study plan under the guidance of a supervisor, graduates of master programmes may apply for. It is aimed at scientific research and independent creative activity. The nominal length of the programme is three years. It is concluded by the State doctoral examination and the presentation of a dissertation in which the applicant demonstrates his/her independent research skills, theoretical knowledge or independent theoretical and artistic creativity (in relevant fields). The awarded academic degree is „PhD".

All study programmes may be offered by the form of face-to-face study or by distance form of study, or by a combination of the two.

1.4 Transition of students from higher education to work

Finding a job after graduation is significantly connected with the general economy situation and job market development. Employment offices regularly provide monitoring on graduates unemployment – in the end of April and in the end of September. General character of unemployment of graduates from higher education has been approved during the recent years: the percentage is the smallest one comparing the groups educated at lower level, because they are very flexible in finding their jobs. Nevertheless, the slight increase of unemployment during the time can be found. There is not possible to determine the study fields of the more significant problems as relates employment figures; the data are very changeable and have not allowed to approve any hypotesis up to now. The graduates from the master level are highly acceptable at the labour market. This is not the case with bachelors at the moment. There still has not been good knowledge about these programmes and about the skills of graduates nor in the society in general neither among the employers. The situation is improving quite quickly especially during the recent time but the good and reliable information is ever the urgent necessity.

1.5 Governance and steering of higher education

The steering of the system is the authority of the Ministry. The important tasks are to allocate funding to individual higher education institutions from the state budget, to monitor their proper use, to arrange favourable conditions for the development of higher education institutions and to co-ordinate their activities. The act sets all duties and responsibilities of the Ministry with the aim to ensure the good balance among the autonomous institutions and the state power. From the point of view of this report there is important to mention explicitly: The Ministry decides on the accreditation of study programmes, habilitation procedures for obtaining *„venium docendi“*, and procedures for the appointment of professors and it awards the state permission for the activities of private higher education institutions, always only in the case of positive expert opinion issued by the AC (see further).

The Ministry is obliged to work out the long-term strategic plan for the development of the higher education system. Similarly, each individual higher education institution is required to elaborate the strategy for its own development. Both ministerial and institutional plans should be updated annually and should be available to the public. Negotiation on plans should help to harmonise the system developments, to steer the system indirectly by means of the allocation of the part of the state budget on the basis of contracts and to contribute to the quality, transparency and accountability.

The governance of the sector is highly influenced by the representation of higher education institutions which is the body established from two parts – Council of Higher Education Institutions (composed of the representatives of the Academic Senates of all higher education institutions and their faculties) and the Czech Rector´s Conference (composed of rectors of all higher education institutions). The Ministry is obliged by the act to discuss all important measures concerning higher education with this body.

The activities of the trade unions (special group for higher education) are focused preferably on the state budget devoted to education and to salaries of teachers. The representative of trade unions is invited to take part at the regular meetings of the Council of Higher Education Institutions.

2. Quality Assurance and Accreditation

2.1 Introduction

Quality evaluation and its assurance is a relatively new attribute of Czech higher education. Until 1990 the higher education system was extremely unique. All institutions were considered to be the same, all provided the same type of education leading to the same types of academic degrees. Quality was not evaluated or even discussed. Indeed, the high quality of education was simply declared and announced. The higher education act of 1990 established the Accreditation Commission and imposed on it the obligation to express expert opinion which serves as the basis for ministerial decisions regarding the realisation of doctoral (PhD) studies. In addition to these obligations, since 1992 the AC has conducted peer reviews and comparative evaluations of faculties in related study fields. The higher education act from 1998 brought the number of significant changes in higher education system together with new competencies and responsibilities of the AC (see 2.2.1).

2.2 Accreditation Commission

The AC is an expert body composed of 21 members. Members of the AC, including the chair and the vice-chair, are appointed for a six-year term by the Czech Government with the nomination of the Minister of Education (further Minister). Prior to this nomination, the Minister requests references from the representatives of higher education institutions (Council of Higher Education Institutions and Czech Rector´s Conference), the Research and Development Council of the Government of the Czech Republic, and the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, and discusses the nominations with these institutions. Members of the AC should be persons enjoying general authority as experts who are not appointed at the same time to the position of rector, vice-rector or dean. The AC may establish working groups that deal with evaluation of specific matters/activities and that are composed of specialists in particular study programmes, forms and objectives. The activities of the AC and its working groups are regulated by the Statute of the AC approved by the Government and made public by the Minister. Material and financial means for the activities of AC are provided by the Ministry.

The main tasks of Accreditation Commission

The act entails the AC to general care for the quality of higher education, which consists of the comprehensive evaluation of all accredited activities and the publication of the results. It also entails it to elaborate a professional standpoint on further matters concerning higher education which are presented to it by the Minister for consideration.

The act further requires that the AC issues its expert view in the following cases: application for accreditation of study programmes; application for the right to perform habilitation procedures and procedures for the appointment of professors; application of a legal entity for awarding state permission to operate as a private higher education institution; establishment, merger, amalgamation, splitting or dissolution of a faculty of a public higher education institution; determination of the type (university or non-university) of a higher education institution.

Legal regulations

The establishment of the Accreditation Commission, declaration of its rights and the stipulation of its main tasks is the matter of the higher education act. The act, however, limits itself on the main arrangements while some needed details of the AC functioning are left on its Statute and the Decree issued by the Ministry.

Statute of the Accreditation Commission

The Statute gives the AC authority to require necessary information for its work, obliges the AC to publish annual report, stipulates the scope of authority and responsibilities of the AC members and working groups. Statute further prescribes the detailed rules of the AC activities, specifies the financial matters of the AC which are under the responsibility of the Ministry and the role of the AC Secretariat.

The Decree on content of application for study programme accreditation

The higher education act requires the Ministry to issue a decree detailing the content of the written application for study programme accreditation. The decree should be issued after the prior agreement with the AC. The basic provision specifies how to apply. Content of the application should include the formal data about the study programme and should inform about: objectives of studies profile, study branch specification, acquired general, professional and special knowledge and abilities of graduates, characteristics of professions which graduates should be prepared to exercise, other possibilities of their employment, the conditions that must be met by students. The application for accreditation includes furthermore the evidence of study programme objectives and motivations and its provision. Doctoral programme as slightly different from the first and second cycle programmes is subject of the individual article of the decree. If the application for study programme accreditation is presented together with application for the state permission, the evidence on the preparation of material, technical and information provisions of study programme is its integral part. Specific demand concerning the distance or combined study forms of a study programme and recommendations to the applicants for accreditation are elaborated in the additional short guide issued by the AC separately. Application for extension of study programme accreditation's validity or application for accreditation of accredited study programme extension should follow the decree provisions as well but the real procedure focuses especially on the modifications and changes made in the programme.

2.3 Accreditation

In general, the accreditation is the decision (yes/no) made by the Ministry. In all cases the Ministry can award the accreditation only on the basis of the positive expert opinion issued for this purpose by the AC.

Institutions/units of the accreditation scheme, geography

All types of accreditation, i. e. accreditation of a study programme, accreditation of habilitation procedures and accreditation of procedures for the appointment of professors are obligatory for all higher education institutions. The award of the state permission for a private higher education institution may be considered as the specific type of accreditation (yes/no). The institutions under this scheme are all legal entities with the domicile in the Czech Republic which intend to act as a private higher education institutions if granted the state permission. The accreditation scheme works on the national level and so the further described procedures are valid for all higher education institutions without exception.

Additional remark: The accreditation of a study programme may be extended also for the tertiary professional schools in the case they agree to submit the application for accreditation of the jointly provided bachelor study programme with a higher education institution. The similar situation is valid for an institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic (in this case the jointly provided study programmes are preferably at the doctoral level).

Function of accreditation, subjects/disciplines

The main function of accreditation is to assure the minimum standards of quality of activities they are subject to it. The similar is valid for the state permission in the case of private higher education institutions. All disciplines that belong to these activities (study programmes and procedures of habilitation and appointment of professors) are taken into consideration.

The actors, ownership, organisations, reviewers and stakeholders

The actors of the accreditation scheme are the higher education institutions and their leaders – rectors or statutory bodies, the AC and its working groups and the Ministry. AC owns the know-how of the evaluation mechanism the result of which is the basis of the issued expert opinion. The Ministry is bound by the act to respect the view of the AC and has the only limited space to apply its own point of view (see below). The institution as one of the stakeholders of the scheme is responsible to accept the decision and possible consequences (see below). Reviewers are mainly the members of the working groups, sometimes also the members of the AC (who act sometimes as the working group chairs). Customers and stakeholders are above all the students as they are fully dependent on the quality to the study programmes. The accreditation is very important for the newly established private higher education institutions. There is the strong belief that the accreditation of a study programme and the state permission are the tools that prevent students from the low quality of the teaching and connected research, development and other creative activity of the particular private higher education institution. As the awarded/limited/refused accreditation is the public issue the other stakeholders are the students´ parents, employers and other interested parts of the society. In the case of procedures of habilitation and appointment of professors the stakeholders are of the limited range. The highly qualified teachers are considered as the important contribution to the overall quality of studies and so at the same time to the student satisfaction and benefits. It means that students remain the considerable stakeholders. The other stakeholders – parents, employers, trade unions, government, may feel the advantages coming from the well qualified faculty more indirectly. The Ministry plays the role of the important decisive actor in the scheme even if the scope of the decision is limited by the act.

Accreditation of a study programme

All types of study programmes are subject to accreditation. The Ministry oversees the award of accreditation of study programmes, which confers state approval of the program and includes the right to award appropriate academic titles. It is impossible, in the case of non-accredited study programmes, to admit applicants, hold lectures or examinations, or award academic degrees. Accreditation is issued on the basis of an expert evaluation submitted to the Ministry by the AC. The AC evaluates the application in accordance with provisions of the Decree (2.2.4). The act assures the right of the AC to request relevant information and the reasonable time of the whole accreditation process. The aim is to make the process quite soft. The AC is asked to eliminate any insufficiencies that may occur in the application by calling upon the higher education institution to improve these in due term while interrupting its reviewing procedure. Only in the case the higher education institution fails to do improvement the AC issues its standpoint based on the original documentation. The Ministry is obliged not to award accreditation in the case of the AC negative stand point. In the case of the positive evaluation, it is bound by an explicit list of possibilities when it may refuse to award accreditation:

- the study programme does not comply with requirements listed in the part of the act devoted to the study programmes,
- sufficient staff, equipment and information provisions are not granted for the study programme;
- implementation of the study programme is not backed up by sufficient financial, material or technical resources;
- the higher education institution is not deemed capable of providing sufficient guarantees for lecturing;
- the application contains incorrect data deemed crucial for awarding the accreditation.

Accreditation is awarded for a limited period which is at most twice the time of the standard length of study. In the case of doctoral study programmes it should not exceed ten years. The validity of accreditation can be extended repeatedly if the continued positive conditions of the provided programme have been assured. A higher education institution can cancel an accredited study programme only if it provides students with an option to continue their studies in the same or a similar study programme at the same or another higher education institution. To promote higher education studies in non-traditional institutions, the act stipulates that any legal entity dealing with educational, research, developmental, artistic or other creative activity may ask for accreditation together with a higher education institution. A request for accreditation should be supplemented with a contract for mutual co-operation and should outline a joint study programme. The background was an interest to invite the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic to be highly active in doctoral study programmes. At the same time it is the potential possibility for collaboration of higher education institutions with tertiary professional schools.

Accreditation of habilitation procedures and procedures for the appointment of professors

Higher education institutions or their units have the right to carry out procedures for obtaining „venium docendi" (habilitation) and for the appointment of professors only on the basis of accreditation. The procedure is similar to that for study programmes. It is fully prescribed by the act, no additional decree exists. Also in this case the decision of the Ministry is bound by the act and there are explicitly listed the possibilities when it may refuse to award the accreditation.

State permission

The granting of the state permission is obligatory for a legal entity who intend to function as the private higher education institution. Private higher education is the new element of the Czech system and so the procedure of granting the state permission is precisely specified by the act. The application should be submitted to the Ministry and it should contain all formal data including the legal form of the appropriate entity and its statutory body. Further, it should provide information on the following matters:

- long-term intention of educational and research/developmental or other creative activity,
- financial, material, personnel and information sources for the activities,
- design of study programmes,
- design of internal regulations including organisation, activities and the status of the academic community members.

Ministry evaluates the application and in the case of potential insufficiencies asks the applicant to eliminate them in due term. It is empowered to prove information given in the application (for instance by the site visit of facilities etc.). At the same time the Ministry asks the AC to present its standpoint over the design of study programmes. On the basis of the view of the AC and the evaluation of application the Ministry makes the resolution. It is bound by the act not to grant the state permission in the listed cases. They are:

- the standpoint of the AC is negative,
- there is not acceptable approval that a higher education institution is capable of providing sufficient guarantees for its educational and other connected activities,
- the design of internal regulations is in conflict with applicable acts or other legal regulations.

Together with the granting the state permission the Ministry decides about the accreditation of the submitted study programmes. The private higher education institution should start to provide the study programme/programmes within two years, otherwise the state permission becomes ineffective.

Type of a higher education institution, establishment of a faculty

The act says that a higher education institution provides the accredited study programmes (bachelor, master or doctoral) as well as lifelong learning programmes. The type of the higher education institution is determined by the type of accredited study programmes being provided and declared in the statute of the institution. The determination of the type of the institution must comply with the standpoint of the AC. The Academic Senate of a higher education institution makes decisions upon establishing, merging, amalgamating, splitting or dissolving individual parts of the institution on a proposal of the Rector. In the case that the unit in question is a faculty the Rector´s decision is subject to an affirmative standpoint of the AC. The procedure how to apply to the AC is not precisely done by the act or any decree. It is up to the institutional and faculty leadership to explain the intended faculty establishment (and/or the other function concerning a faculty) and to make evidence of the needs of making such a decision.

Possible consequences of accreditation

The AC is empowered to require improvement in a specified period of time in the case it discover shortcomings of an accredited activity. If the AC discovers serious shortcomings in a study pro-

gramme it may propose relevant restrictions to the Ministry. Ministerial restriction can consist of a ban on admission of new applicants or in termination of the accreditation. This means a ban on performing state examinations and awarding academic degrees or complete withdrawal of the accreditation. If the reason for restriction is eliminated (with the exception of withdrawal of the accreditation) the AC invites the Ministry to cancel the measures taken. In the event of temporary termination or withdrawal of the accreditation, the higher education institution is bound to provide students with the possibility to continue their studies in the same or a similar study programme at the same or another higher education institution. The restrictions have the direct implication on the institutional budget. The significant part of the budget is allocated on the basis of the formula which counts with the number of students. In the case of non-accredited study programme there is not allowed to admit students and so the budget is relevantly decreased.

2.4 Evaluation of quality

In the Czech higher education system two types of quality evaluation exist, both are the obligations from the act. The first type is the external evaluation which is the responsibility of the AC as mentioned in 2.2.1. The second type is the self-evaluation provided by a higher education institution itself (2.4.2).

External evaluation

The AC has been evaluating the quality of higher education since it was established, even if this obligation was stipulated later by the act from 1998.

Geography, functions, actors and stakeholders of evaluation scheme

The evaluation scheme is focused on an institution as such and it incorporates all higher education institutions in the country no matter where they are located (geography). The process if preferably improvement oriented. The actors are higher education institutions, usually their main parts (faculties), the AC and their (special) working groups. The AC is the owner of the process (know-how) while the leadership of the evaluated institutions is the main stakeholder. The other stakeholders are the students, employers, state and the society (its part interested in higher education) as such. All of them can use the results of evaluation of quality in accordance with their own specific needs.

Process of external evaluation

While the obligation to perform evaluation comes from the act the necessary extensional description is included into the AC´s Statute. For evaluation in certain period the AC usually chooses one institution or several institutions performing similar accredited study programmes. The evaluation is focused on the overall activity of the institution and the conditions under which it is provided.

The rules (given by the Statute of the AC) of evaluation procedure are as follows:

- The evaluation lasts usually one year and half.

- The AC determines the institution or the group of institutions of similar study fields and the member of the AC responsible for the evaluation process.
- The special working group is established and approved by the AC.
- The rector or another „chief worker“ of the institution is informed about the AC intention and asked for collaboration.
- Institutional leadership is requested to prepare self-evaluation report.
- Gained information and other additional documentation are elaborated by the special working group of the AC.
- The „chief worker“ of the evaluated institution is invited to express the opinion concerning the composition of special working group whose members personally visit the institution.
- The visiting group is composed of at least three members of the special working group.
- The special working group elaborates the recommendations and conclusions.
- The discussion with the leadership of the evaluated institutions on the elaborated report (preliminary results) is organised.
- Recommendations and conclusions are submitted to the AC.
- The AC accepts (may accept) the recommendations and conclusions after the joint debate with the leadership of the evaluated institution.
- The final conclusions and recommendations together with the references of evaluated institution are presented to the Ministry and published.

Possible consequences

The evaluation is in principle the improvement oriented process which does not lead to any concrete consequences made either by the AC either by the state authority. The results of the evaluation are public. It is assumed that evaluation of quality (its results) is very important for:

- the institution itself
  - it may serve as the very good promotion in the case of positive results,
  - it may push the leadership and the staff to find the way of relevant improvements in the case of negative results,
- students and potential applicants of studies
- as the very comprehensive and reliable information about all activities of the respective institution,
- all other stakeholders including employers
- similarly as in the case of students,
- the state (preferably for the Ministry but also for some other ministries) as the very good information and background for the wise decisions.

Internal evaluation

The act requires that each higher education institution should provide regular internal evaluation and to make its results public. An additional requirement is to determine the evaluation procedures in more details in the internal regulations of the institution. This is a loosely structured obligation and it is left up to the institution as to how to provide this evaluation and how to use its results.

International evaluation

Czech higher education institutions have undertaken a number of evaluations initiated by international bodies or by foreign institutions. Some examples include the following: quality audit by CRE (Czech Technical university, Palacky University in Olomouc); evaluation by the European Association for Veterinary Education (Veterinary and Pharmaceutical University in Brno); evaluation by a prestigious foreign university (Czech Agricultural University evaluated by the Agricultural University in Wageningen); FEANI accreditation (received by 25 Czech faculties of technology); IGIP accreditation (received by four higher education institutions); NCFMEA (National Committee on Foreign Medical Education and Accreditation) accreditation (received by all Czech medical faculties); and others. The evaluated institutions usually declared that the knowledge obtained and recommendations received were useful and led to the estimated improvements. These evaluations contribute also to a better understanding of the importance of evaluation and offer new observations on different evaluating mechanisms and approaches.

2.5 Real implementation of formal rules

Accreditation of study programme

The act from 1998 required to accredit all running study programmes during 4 years, it means to close the process to 2003. The total number of 1471 study programmes of all types and forms provided by various higher education institutions (which means 4380 study branches) received accreditation before 1.1.2003.

Note: *A study programme is composed of study branches.* There were some of study branches (as the components of different study programmes) which were not evaluated positively (244 of them) and so they were not allowed to be included into particular study programmes and offered for applicants. Another study branches (142) were evaluated with reservations and so the accreditation was awarded with limits (for relatively short period with required improvements). In the case of the real failure in the accreditation process (one such case is currently under debate) the situation of students should be solved carefully and individually and it is expected that they would finalise their studies in a similar study programme provided by another higher education institution.

Accreditation of the habilitaiton procedure and procedure for the appointment of professors

Slightly more than 10% of all of them (total number of applications for accreditation of both habilitation procedure and procedure for the appointment of professors was 879) did not receive accreditation, the applicants were asked for the improvements and possibly new submission of the application.

State permission

The real situation of granting the state permission is shown in the following table.

Table 2

Year	1999	2000	2001	2002	to 02-2003	sum.
Number of requests for granting the state permission	13	20	19	19	1	72
Number of private HEIs. with the state permission	5	9	11	2	-	27
Number of not awarded the state permissions	8	11	8	14	-	41
Number of requests which are still in discuss in AC or Ministry				3	1	4

Evaluation of quality

The process of general evaluation of the institutional quality was limited to the minimum during the last years as the AC has been fully engaged in the process of accreditation. The aim for the near future is to continue the scheme of evaluation as described in 2.4 and to begin with several private higher education institutions to see to what extend their mission and goals given in the application for the state permission are reached.

3. Accreditation and evaluation schemes and other processes in the country

3.1 Driving forces for the establishment of the accreditation and evaluation scheme

The primary and very basic driving force of the scheme of accreditation and quality evaluation establishment has been the fear that quality of higher education may decrease considerably. The considered reasons have been:

- the very high autonomy and self-governance of the institutions and limited power of the state (act from 1990, approval of the situation by the act from 1998),
  a) the fast and very high increase of the number of students in higher education,
  b) the open space for the establishment of private higher education institutions.

Ad a) The act from 1990 changed the situation in higher education really dramatically. It brought back to the institutions their academic rights together with the high degree of self-governance and autonomy from the state. At the same time it limited very strongly the power of the state and shifted its competencies from the strict control to the indirect steering by means of the allocation of the state budget and obligation to ensure and co-ordinate the higher education development. The situation was in fact in accordance with the overall development in Europe and in the world elsewhere characterised by the high extend of decentralisation. The Czech case, however, differs significantly due to at least three main facts:

- Starting conditions formed by the 40 years development were very different from that in most developed European countries.
- Central governance was until 1990 fully subordinated to the political power without realistic base of its decision-making (no realistic idea had chance to be accepted).
- The change from centralised to extremely decentralised conditions was extremely quick (period of time was several times shorter than in the majority of other countries).

The new legal rules (1998) that brought the obligatory accreditation and evaluation of quality were the general respond taking into consideration the satisfactory decentralisation of the state power and at the same time the way how to ensure the required quality of higher education.

Ad b) The big proportion of the relevant population entering the higher education calls for the diversification of study offer, which will give the chance the diversified group of young people to study in accordance with their abilities and needs. In general, the diversification would enable to assure or even to improve the overall quality of higher education. Anyway, the quality of the wide spectrum of study possibilities should be checked. It was the other reason that the AC was established and entitled by the above described obligations (Chapter 2).

Ad c) The developing private higher education is considered as the additional offer of studies and at the same time as the positive motivation and competition for the public sector. The fast development of the high number of new private higher education institutions in most of CEE countries has been confronted with the lack of adequately qualified teachers/researchers, non-sufficient financial means, facilities etc. This situation may be very dangerous especially for students. To prevent such a situation the obligation of the receiving the state permission for all of newly established private higher education institutions was introduced (see also the Chapter 2).

The initiators of the driving forces were the developing conditions both at the national and international levels. The concrete initiator of the legal rules preparation and the act adoption in 1990 was mainly the academic community itself. This „revolutionary“ situation was quite soon replaced by the more evolution stage when the main initiator of the debate on the new act was the state represented by the Ministry. The debate which resulted in the adoption of the act in 1998 involved the broad spectrum of stakeholders – representatives of state, academic community, higher education governance, students, members of the Parliament and others.

3.2 Political and/or social problems

The relatively strong restrictions which can occur in the case of the negative evaluation of study programme by the AC – the ban on admitting new applicants, on performing state examinations and awarding academic degrees (temporary termination of accreditation) or withdrawal of accreditation may cause the problems of political as well as social character. To prevent students from the difficulties the act obliges the higher education institutions in question to provide students with satisfactory substitution. In theory it seems that students are safe. In practice this is not so easy. In the case of not very frequently delivered study programmes it may be difficult to find proper institution which is able (and also willing) to accept students and to give them opportunity to continue their studies smoothly. Even details as the different sequence of study subjects or courses or the like may cause problems. There may be unpleasant psychological barriers due to the unexpected change of location, of teachers, form of study, social conditions and other various aspects. The additional requirements on students´ accommodation or the need to travel a lot is always costly or time-consuming or both. Social problems regard the students and possibly also their families. Political problems may come into existence in the case of impossibility to find the proper compensatory institution, in the case of too many non-accredited study programmes of an institution or too significant social problems mentioned above.

3.3 Relationships between accreditation and evaluation schemes

Both accreditation and evaluation schemes were developing without the clearly set idea of their relationship or needed connection. The evaluation scheme has been developed from the beginning of the 90th. The first years of these activities were more the attempts using the sensitive approach and the knowledge picked-up from the different fragmented experience from abroad rather than conceptually composed scheme what to do and how to proceed. The activity of the AC at that time was not obligatory and came from the idea to encourage the certain type of „benchmarking". The willingness of an institution to undertake the evaluation came from the possibility to compare itself with others but also to meet the declared aims of the AC which received quite quickly the high prestige. During the time the process was step by step developed taking into consideration both the home and foreign experience supported also by the results of the international evaluations (see 2.4.3). The obligatory accreditation scheme in the full range was introduced in 1998. The accreditation is focused on the study programme (remaining types of accreditation are specific and not important for this section) while the evaluation is focused on the institution as such. The accreditation leads to the fundamental and consequential decision. Besides the very negative influence of the institutional prestige the failure in accreditation is also connected with the reduction of the institutional budget. In contrary, the evaluation does not lead to any decisive result. It is assumed that the published results are the satisfactory tool driving the institution to take the measures in accordance with the obtained recommendations. It is obvious that both schemes are different from many aspects.

3.4 Approval schemes – relations

The Czech higher education system is characterised as very decentralised one. The only approval scheme except of accreditation is that related to the state financial means allocation. The decision making power in this matter is in the hands of the state even if the rules of allocation and final decision on it should be discussed with the representation of higher education institutions (1.5); in most cases the agreement or compromise has been found. The relation between accreditation and money allocation schemes appears in the case of non-accredited study programme – students cannot be enrolled and so the part of budget based on the number of students cannot be received (see also 2.2.3).

3.5 Current situation and possible projection for the future

The recent years were devoted preferably to the accreditation of all study programmes and to the high demand of private persons to receive the state permission. These two activities made the AC members extremely overloaded and suppressed the evaluation activities to the minimum. The positive point of the described development was that all actors of the both schemes started to think about:

- the possibly very high additional working load of academic people involved into accreditation and evaluation activities,
- the high working load of the AC as such,

- the fact that the expert point of the AC needed for accreditation is expressed after the specific kind of evaluation (2.2.4),
- the possibility to incorporate the results of accreditation into the evaluation scheme, i. e. to build on the fact that the study programme has been accredited and to focus the evaluating activity to the other important issues of the institutional performance,
- the amendment of the decree in connection with previously mentioned matter,
- the fact that the AC is responsible body for both schemes, the reasons why it is so and what are the positive/negative aspects of this solution,
- the possible arguments for the improvements/changes of both schemes,
- the need to co-ordinate both activities very carefully to prevent high overload on both sides – the institution and the AC, as it may lead to the negative impacts in general.

The short term projection of the AC is to finalise the accreditation of all study programmes in accordance with act transit provisions (end of 2002) and then to focus itself on continuous re-accreditation, accreditation of newly created programmes and evaluation. It is not easy to predict the development in the field of the private higher education. It is estimated that the submission of applications for the state permission and so the high workload of the AC will continue. The debate among the AC, Ministry and the academic community is expected with the aim to improve further the whole process and to involve the view of other stakeholders, preferably employers.

3.6 The consequence of the set-up of the accreditation scheme for the higher education institutions, departments and scholars

From 1990 till 1998 a state higher education institutions were accredited „implicitly“ by the fact that they were established by the act. The consequence was that an institution was fully responsible for the study programme content, teaching and research capacity related to that, needed facilities etc. as well as for all changes. From 1998 the situation has been changed. A public higher education institution continues to be fully responsible for everything concerning all provided study programmes – starting from the idea of a programme establishment to the elaboration of its concrete form. The difference in comparison to the past is that before the programme is publicly announced and really provided the institution has to apply for the accreditation (2.3.4). The consequence for an institution is that is should very carefully think about all requirements of the AC and the additional demand of the Ministry listed by the act. It should prepare clear evidence that all requirements are met. The unpleasant consequence in comparison with the previous time is the additional working load, which has to be paid to the application otherwise the accreditation may be in danger. In the case that the real weaknesses exist an institution should devote the necessary effort to remove them. It is very important difference from the time before 1998 as the weaknesses could be taken more easily. There were perhaps no programmes of the poor quality offered to students at that time (or at least not frequently) but nevertheless, there was no need to be really reliable and to hurry with improvements. The step by step developing evaluation scheme (from 1990) required more responsible behaviour of faculties as they had to approve general quality including study programmes. In fact the psychological effect of accreditation is the most important. Loss of reputation and potential decrease of money (2.3.8, 3.3) may be highly influential. The consequences of the accreditation of quite demanding procedures of habilitation and procedures for the appointment of professors influence the carrier of academic people of an institution. The accreditation allows to an institution to recruit either own candidates or candi-

dates from other institutions for the professors´ (associate professors) appointment. It helps to improve the academic staff qualification and to increase good institutional reputation. As regards private sector of higher education systems of almost all CEE countries its fast development and significant increase of the number of institutions is characteristic and may be very dangerous from the point of view of quality. It is too soon to judge the real consequences of the obligation to receive the state permission in the CR. The requirements of the AC towards private legal entities are rigorous and objectively comparable with those concerning the accreditation in the field of public sector. Also the ministerial evaluation of data pertaining to provision of financial, material, personnel and information sources, the long-term plan and all formal duties required by the act is demanding. So rightful hope exists that this procedure will help not to follow the negative experience of some other countries.

3.7 Consequences of the set-up of the accreditation scheme for students

It is believed that the accreditation will prevent students from the offer of programmes of the low quality. The worry comes from the still unsatisfied demand of applicants which might very naturally result in creation of programmes in the attractive study fields (economics, business, law, arts, computer sciences etc.) without careful assurance of their content and other needs – highly qualified staff, facilities etc. The accreditation does not allow such an behaviour and so the consequence for students should be fairly positive. The question if students will be served better cannot be answered definitely. Better service to students is not too explicit and can include the number of issues. The accreditation cannot ensure the good care of students from the side of all teachers, the development of the new approaches to learning-teaching process, enough effort paid to the decrease of the classroom lessons substituted by the use of modern teaching materials, more types of modern possibilities of communication among students and their teachers and so on. It does not mean also, that students will be offered by the acceptable social conditions and that the number of connected issues will be solved properly. On the other side, the evaluation seems to be very important tool which may contribute to students´ satisfaction. Students are quite active in this respect and so the space given to them within the evaluation scheme and the attention paid to the students´ recommendations may improve a lot.

3.8 Consequences of the set-up of the accreditation system for other stakeholders

The accreditation of study programmes is the general assurance of quality announced to all stakeholders. It is assurance for parents that studies of their children in each of higher education institutions no matter if it is very old and prestigious one located in Prague or other „university city“ or elsewhere in the region are of a good quality. It is also the assurance that the tuition fee, sometimes considerably high, required by a private higher education institution will be paid for the acceptable quality of the relevant studies. It is assurance for the employers that the graduates will be provided by the good knowledge from the academic point of view. It does not mean, however, that the content of the study programme will meet at least partly their requirements. This is the weak point of our accreditation scheme up to now as the composition of the AC is too academic and so the evaluation of study programmes from the point of view of possible employers is almost missing. It is very difficult to come to the consensus how to improve this weak point and even to solve it partly will take time. The accreditation is also assurance for the state (Ministry)

that the state money devoted to the particular institution are used properly. It is, moreover, the tool in the hands of the state, not to pay for the bad programmes.

3.9 Other processes in the country

There are no other processes of quality evaluation or accreditation in the country that are officially required or organised at the national level. The Czech institutions has been active in some international evaluation schemes (2.4.3) which were in general considered as useful. But there are at least two weak points that should be mentioned: The first one comes from the still quite significant closeness of institutions towards their „own life“ and low joint collaboration. This makes the lack of the shared experience, of the use of the examples of the good practice and the important information about possible difficulties which may occur from the different international evaluation processes. To overcome these problems needs time. The second weak point is conditioned by the institutional money and the possibility to use them for different purposes. The institutional budget is always quite tight and the evaluation procedures offered by the different international bodies or agencies are significantly expensive for Czech conditions. It is the reason that even if some of international evaluations would be attractive (IRP provided by EAU, IQR provided jointly by the OECD/IMHE, ACA and EAU etc.), are not frequently used. (Just for imagination – the OECD/IMHE evaluation costs about 19 000 EUR, which represents about two yearly salaries of quite well paid young teachers of a Czech higher education institution). To accept the offer to be evaluated by an international agency needs to obtain the extra money (example: evaluation of Czech Technical University in Prague by CRE was sponsored from the TEMPUS project).

4. Accreditation and evaluation scheme with respect to the Bologna process, international examples

4.1 Bologna-Prague process

Both evaluation and accreditation schemes were established in the CR before the process of the harmonisation of the European higher education studies was initiated (Sorbonne Declaration, 1998). So in theory the Czech Republic can accept the call of both Bologna Declaration and Prague Communiqué for the urgent need of the quality evaluation and accreditation systems quite easily. In practice it is necessary to pay attention to the weak points of our schemes because we are aware of their existence. The need to pay special attention to the interrelation of evaluation and accreditation schemes was explained in 3.3.

Another serious difficulty is the need to devote a lot of attention to the international development. Too strong concentration on the home problems and on our own ideas how they are to be solved is very deeply rooted. The lack of the openness to the sharing experience gained abroad, of the monitoring of new international knowledge and of the building on the experience of the good practice is necessary to consider as the weak point in the field of quality in higher education. The driving forces for the AC and for the decision making and research bodies are the results of activities between Bologna and Prague (mainly the Salamanka Convention and its ideas expressed in the „Message from Salamanka“). The invitation to create the European platform for

the common debates and exchange of experience is highly acceptable idea. The 10 years of the Czech AC´s experience (even if based preferably on the national matters) is longer and in many aspects broader than in many other countries including those of EU and so it may contribute significantly to the common knowledge of all partners of ENQA. On the other hand the AC would benefit considerably from the experience of others and from their possible comments and recommendations to our schemes.

The European common higher education area would enable the free movement of students across the whole continent which is conditioned by the mutually acceptable quality of studies and their recognition. The first reasonable step at the European level is the mutual recognition of the national evaluation and accreditation schemes, which requires the following approach:

- To have as much as possible of the reliable information about the national schemes of quality evaluation and accreditation.
- To have very clear and understandable information not to make mistakes.
- To trust each other on the basis of the above two statements.
- To take into consideration the Lisbon Convention which ask us to avoid the former approach based on equivalency of studies and to accept the approach of recognition if the significant differences do not exist.

The last statement will play the significant role even if there is still a lot of misunderstanding. The Czech difficulties to recognise studies obtained at different home institution although the accreditation exists and so one might think that it should not be a problem prove the importance of reliable information, trust and last but not least common debate.

4.2 Transnational education

It has not been very common issue in the Czech Republic. In fact, it is very easy for a foreign higher education provider to act in the country as a private higher education institution, to offer study programmes and to award foreign degrees. In this case there is not enough knowledge about the quality of studies and so the recognition of the received academic degree may cause problems. The competent authority are the Czech higher education institutions and the decision on the recognition/non-recognition may create the precedence for the future as well as give the idea about the relevant quality. A foreign higher education provider may ask for accreditation. If successful it is approval of quality and the permission to award the Czech academic degrees. There are several providers who did so. The Czech Republic still does not belong among countries, which export higher education studies. In contrary, the exchange of students is developing very quickly. The debate on the concept of quality of transnational education is in the very beginning as well as the debate on GATS and education being the service commodity.

4.3 International examples and role of models

It is usually stressed that the models even if they work nicely in other countries cannot be transferable to the different conditions. In contrary, there were done a lot of investigations the results of which speak about some important elements which can be found in the more or less modified form in almost all evaluation schemes that are used elsewhere. The Czech experience can approve both views. We are very closed society towards changes and so we do not like to find models. On the other side we sometimes tend to accept what seems to be modern and highly required. In this

case often without proper analysis and so sometimes with the questionable results. We had the great chance to evaluate the whole higher education system in the framework of the joint project with the OECD. The whole process, at that time applied on the former Czechoslovak higher education (started in 1991) went successfully, the final report was unlike usually (destination is Paris) discussed in Prague. The reason was to enable to the wide spectrum of stakeholders to take part. The follow-up report was prepared and discussed two years later in Paris. The impact of this event was quite strong, the recommendations were the topics of very serious debates and they influenced the development of higher education system significantly. From the point of view of a model – the general elements of the scheme were incorporated into our own evaluation scheme.

There was not such an example used as the model in the case of accreditation. There was some experience from the US accreditation disseminated in the CR through several seminars where our colleagues from American Council on Education and Pennstate University participated, there were the personnel experience of those Czech individuals who had the possibility to stay in USA etc. So may be that our accreditation scheme was influenced slightly and some several aspects were incorporated. In principle neither model from abroad nor possible models from the field of professional accreditation were fully accepted. The accreditation scheme was established on the agreement of the wide spectrum of higher education stakeholders who participated in the debates and preparation of the higher education act adopted in 1998.

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Appendix: Tertiary education in the CR

The task of the appendix is to describe the whole sector of tertiary education in the Czech Republic and to explain why the report was devoted almost exclusively to the higher education.

Tertiary education in the Czech Republic includes any type of education recognised by the state that requires a completed secondary education as an entrance condition.

Tertiary education is composed of:

- Higher education
- Tertiary professional education
- Post-secondary courses (they will come into existence when the new act on education will be accepted; it has been prepared but the formal process of its adoption (Government, Parliament) has not been covered yet)
- Courses of lifelong learning

1. Tertiary professional schools

Tertiary professional schools were developed first of all on the basis of vocational secondary schools. They provide educational programmes mostly highly professionally oriented, sometimes very closely connected with possible employers of graduates, lasting in average 2,5 – 3 years, leading to the diploma (not comparable with bachelor degree).

Table 2: Number of students in tertiary professional schools

School year	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02
Number of students	14 931	23 526	29 566	31 073	26 605	26 680

Some of these schools are very active, ambitious and they provide programmes of a very good quality. The act on higher education allows to prepare the jointly provided bachelor study programme by a tertiary professional school in collaboration with a higher education institution and to submit it for accreditation. In the case of awarded accreditation the both institutions continue the mutual co-operation while providing the study programme. The higher education institution is responsible to admit applicants to the jointly provided programme and to award academic degrees (bachelor degrees) to the graduates.

The tertiary professional schools, mainly those with the experience in jointly provided study programmes may be the basis for the establishment of the new higher education institution of non-university type. This has been the case of the establishment of majority of private non-university higher education institutions up to now (see 1.1) and it is expected that during the short time also several public higher education institutions of non-university type will appear.

2. Accreditation and evaluation of quality

Unfortunately the situation in this part of the tertiary sector of education is not satisfactory. There has not been developed nor the accreditation neither real quality evaluation scheme.

The tertiary professional programmes are approved by the Ministry which is in fact just administrative process. The „evaluation“ is under the responsibility of the School Inspection. Also this process may be characterised similarly and it has very little to do with the real evaluation of quality.

The strategy at the ministerial level supported also by the national concept of education and expressed by the ideas of the White Paper is to work seriously on the mechanisms of quality evaluation. It is expected that both the good experience and some weak points of the evaluation scheme used in higher education sector will be taken into consideration while the special characteristic of the tertiary professional education will be the basis of the evaluation mechanism development.

The pilot project started several months ago. It is expected that the results of the project will influence also partly the accreditation mechanism applied at the level of bachelor study programmes and evaluation of higher education institutions of non-university type as the contemporary means are often criticised due to their too academic character.

3. Courses of lifelong learning

Any course of lifelong learning can be subject of the evaluation process while it is provided by a higher education institution. It is not subject of accreditation as it is considered implicitly that the provider – higher education institution, is the sufficient confirmation of its quality.

Other courses of lifelong learning may be accredited by the special Accreditation Commission (it is unfortunate that the name is again Accreditation Commission as it might cause confusing situation because it is completely different body) established by the Ministry for this purpose. The accreditation is not obligatory and a provider asks for accreditation in the case he/she intends the national-wide acceptation of the course.

Ministerial Approval and Improvement-Oriented Evaluation in Denmark
Country Report Denmark

Dorte Kristoffersen

1. The Danish Higher Education System

1.1 Higher Education in Denmark

Structure and Steering of Higher Education

The Danish higher education system is a public education system. Higher education institutions are public and state-regulated. All higher education is subject to ministerial approval of new programmes and institutions. The institutions have a high degree of autonomy but must follow general regulations, e.g., concerning teacher qualifications and award structures.

Private institutions can operate without any approval. There are few private institutions of higher education and no private universities. The last few years have seen some examples of transnational education offers where Danish institutions have established agreements with foreign institutions to offer bachelor's degrees. These agreements have primarily been established by colleges offering medium-cycle professional degrees.

The institutions of higher education are divided into two sectors:

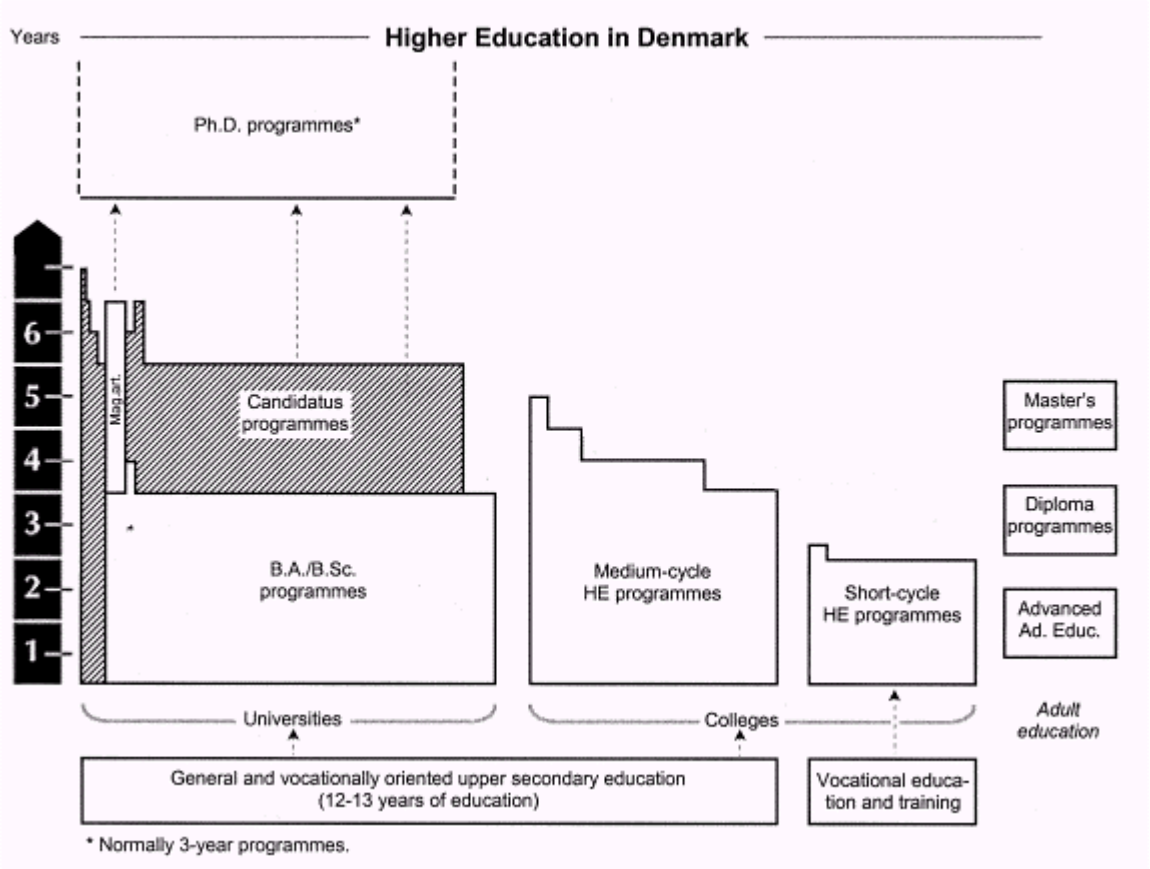
- The college sector, i.e the professionally oriented higher education sector offering short-cycle and medium-cycle professional programmes
- The university sector

Higher education programmes are divided into short-cycle (18%), medium-cycle (39%) and long-cycle (43%) programmes.

The Ministry of Education is responsible for almost all college sector education whereas the universities are part of the responsibility of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation. Students pay no fees to enter higher education. They may furthermore obtain a state grant for the official time of their studies plus an additional year in case of a wrong choice.

General entrance requirements to higher education are 12 years of education. Admission to many study programmes also depends on the fulfilment of specific entrance requirements. These may either be a specific subject combination, or requirements concerning the subjects taken or the grades obtained. It is also possible for the institutions to formulate more qualitatively oriented criteria for admission, e. g. work experience, travel, or community service. A *numerus clausus* exists for some study programmes.

Figure 1: Higher Education in Denmark



Source: the Ministry of Education website (www.uvm.dk)

Size

Danish higher education institutions had an intake of almost 43,100 students in 2001. 44% of an age group attends one of the three kinds of programmes.

The college sector comprises over 150 specialised institutions. One third offers short-cycle programmes and the other two-thirds medium-cycle programmes.

As of 2003, there will be 12 universities. 5 are multi-faculty universities while the rest are specialised in fields such as engineering, information technology and education. All university programmes are research based.

The Main Types of Degrees and Programmes

The degrees offered in the Danish higher education system are organised according to the types of programmes on offer.

Tabel 1: Degree types

Cycle	Degree/title	Type of institution	Duration
Short-cycle professional qualification	AK[1] 2-year professional degree	College	2 years
Medium-cycle	Professional bachelor degree	College	3 to 4 years
Medium- cycle	Bachelor of arts Bachelor of science	University	3 years
Long-cycle	Master of arts Master of science	University	2 years[2] (awarded after a total of 5 years)
Long-cycle	Mag.art	University	Bachelor degree + 3 years
Long-cycle	Ph.D. degree	University	3 years (awarded after a total of 8 years)

Source: En Dansk Kvalifikationsnøgle (A Danish Qualification Framework)

There is also an adult education system. It offers Advanced Adult Education, which is comparable to short-cycle higher education. The Diploma programmes are comparable to medium-cycle higher education, and the Master programmes (e.g. MBAs) are comparable to long-cycle higher education. Most programmes consist of 2 years of part-time study, equivalent to 1 year of full-time study. Admission requirements are relevant educational qualifications and at least 2 years of work experience in a relevant profession.

Labour Market Requirements

The labour market in Denmark is unregulated. A degree that is recognised by the government is only required to practise a few professions, e.g. medicine, midwifery, and law. These professions are subject to a formal authorisation process by the relevant authority, e.g. the National Board of Health.

*Tabel 2: Rates of unemployment**

	1997	2001
Short-cycle professional education	6,2%	3,6%
Medium-cycle education	3,0%	2,1%
Long-cycle education	4,4%	2,9%

Source: Statistics Denmark
* Percentage of those holding the degree

1 No official translation is available.
2 The degree in medicine is awarded after a total of 6½ years of study, however.

Governance and Steering of Higher Education

The Danish higher education institutions are governed by various laws, and there are differences in the specific rules for governance and steering. There are a number of principles, however, which apply to all institutions. They are governed by boards with both external members and in most cases members within the institution. For the universities this principle is introduced with the new university law which is discussed below. The university boards will comprise a majority of external members and the chairman of the board will be chosen among these.

Staff-student study committees are responsible for the planning of the study programmes. They comprise staff and student representatives and sometimes technical and administrative staff.

2. Procedures of Accreditation, Approval and Quality Assurance

2.1 Accreditation in Denmark

In terms of the definition of an accreditation scheme offered in this study there are no accreditation schemes in Denmark for public degrees, programmes or institutions. The main reason for this is that all institutions, programmes and degrees are subject to approval by laws and ministerial orders.

As mentioned in the first section, there are no private universities operating in Denmark and only a few private short-cycle higher education programmes. These are subject to accreditation if they want to obtain state educational grants for their students. This type of accreditation was set up to limit the rise in the number of private programmes demanding state educational grants, which took place in the late 1990s. Accreditation is not mandatory for the institutions, but necessary to obtain the state educational grant.

The application for accreditation is sent to the Ministry of Education where it is screened, and it is decided if it should be sent to The Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) for accreditation. The institutions are asked to prepare a self-study in which they must document how they meet a number of predefined criteria. The self-evaluation is sent to EVA which sets up an internal project team among its staff that is responsible for the accreditation process.

When the self-study is analysed the project team carries out a site visit that has a double purpose. On the one hand, to meet the different groups at the institutions, i.e. students, staff, management and representatives of the external examiners to verify the statements put forward in the self-study. On the other, the site visit offers the team the opportunity to study more carefully the documentation for the statements put forward in the self-study.

In addition to the self-study and the site visit, statistics are prepared that show whether the labour market is favourable for the graduates of the private programmes. It is an important parameter in the accreditation process.

After the site visit the project team draws up a recommendation for accreditation commenting on the strengths and weaknesses in respect of the different criteria. The recommendation may lead to three kinds of decision: unconditional approval, approval on condition and non-approval. If institutions are granted unconditional approval they obtain the right to the state educational grant for four years. In case of approval on condition they typically have to improve certain aspects of their procedures. The typical delay granted to remedy these shortcomings is between 6 and 12 months. If an institution is not approved it has to reapply for accreditation.

2.2 Approval of Higher Education institutions, Programmes and Degrees

General Procedure

The establishment of new institutions, programmes, and degrees is regulated by the relevant ministry, i.e. either the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation for the universities. Institutions and programmes under the Ministry of Education are regulated by ministerial orders and subject to approval by the ministry. A proposal for a new university law was presented in Parliament in January 2003. It is part of the proposal that ministerial orders[3] will be replaced by ministerial approval for the establishment and abolishment of institutions and new programmes.

The application to establish new programmes is sent to the relevant ministry. In the case of the Ministry of Education the approval will be decided in relation to the relevant ministerial order. In future, the university programmes will only be subject to ministerial approval and their relevance for society will play an important part in the approval process. Programmes for which special approval procedures exist are presented below.

There is no procedure for one type of institution to change status, e.g. for a college to apply to become a university.

Approval of Professional Bachelor Degrees

Following the introduction of the professional bachelor degree in 2001 all medium-cycle higher education programmes will be granted the title of professional bachelor degrees (title: bachelor plus the profession). This right is granted by the Ministry of Education on the basis of an assessment of the degree to which the programmes fulfil the requirements set out in the ministerial order for the professional bachelor programmes. The Ministry of Education has furthermore committed itself to carry out a further review of the programmes on the basis of the formal criteria set out in the legislation and a number of criteria defined by EVA to decide whether they can maintain the right to offer the professional bachelor degree. The Minister of Education has not yet decided how this approval procedure will be organised.

Approval of Master Degrees in the Adult Education System

The Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation approves the establishment of new master's programmes as part of the Adult Education system on the basis of a recommendation made by the Rectors' Conference.

An application for approval of a new master degree in the Adult Education system has to include a description of the following points:

- Admission requirements
- The degree of user and labour market influence
- Objectives and content
- Target group and professional profile
- The division of the programme into modules
- Length

3 Ministerial orders are the written regulations of the institutions of HE in a relation to their various activities. In addition to or on the background of these various activities or decision can be subject to ministerial approval.

- Quality assurance mechanisms
- Placement in the taximeter system (the cash-per-student grant system)
- Relation to the relevant ministerial order

Approval will be made public on the ministerial website.

If the application cannot be approved, the Ministry contacts the Rectors' Conference to further discuss the application and clarify the criticisms. Depending on the results of this, the application is either rejected or the programme is asked to provide additional information.

Programmes are initially approved for a two-year trial period. After this period, a self-evaluation process is launched and the ministry decides whether the programme should be granted a permanent status, be adjusted or be closed down on the basis of the result.

Programmes within the same academic field will be evaluated together. The evaluation will focus on a number of predefined issues which are known to the programmes beforehand and is the same for all programmes. It will draw on a number of facts about e.g. enrolment and drop-out rates and will include comments from external examiners who were involved in the evaluations and representatives of the labour market for the specific programmes. Furthermore, the judgement of the graduates' competences after graduation by the labour market will also play a role in the evaluation.

2.3 The National, Supra-Institutional Evaluation Scheme

EVA's Mandate

The Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA) was established by law in June 1999 with the objective to systematically evaluate all levels of the educational system. Furthermore, EVA must be the centre of expertise concerning educational evaluation in Denmark. Last but no least, EVA can carry out evaluations on request from the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, other ministries responsible for educational activities, school owners or institutions.

EVA is an independent institution under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. It has its own board and can decide which evaluations to initiate each year. The activities of EVA are presented in annual plans of action which are approved by the minister of education. Participation in the evaluations initiated by EVA is mandatory for the higher education institutions.

EVA can also decide what to evaluate. Between 1992 and 1999 EVA's predecessor, the Center for Evaluation, evaluated all programmes of higher education (both medium and long cycle education) every seven years. With the integration of the Center for Evaluation into EVA it was decided, however, not to continue immediately the round of programme evaluations but to test a number of other types of evaluation, drawing on the experiments in the field of evaluation of higher education in the 1990s. EVA has therefore not decided, for the time being, on one type of evaluation, but carries out follow-up evaluations, programme evaluations, evaluations of faculties and institutions and audits that evaluate the internal quality assurance mechanisms of the institutions.

EVA's Activities and Procedures

According to the law on the Danish Evaluation Institute there are a number of mandatory elements in the evaluations carried out by EVA:

- An evaluation must build on the self-evaluation carried out by the evaluated units

- An external evaluation group is responsible for the recommendations and conclusions in the evaluation report
- EVA staff is responsible for the methodology and the secretariat function
- A public report.

Prior to each evaluation, EVA conducts a preliminary study which encompasses existing material relating to the field of education, e.g. regulations, ministerial orders, study plans and curricula. The preliminary study also often involves a dialogue with the main stakeholders in the evaluated field.

The preliminary study is essential for the preparation of the terms of reference for the evaluation. The Board approves the terms of reference. After their approval, they are sent to the institutions participating in the evaluation and are made available to the public on the EVA website.

EVA is obliged by law to inform the participating institutions about the objectives of the evaluation, the terms of reference, including the time schedule, the methods applied, the composition of the expert group and the institutions' tasks in the evaluation process. EVA also has to inform the evaluated institutions that participation is mandatory, and that they are obliged to provide all the information requested by EVA which is of relevance to the evaluation and must comment on factual and technical errors before the report is made public. All the costs of an evaluation and those of the preparation of the self-evaluation document are covered by EVA. The duration of an evaluation is in general one year between the approval of the terms of reference by the board and the publication of the final report.

As part of the preparation of the terms of reference, members of the external evaluation group are identified by EVA and approved by the board. The external evaluation group is made up of experts in the field evaluated. EVA applies a multi-professional peer concept. As a general rule, the experts are academic experts, representatives of the labour market and general experts in education. It is important for the evaluation process that the experts are external to the institutions or programmes being evaluated. But at the same time great care is taken to find experts who are respected by those being evaluated and who have an understanding and knowledge of the field under evaluation. In order to achieve the necessary level of externality EVA uses a large number of Swedish and Norwegian experts who understand Danish.

The institutions prepare a self-evaluation report on the basis of guidelines for self-evaluation. These are prepared by EVA and commented by the external evaluation group. The guidelines comprise the themes that the institutions must cover in the self-evaluation and sometimes the specific questions that they have to answer. The self-evaluation report serves two purposes. First, it aims at initiating processes of quality improvement within the institutions. Second, it serves as information for the external expert panel. The guidelines also contain advice on how to organise the self-evaluation process. The institutions are encouraged to set up a self-evaluation group comprising members of its management, teachers, students and technical and administrative staff. This group is responsible for drafting the self-evaluation document. EVA always carries out a number of additional surveys, which also form part of the documentation. They can be surveys among labour market representatives and former students, or more statistical surveys e.g. aimed at throwing light on the employment situation of the graduates.

Once the institutions have prepared the self-evaluation report and the surveys are finalised, the external expert panel and the EVA staff visit the institutions for a day. They meet the managers, staff, students, and in some cases external examiners and the self-evaluation group.

Following the site visit, the EVA staff member responsible for the evaluation drafts elaborates the evaluation report on the basis of input from the experts. All reports contain conclusions, e.g. on the strengths of the institutions and specific recommendations as to how quality can be im-

proved. The draft report is sent to the institution for correction of factual mistakes. Furthermore, the institutions can comment on the evaluation process and the methods used. Once the report is finalised, it is printed and made public. All EVA reports are available in Danish (the abstracts will be available in English) on its website (www.eva.dk). Furthermore, they are circulated to a large number of parties, e.g. the evaluated institutions, the relevant ministry and the main stakeholders. The printed reports are also for sale.

Follow-Up to Evaluations

The follow-up to the evaluations of short and medium cycle education carried out by EVA is also regulated by law. It is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. According to the ministerial order on follow-up, which came into effect in January 2002, an evaluated institution has to plan its follow-up to the evaluation no later than 6 months after the publication of the report and send it to the Ministry of Education. The Minister of Education has the option to take action if the institution's follow-up is deemed insufficient. The universities are responsible for the follow-up to evaluations.

In May 2002, legislation on transparency and openness was introduced requiring that all educational institutions put the results of both internal and external evaluations on their website.

The Quality System in Short-Cycle Higher Education

Since the year 2000, institutions providing vocational education and short-cycle higher education have been under the obligation to use a system of continuous quality development and a system of assessment of results. Hence, they must have procedures for systematic self-evaluation of central areas of institutional activity. These ensure, for instance, that teaching measures up to the predetermined goals, that appropriate teaching methods are used, that the school or the teachers consult students on their assessment of the instruction provided and of the institution's organisation of the course or programme of study, and the systematic continuing training of teachers. In addition, examination results and any external evaluations must form part of self-evaluation. On the basis of a school's self-evaluation, a follow-up plan must be devised specifying how the predetermined goals are to be achieved. It is an explicit requirement that teachers, students and the local education committee be involved in this process.

The Examination System

In parallel to the system of external evaluation, there is also a system of external examiners. At least one-third of the exams of higher education programmes must be attended by an external examiner. The external examiners are organised in national boards for the various programmes of study. The national boards of examiners make sure that the examiners are used on a rotating basis at the different institutions offering the same programmes in order to safeguard academic standards across the country.

At least one third of the boards of external examiners should be labour market representatives. The external examiners are nominated by the institutions and approved by the relevant ministry. The course supervisor is responsible for choosing the examiners for each examination.

3. The Status of Accreditation in Denmark

3.1 Accreditation in the National Context

It has been mentioned above that Denmark does not have an accreditation system of higher education. It is interesting to observe that the discussion of the possible benefits and needs of introducing accreditation has been close to non-existent in Denmark as compared to many other European Union countries. Undoubtedly, the main reason for this is that approval is and has always been centrally managed by the relevant ministries in the form of ministerial orders and ministerial approval. It should be mentioned, however, that the ministries have always been able to use the results of external evaluations to carry out their inspection obligations, e.g. in terms of financing or institutional requirements. But this is not done with an accreditation purpose.

In addition, Denmark has both an efficient evaluation system and a system of external examiners. The evaluation system is a guarantee that the overall quality of higher education is studied at regular intervals, and the system of external examiners checks that the quality of specific subjects and academic standards are maintained and are comparable across institutions and programmes. In sum, these evaluation procedures ensure that Danish higher education activities are evaluated on a regular basis, and regularity has been emphasised in the new university law whereby the universities will also be responsible, through development contracts, for initiating systematic evaluation of teaching and research activities.

Discussions on accreditation have mainly involved the ministries, the advisory system for higher education, the rectors' conferences and EVA. They have not yet involved the staff. The Universities' Rectors' Conference has been the most outspoken. It is not willing to discuss the introduction of accreditation unless the ministries are willing to abolish the ministerial approval system. Ministerial approval and accreditation would imply a double approval system. The discussion of accreditation versus ministerial orders thus goes hand in hand. It has not been challenged further than this, since the system of ministerial approval is still firmly in place.

It could be expected that the professions, e.g. engineering, would be especially active in the debate as national accreditation often paves the way for easier access for students to foreign institutions of higher education. But this has not been the case except for the two business schools which have both participated in the EQUIS accreditation scheme, which covers business schools.

Accreditation is often mentioned as an important steering mechanism in matters of recognition of foreign degrees. During the past year the need for accreditation as a means of controlling offers of foreign degrees or joint degrees has been discussed. There is no doubt that in the long run these types of educational offers will require some kind of control in the form of evaluation or accreditation. To date there are only few examples where these educational offers have caused severe problems and there is at this stage no agreement within and between the ministries as to how seriously this situation should be taken and what measures should be introduced.

As mentioned, a system for approval of Master degrees in Adult Education has been introduced. It resembles an accreditation system insofar as the criteria are quite specific. Furthermore, the programmes will be evaluated on the basis of a number of pre-defined criteria after a trial period. The same trend can be found in the approval of professional bachelor degrees. The Ministry of Education has announced that the formal approval of these degrees will be on the basis of predefined criteria and will end in a yes or no decision. These schemes have only recently been introduced, and it is too early to say if this is a first step towards the introduction of accreditation. It should be added, however, that neither of the ministries responsible for these degrees are trying to link the introduction of these approval systems to a discussion of accreditation.

It should also be mentioned that EVA has carried out a number of evaluations, both national and international, which are based on specific criteria in the last two years. These evaluations do not lead to accreditation, but they have given both EVA and the participating institutions experience with a type of evaluation that could eventually lead to accreditation.

3.2 The Pros and Cons of Accreditation

The national context, and not the international imperative, has decided the fate of accreditation in Denmark. On the basis of the analysis presented above on the concept of evaluation, a number of advantages and disadvantages of accreditation as a national steering mechanism can be identified.

First, accreditation would establish an approval process that is solidly grounded in an evaluation process based on academic judgements of quality. In this way, the judgement of good quality, which would be part of an evaluation process, would be separated from the approval process, which could be part of the ministerial approval responsibility. Second, accreditation based on pre-defined criteria would increase transparency both in terms of the approval process and the quality of the institutions that are subject to accreditation. Third, accreditation could be a means to liberalise higher education by offering a control system in a less regulated market.

But three disadvantages can also been identified. There is a risk that evaluation on the basis of pre-defined criteria will impede the development processes within the institutions as fulfilment of the criteria becomes a goal in itself. Second, the formulation of criteria can be based on or develop a conservative concept of quality and hamper innovation. The third disadvantage is of a financial nature. For accreditation to be efficient it has be to repeated at regular intervals, e.g. 5 to 7 years, to make sure that the quality is always up to current standard. This would involve a large number of resources both within the institutions, at the evaluation institute, and in the ministries.

These arguments do not spring from the Danish discussion, which has not yet reached such an operational level. Apart from the two examples mentioned above, there are no concrete initiatives or signals from the ministries that the situation is about to change. The educational legislation that is being prepared or introduced at the moment follows the same lines of ministerial approval of degrees, programmes and institutions as before.

4. The International Dimension of Supra-Institutional Evaluation Schemes

4.1 The Influence of Bologna and GATS on Evaluation

In terms of the supra-institutional evaluation schemes, EVA follows the Bologna process very closely and has initiated or is part of a number of projects that attempt to test methods of evaluation that could help to create transparency of the quality of the educational systems and facilitate student mobility and access to foreign higher education institutions.

As part of its 2001 plan of action, EVA carried out an international evaluation of agricultural science in Denmark, the Netherlands, Germany and Ireland. The national evaluations carried out by EVA as a rule take as their starting point the objectives formulated for the evaluated unit, e.g. an institution or a programme. The educational systems in Europe are too different to apply this approach. Therefore the international evaluation took as its starting point a number of predefined

criteria. The expert panel in the evaluation consisted of experts from the four countries and a chairman from Norway.

Furthermore, EVA is centrally placed in the Transnational European Evaluation Project (TEEP) of the European Network for Quality Assurance (ENQA) at the request of the European Commission. The project is carried out in cooperation with the quality assurance agencies in England, Catalonia (Spain) and Denmark. It aims to contribute to greater transparency and compatibility in European higher education through the development of a method for transnational evaluation, and it builds directly on the experience of the former European pilot project and the Tuning Institutional Structures in Europe project.

Denmark has been involved in a number of activities aimed at giving evaluation agencies and ministries of education across Europe experience in international evaluations and thus prepare them for future challenges. The most important is the preparation of the 'Dublin' Bachelor- and Master-descriptors. Their value will be tested in an international perspective in TEEP and in a national context in an evaluation of German language at university level in Denmark recently launched by EVA.

Last but not least, the evaluation agencies in the Nordic countries launched a project in 2001 to test a method for mutual recognition of quality assurance agencies. One of the aims was to decide if the evaluation method helped the two national evaluation agencies in Finland and Denmark, FINHEEC and EVA, to recognise each other's evaluations and thus accept them as equivalent. Furthermore, it functioned as a quality assurance project for the two participating agencies.

It is the official position of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation that there is no need to move beyond the level of liberalisation that currently exists in Europe, i.e. only privately funded education activities are subject to negotiations in GATS. The argument behind this is that the Danish education market is quite open, giving both publicly funded education and non-governmental providers of education the possibility to operate. Concerning quality assurance and evaluation, the ministries consider ENQA to be an important contribution to the creation of a European platform for quality assurance and evaluation, but stress that quality assurance remains a national responsibility.

4.2 International inspiration

The supra-institutional evaluation procedures have always been inspired by international examples and developments. EVA has always participated in international cooperation at global, European and Nordic levels. Furthermore, it has been involved in a number of European projects, e.g. the European pilot project carried out between 1994 and 1995 for which EVA was responsible, together with the French Comité National d'Evaluation, and the PHARE Multi-Country project carried out between 1997 and 1998. They both aimed at giving all countries in Europe an experience with evaluation and methods for quality improvement. International cooperation and the projects naturally inspired and thus had a positive effect on the Danish evaluation procedures.

5. Other Types of Quality Assessment Activities

For permanent employment, the qualifications of staff at higher education institutions are reviewed by a panel of experts in the field to make sure that the qualifications are of sufficient aca-

demic quality. Staff with a research obligation are also regularly subject to review of their work. These procedures differ according to the university.

Furthermore, the management responsible for the permanent staff is obliged to carry out yearly appraisal interviews with staff. The purpose of these interviews is to evaluate the achievements of the staff members over the last year, give positive and negative feedback and discuss and plan the personal development activities for the coming year.

Country Report Finland

Jussi Välimaa

1. Introducing starting points for Finnish country report

The aim of this country report is to describe and analyse the nature of accreditation, approval and evaluation processes and schemes in Finnish higher education. This study is based mainly on the analysis of evaluation reports published by Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) supported by relevant research literature, higher education data base (KOTA and AMKOTA)[1] maintained by the Ministry of Education, and other statistical data.

The study begins with discussion on the central concepts of the study. It is followed by the description of historical layers in Finnish higher education and evaluation to explain the context of accreditation. The study then focuses on present day accreditation, evaluation and approval practices. Concluding chapters will discuss the nature and social roles of accreditation, approval and evaluation processes in Finnish higher education.

2. Defining accreditation, evaluation and approval

This country report will focus on the processes of accreditation (i. e. approval based on evaluation), evaluation (without approval-like consequences), and approval (without evaluation) in Finnish higher education. These concepts describe both the process where evaluation is related to political decision-making (accreditation) and the evaluation processes in and during which the political dimension is not that evident (evaluation). Approval describes, in turn, the Finnish traditional administrative way of giving permission to an institution or a degree program without utilising any public evaluation or accreditation scheme.

Taken these concepts as intellectual devices one should reflect shortly on their relationship. According to Scriven (1991) „the term of 'evaluation' refers to process of determining the merit, worth, value of something, or the product of that process".[2] Accreditation, in turn, is an evalua-

1 See KOTA database (http://www.csc.fi/kota/nuts.html) and AMKOTA database (http://www.csc.fi/amkota).

2 According to Woodhouse (1996) assessment is, in turn, an evaluation that results in a grade, whether numeric, literal or descriptive). I will use the concept of evaluation also because the Finnish word 'arviointi' can be translated as

tion of whether an institution qualifies for a certain status. Specialised or professional accreditation is, in turn, an evaluation of whether an institution or programme qualifies its graduates for employment in a particular field (Woodhouse 1999). In addition to these concepts we should also mention audit, which as a concept describes the process during which organisation's claims (explicit or implicit) about itself are being checked.[3] All these schemes have been used in the evaluation processes in Finnish higher education. Challenging with these concepts is the fact that they often coincide in evaluation practices. I will return to this issue in the chapter four.

3. Finnish higher education in a historical perspective

3.1 Five historical layers

Present-day Finnish higher education is a mass higher education system with the history of over 360 years (see Välimaa 2001). I will give on outline of the historical development by sketching the history with the help of the idea of historical layers. These historical layers should be understood like archaeological layers developed above each other over time. Following the metaphor, earlier layers have continuous influence on the modern practices because the traditions (ideas, norms and practices) have not only provided starting points for new developments but also because they have given forms and shapes to more recent layers.

The basic historical layer in Finnish higher education was laid during the Middle Ages when Catholic Church supported the sending of talented young Finnish men to European universities, most often to the University of Paris. This cultural connection to European Continent was also one of the factors that has made Finland part of the Western European Cultural sphere (Nuorteva 1999).

The second historical layer in Finnish higher education, and the beginning of the develop towards a national system of higher education, was initiated by the establishment of the University of Turku (with the name Royal Academy in Åbo) in 1640. At that time Finland was part of the Swedish Kingdom and higher education served mainly the purposes of the Lutheran Church by training priests and defending the „right religion" and the King by training civil servants. This civil servant social function is continuously an important part of the Finnish higher education, also because the majority of university students are employed by public sector.

The third historical layer to Finnish higher education was added during the period when Finland was an autonomous Grand Duchy as part of the Russian Empire from 1809 to 1917. This was a historical period of cultural, political and economic development of Finland and the Finnish nationality. Higher education, and especially the only university in Finland, which was moved from Turku to the new capital Helsinki in 1827 and renamed to the Imperial Alexander University (later know as the University of Helsinki), played a central role in both cultural, political and economic processes creating a basis for the independent nation state which was established during the First World War (Klinge 1987, 1987). The period was important also to the development of the Finnish idea of university. It is no historical exaggeration, perhaps, to say that

evaluation and because there is no specific Finnish word for assessment. 'Arviointi' (evaluation) is also rather neutral term in Finland.

3 When an institution states objectives, the purpose of the quality audit is to check the extent to which the institution is achieving its own objectives. When an institution makes explicit claims, audit becomes a validation of those claims (Woodhouse 1999)

essential in this Finnish idea of university was, first, the notion that university is a national cultural institution. The idea of a cultural institution was rooted in the Humboldtian ideals of a university. Secondly, university and higher education were considered important aspects of the development of the nation and nation state. Thirdly, it was also realised that access to education - including higher education – is an issue to be decided by politicians not by the academics themselves. These interpretations of the idea of university have had continuity also in the 20th century; the issues that they involve have been addressed at different points of time on the basis of variety of political decisions (Välimaa 2001).

Table 1: The number of students in Finnish higher education, 1900-1999

Year	Students in universities	Students in polytechnics	All students
1900	2 300	-	2 300
1910	3 100	-	3 100
1920	3 500	-	3 500
1930	6 900	-	6 900
1940	9 500	-	9 500
1950	15 000	-	15 000
1960	25 300	-	25 300
1970	60 700	-	60 700
1980	84 200	-	84 200
1990	110 700	-	110 700
2000	157 200	114 100	271 300

Sources: Nevala 1991, KOTA database, AMKOTA database

The fourth historical layer in Finnish higher education was laid between the two World Wars when Finnish higher education continued to be an elite system. Studying was possible mainly for the more prosperous social classes and the number of higher education students remained low. Social exclusion from higher education took place in then school system where one needed money to complete upper secondary school. The lack of public financial aid for students increased the exclusionary effect (Nevala 1999). Furthermore, university professors belonged to the highest level of Finnish society, and from the 1920s to the 1940s many of them served as ministers (Klinge 1992). High social prestige of universities and university degrees is continuously a social reality in Finland.

The fifth historical layer in the Finnish higher education has been added by the expansion of Finnish higher education towards a mass higher education system (see table 1.). This development was begun in the late 1950s. Measured by student numbers, Finnish higher education reached the level of mass higher education during the 1970s, when more than 15 per cent of the age cohort entered it. The last phase of the expansion of Finnish higher education was the establishment of polytechnic sector during the 1990s. Following the traditional Finnish reform strategy 'learning by experimenting' first polytechnics were established as experimental institutions. After a certain period of time all experimental polytechnics were allowed to apply for a permanent status.

In 1999 the universities admitted 19 373 students and the polytechnics 25 804 students (KOTA). A comparison of these numbers with the size of the relevant age cohort reveals that 83 per cent of the cohort is offered a starting place in higher education (Välimaa 2001, KOTA 2001, AMKOTA 2001), even though only about 30 per cent of the students continue immediately to higher education after having finished secondary level education[4] (Havén 1998).

The expansion of Finnish higher education was closely related to and at the same time one of the results of a welfare-state agenda supported by major political parties. Creating equal educational opportunities -including equal access to higher education- became one of the most important objectives on this agenda, implemented over a period extending from the 1960s to the 1990s. The expansion of higher education was supported by a regional policy principle. The founding of a university was seen not only symbolically but also culturally and economically important to the development of the given region. All major provinces were allowed to establish a university of their own in the 1960s, the 1970s, and the 1980s (see Välimaa 2001).

3.2 Size of the Present-day Finnish higher education system, institutions and main degree types

In 2003 there are 20 universities located in all parts of Finland. These include *ten multi-faculty universities* (University of Helsinki, University of Joensuu, University of Jyväskylä, University of Kuopio, University of Lapland, University of Oulu, University of Tampere, University of Turku, Åbo Akademi University, and University of Vaasa), *three technical universities* (Helsinki University of Technology, Lappeenranta University of Technology, Tampere University of Technology), *three schools of economics* (Helsinki School of Economics and Business Administration, Swedish School of Economics and Business Administration, Turku School of Economics and Business Administration) and *four art academies* (Academy of Fine Arts, University of Art and Design, Sibelius Academy, and Theatre Academy). All Finnish universities are public institutions in the sense of the traditional continental model (Clark 1983). They are autonomous institutions but subordinated to the Ministry of Education.[5]

There are 32 polytechnics located all over the country, most of which are multidisciplinary institutions. This non-university sector of higher education was established during in the 1990s. Finnish polytechnics (or AMK-institutions) were created gradually over the 1990s by raising the standard of former higher vocational education and institutions were incorporated into multidisciplinary polytechnics. All Finnish polytechnics were established as temporary institutions. The process of achieving a permanent status was based on approval process based on evaluation as will be described on the below (see chapter 2.2.1). Since August 1st, 2000 all Finnish polytechnics operate on permanent basis. Finnish polytechnics are normally local institutions operated by a municipality, a federation of municipalities or a registered Finnish foundation or association.[6] In

4 An indicator which shows the proportion of 19 year olds (the age when one has finished secondary level education) attending to universities before the age of 29 is 25 per cent and those going to polytechnics is 20 per cent (Havén 1998, 59). This situation is probably changing because the indicator shows the situation at the mid 1990s when polytechnics operated mostly on a temporary basis.

5 The only exception to the rule is an attempt to establish a private university in Finland when the Preston University established a campus in two villages in Northern Finland at the end of the 20th century. It has not been a success story.

6 The exceptions to the rule are the Police College (funded by the Ministry of Interior) and Ålands Yrkeshögskola which is subordinate to the self-governing Åland Islands. National Defence College is, in turn, a hybrid between these two higher education sectors, because it has elements with Polytechnic orientation (basic training curricula) and common structures and functions with universities: professors, research activities and the right to grant doc-

principle this means that part of the polytechnics are private institutions because they are run by foundations or associations. In practice, however, they are public institutions because they are funded by public sources (mainly by the Ministry of Education) (see Välimaa 2001).

Finnish universities grant professional degrees, bachelor's degrees, master's degrees, licentiate degrees and doctoral degrees. There are national decrees on the university degree systems of each discipline. The decrees define the broad framework for each degree (extent, structure, main objectives), but the universities have a full autonomy to decide on the contents of each degree (Higher Education 2001).

The Polytechnics all grant Bachelor level degrees[7] differing from the academic degrees in the sense that they are targeted at a particular job area in working life. In summer 2001 parliament passed an act on experimental post-graduate polytechnic degrees. According to the act Bachelor's degree followed by at least three years of work experience will be offered the opportunity to complete a 40-60 credits (18 months of full-time studies) post-graduate degree (OECD Report 2002).

Universities and Polytechnics select their own students, and the competition for study places may be stiff in popular fields of study. All university fields apply numerus clausus, in which entrance examinations are an essential element. Polytechnics also decide on their own selection criteria, and in many sectors there is also an entrance examination.

3.3 Transition of students from higher education to work

The change in the social role of higher education from elite universities to mass higher education has changed the way students are employed by labour market. According to most recent statistical information the holders of Masters Degrees are employed mainly by education (33,7%), manufacturing, electricity and water supply (13,5%), health and social work (13,0%), real estate and business activities (13,5%), and also by public administration and defence (10,4%). These sectors employed 84,1 per cent of the 1995 graduates in the year 1996. The holders of Polytechnics degrees in 1995 had only somewhat different structure of employment. Health and social work employed most of them (30,20%), then came manufacturing, electricity and water supply (13,9%) and wholesale retail and trade (13,4) public administration and defence (9,2%), and also real estate and business activities (7,5%) (Havén 1999). In 1996, these sectors employed 74,2 per cent of the 1995 graduates of polytechnics.

As a rule the employment pattern in Finland follows the level of education: the more there is education, the less there will be unemployment. According to official statistics the rate of unemployment five years after graduations was as follows in 1996 (table 2):

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toral degrees (Laine et al. 2001). In this report National Defence College is included in the Polytechnic sector because of its small size (only 5 professors) and orientation to serve the needs of National Defence rather than those of academic community.

7 These comprise 160 credits (which is four years of full-time studies) in the sectors of technology, natural resources and culture, and 140 credits (3,5 years) in business and administration, catering and institutional management, health care and social services, and tourism, whereas the degree in music demands 180 credits (4,5 years).

Table 2: The relationship between the level of education and the unemployment rate after 0, 1, 5 and 10 years of graduation

Educational level	**Unemployment rate (%)**			
	0 year	**1 year**	**5 years**	**10 years**
Upper secondary/vocational	51	39	26	21
Vocational college	35	21	12	9
Polytechnic	26	14	7	6
University	13	8	4	4
Doctorate level	4	4	3	2

Source: Havén 1999

There can be found differences between academic fields as to the employment. The lowest unemployment rates were among medical, engineering and business fields (1-2 %), whereas the highest were among the graduates of Fine Arts (21%) and theatre (14%) in 2000 (KOTA database). The differences between institutions followed, in turn, more the disciplinary structure than geographical location of the institution.

3.4 The Governance, steering and funding of higher education

The Finnish Constitution secures the freedom of the sciences, the arts and the highest level of education. These principles are operationalised by new Universities Act (645/1997) which ensures the autonomy of the universities by prescribing their functions, operation and objectives in general terms only. By nature, the new Universities Act is a skeleton law covering all Finnish universities (see Välimaa & Jalkanen 2001). Within given limits, each university decides on the detailed organization of its administration and the decision-making power of its administrative bodies (Higher Education Policy 2001).

According to the Ministry of Education, the steering of Finnish higher education is based on consultation procedure – called *management by results* – by which the Ministry of Education and the institutions set jointly the objectives for each higher education institution and agree on funding levels or number of new students in case of the polytechnics. The Ministry of Education and each university sign a performance agreement in which both parties commit themselves to certain production objectives (measured in the numbers of degrees) and development projects and level of funding. The agreement is signed for a three-year period but the financial aspects are checked and negotiated every year (Higher Education Policy 2001).

An important context for Finnish higher education is the change of the structure of funding during the 1990s. The proportion of public funding of higher education by the Ministry of Education decreased by 21 per cent between 1990 and 2001 (from 84% to 63%), while external funding from both private and public sources grew almost sixfold (KOTA 2001). Consequently, the number of academic teaching staff (mainly professors and lecturers) has fallen from 7 800 people to 7 300 people, whereas the number of other staff on external funding has almost double (from 5 200 to 9 600) between 1990 and 1999. (Välimaa 2001b). Together with increasing student intake the number of student per teacher is steadily growing.

Finnish higher education policy objectives reflect managerial ideas which have defined as New Public Management (Pollit 1995). In higher education, a strong element has been the decentralisation of management authority. This policy principle is evident in the new Universities Act (1997). The official arguments emphasise the fact that universities have autonomy (in fact: only procedural autonomy) in deciding how to reach the targets (the number of academic degrees) set by the Ministry of Education. The second main trend has been the introduction of market or quasi-market type mechanisms in Finnish higher education. The marketization of higher education has led to competition both among and within higher education institutions. In fact, the Ministry of Education uses competition as a national steering instrument in its management by results negotiations with each university (Välimaa & Jalkanen 2001). In this sense the social context of Finnish higher education may be described as academic capitalism following the definition of Slaughter and Leslie (Slaughter, 1997). The shift in the funding structures is also related to academic capitalism because it is increasing the impacts of market-like behaviour thus changing social dynamics inside universities. The third major trend has been the requirement that staff work to performance targets and output objectives. This trend is closely related to the shift in the basis of public employment from permanency and standard national pay and conditions towards term contracts and performance-related pay. In universities, this has led to increasing number of „project researchers", that is, academics who have been appointed only for a certain fixed period to carry through a specific research project (see Välimaa 2001).

Five historical layers of Finnish higher education aim to reveal that present higher education system has many simultaneously existing and often conflicting understandings of what are the social functions of higher education (see also Williams 1995). From the perspective of accreditation and evaluation this means that there are different and -often conflicting- expectations on higher education and the roles evaluation may play in its development.

4. Evaluation and Accreditation in Finnish higher education

According to the Universities Act (645/1997, §5) Finnish „universities are to evaluate their training, research and artistic functioning and the impacts of these activities. Universities also have a duty to participate in external evaluations of their functioning. Universities are to publish the results of their evaluations." Finnish Polytechnics have a similar duty to evaluate and report on their activities in public. In fact, the same evaluation requirements are repeated at all levels of the Finnish system of education.

Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) is responsible for the development and organisation of evaluation in Finland. According to the Decree on the Higher Education Evaluation Council (No.1320/1995) and in its amending degree (465/1998) FINHEEC is responsible for:1) assisting higher education institutions and the Ministry of Education in evaluation; 2) conducting evaluation for the accreditation of the polytechnics; 3) organising evaluations of the operations and policies of higher education institutions; 4) initiating evaluations of higher education and its development; 5) engaging international co-operation on evaluation; 6) promoting research on the evaluation of higher education, and 7) taking responsibility over the evaluation and recording of professional courses offered by institutions of higher education. This last objective was added in 1998.

These sentences describe the fact that national legislator takes evaluation seriously in Finland. They also indicate that evaluation is normally understood as a tool for improvement rather than

an instrument of control. How has this societal understanding developed? In what follows I will try answer to the question by describing historically how the Finnish idea of evaluation has developed and what are its consequences.

4.1 History of evaluation in the Finnish higher education: from amateurism to professionalism

Evaluation has arrived in Finland on three separate occasions, displaying varying emphases. The first evaluations projects were carried out at the turn of the 1970s when academic societies (especially the Finnish Physics Society) began to evaluated scientific level of research in Finland (Suomen 1981, Marttila 1971). The history of systematic evaluations begins, however, in the 1980s when the Academy of Finland decided to organise the first discipline-specific evaluations (Finnish Academy 13/1981, 7/1983. During this *„first round of evaluations"* the main aim was to evaluate the level of scientific research in Finland at the beginning of the 1980s (Finnish Academy 13/1981). Inorganic chemistry was the first discipline to be evaluated (Finnish Academy 7/1983). Six institutions out of the seven which were assessed strenuously resisted the interpretations (and even insults hurled) by the evaluation team in their published report (Finnish Academy 7/1983). Thus, this evaluation was successful mainly in the sense of showing how evaluations should not be made: they should not be used to rank individual academics or departments in a given discipline. A positive aspect of this unsuccessful evaluation project was also the fact that it helped to prepare ground for an understanding that the aim of evaluation should be to encourage development instead of provoking debates on the arguments underlying the findings. This first round of evaluations is still continuing in and through various discipline-specific evaluations.[8] At the beginning of the 21st century the Academy of Finland is responsible mainly for evaluating the scientific standard of disciplines (see Suomen, 2000).

The second round of evaluations was initiated by the Ministry of Education in the early 1990s. The Ministry supported institutional evaluation projects in two Finnish pilot universities: the University of Oulu and the University of Jyväskylä. At that time it was not clear what kind of national model of evaluation would be adopted even though it was rather clear that evaluation should focus on the institutional level. Following the guidelines suggested by the Ministry of Education, the University of Oulu introduced a model based on the massive gathering of information using questionnaires (Oulu Report 1993). The results of this American stylish model and idea of institutional evaluation were not convincing because there was not much commitment to the project within the academic community in the university concerned. Another problem with this approach was the fact that at that time university central administration had practically no instruments for institutional policy-making. The University of Jyväskylä developed another approach to evaluation based on departmental self-evaluations. This approach was intended to involve academics in the evaluation process at the basic units. The information was not gathered for institutional purposes but instead the basic units (and the academics themselves) produced it

8 Discipline-specific evaluations have been initiated by the Ministry of Education, the Academy of Finland, individual universities, or academic associations. There have been organised several of them: organic chemistry (1983), experimental nuclear physics (1985); hydrobiology (1986); environmental toxicology, basic research on energy, forest renewal studies (1988); education, heart disease studies (1989); Information technology, peace and conflict studies (1990); forest studies (1992); juridical research (1993); the evaluation of Finnish membership in IIASA, space research (1994); National Public Health Institute, Low temperature Laboratory in Helsinki University of Technology (1995), molecular biology, electronics, to be continued … (1996) etc. (Liuhanen 1997).

(Jyväskylä report 1993). This process seemed to lead to a deeper commitment to developing the operations of the basic units (Välimaa, Aittola & Konttinen 1998) than the Oulu approach.

The Jyväskylä model has influenced the Finnish model of evaluation. A typical feature of all Finnish evaluation projects is a process comprising several or all of the following elements: self-evaluations are produced by the units involved; their self-evaluations are followed and supported by site visits by external evaluators; the external visitors publish an evaluation report that includes their recommendations; and the institution concerned organises a publication or development seminar where the results are discussed and to disseminated (Hämäläinen & Liuhanen 1999).

After having analysed these two pilot projects I should also describe the breadth of this second round of evaluations in Finland. Namely, in addition to these two pilot projects there were organised several other evaluation projects suggested either by the Ministry of Education or higher education institutions or communities. Institutional evaluation projects were carried out in the University of Lappland (1994-95), University of Tampere (1994-1995), University of Vaasa (1994-1995), Sibelius Academy (1994-1995), Theatre Academy (1994-1995), University of Joensuu (1997-98), University of Kuopio (1997-98), and Lappeenranta University of Technology (1997-98). In addition to these evaluations focusing on higher education institutions and their functioning, several nation wide evaluation projects of academic fields were carried out simultaneously with institutional evaluations. These evaluation projects included all institutions which organised training in the respective academic field. The total number of 10 national evaluation projects of academic fields in 16 Finnish universities were organised between 1991 and 1996 (see Liuhanen 1997).[9]

This second round of evaluations introduced higher education institutions and academics into the basic ideas of evaluation. The strategy of implementation promoted a social climate in which evaluation was more or less accepted as a part of the activities of a postmodern university (Välimaa 2000).

The third round of evaluation begun when the Finnish Government decided to establish the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) in 1995. This decision was made in the context where evaluation had already become one of the regular activities in higher education institutions. The aims of the Higher Education Evaluation Council were defined in a degree (No.1320/1995) and in its amending degree (465/1998) (see above). FINHEEC is funded by the Ministry of Education, but it is not a part of the Ministry. Both in principle and in practice, it is subordinated to the Ministry of Education (like universities and the Academy of Finland), but it has internal autonomy. Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council consists of members appointed by the Ministry of Education for a four-year term. The members represent higher education institutions, students and various stakeholders. FINHEEC draws up an annual budget, which is approved by the Department for Education and Science Policy of the Ministry of Education. It is assisted by the a Council Secretariat, similarly appointed by the Ministry of Education. According to its own brochures FINHEEC has the taken care of several tasks (FINHEEC 2000). The main responsibility of FINHEEC is to organise both institutional evaluations of universities and evaluations for the purpose of accrediting polytechnics. In addition, it has organised subcommittees or subsections to accredit professional courses. It also has made specific proposals in different evaluation projects. Universities and polytechnics have also funded their evaluations from their own budgets. During the first four years of operation, the total sum used by FINHEEC was about 3 million euros (FINHEEC 2000).

9 The following academic fields were evaluated: Humanities (1991-93), natural sciences (1991-93), social sciences (1993), education (1993-1994), business sciences (1993-1994), administrative sciences (1993-94), forestry and agricultural studies (1994-1995), jurisprudence (1995), psychology (1995), exact natural sciences (1995-1996).

Reflections of the third round of evaluation

Essential in this third round of evaluation seems to be development towards „professionalism of evaluation" as can be seen from the list of responsibilities of FINHEEC. This professionalism of evaluation is indicated, first, by the training of academic staff responsible for evaluations. FINHEEC has also organised study visit to various countries (including the Netherlands, US and Australia). Increasing professionalism of evaluation also means the standardisation of evaluation practices through secretarial and project management services to higher education institutions. FINHEEC has also initiated evaluations in higher education institutions and supported uniform reporting of evaluation processes in their own publication series. It between 1997 and 2002 FINHEEC has published 86 evaluation reports. This is a remarkable number of books in a country with 20 universities and 32 polytechnics.

Professionalism of evaluation has not yet created a group of managed professions as analysed by Rhoades (1998). However, it has a strong potential to create of a group of evaluation experts who begin to take care of various evaluation processes in Finnish higher education institutions, because it seems that „normal academics" have neither expertise nor time to „waste" with various evaluation processes.

Finns active in ENQA

The members of FINHEEC have actively supported the functioning of European Network for Quality Assurance (ENQA). According to their homepage (http://www.enqa.net/) ENQA has been established to promote European cooperation in the field of quality assessment and quality assurance. ENQA aims to disseminate information, experiences, good practices and new developments between interested parties. These are public authorities, higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies. ENQA secretariat and coordinator are located in FINHEEC. The active support of ENQA by the Finns is rational also because the objectives of ENQA happen to coincide with those of FINHEEC. They include training and advisory support, publications in the field of quality assessment and quality assurance (see Hämäläinen et al. 2001) and dissemination of information through website and newsletter.

Other quality assessment and evaluation activities in institutions and units

FINHEEC has been an active expert body responsible for the practical organisation of the evaluations. In Finnish context this does not meant, however, that FINHEEC would have a monopoly over all evaluations in higher education. Finnish universities and polytechnics also have initiated their own evaluation projects. E.g., there was an evaluation project in the University of Jyväskylä which aimed at improvement in the quality of teaching by utilising a method combining local bench-marking and self-evaluation (see Kallio 2002). This project served local institutional needs and utilised evaluation as one of the instrument to improve university's quality of teaching. Many other similar projects have been organised by Finnish higher education institutions.[10] From the researcher's point of view it is, however, problematic matter that these local evaluation and development projects have seldom been documented, especially when they have taken place at basic units. For this reason it is quite impossible to know the exact number of

10 E.g., an American teaching evaluation formula was tested in the university of Tampere to improve the quality of teaching (Parjanen 2002)

evaluations. It may be stated, however, that evaluation has become one of the regular practices in Finnish higher education institutions. It is used as an instrument to gather and analyse information in order to support improvement and decision-making processes in Finnish higher education institutions.[11]

4.2 Accreditation schemes in Finland

An essential element in the increasing professionalism of evaluation was the introduction of accreditation activities in Finnish higher education. After having said this I need to add that, in principle, there are no accreditation agencies or accreditation practices in Finland. Even the concept accreditation (*akkreditointi* in Finnish) has not been used in Finnish field of higher education policy making. In practice, however, there can be found processes which may be called accreditation if we follow the definitions of this European comparative project. Therefore, in what follows I will describe the different accreditation processes as they appear in practise without paying attention to the fact whether they have been called accreditation or not.

Approval of new higher education institutions

The main process of accreditation is that of establishing a new higher education institution, even though traditionally it has neither been called nor understood as accreditation in Finland. Finnish government keeps for itself the formal power to grant official approval in the field of higher education. The establishment of a new higher education institution is decided by the Council of State and recognised by law. Therefore, it may said that Finnish government 'accredits' higher education institutions automatically when a decision is made to establish a new one. Higher education institutions can then offer recognised degrees to the students. The establishment of a new university automatically means that the institution has the right to grant all traditional university degrees (Bachelors, Masters, Licentiate and Doctor's degrees). As a rule, a student does not need additional professional accreditation from a professional body after having completed his or her studies successfully (cf. Hämäläinen et al. 2001).

Approval of university and polytechnic degrees

The Ministry of Education decides the degrees given by a university or a polytechnic. Higher education institutions submit a proposal for its own degree programmes for approval by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry decision states the name of the programme, its extent in credits (especially in polytechnics: the compulsory practical training component in credits), the name of the degree, and the title that the graduate is authorised to use. The higher education institutions themselves, in turn, decide on the curriculum for each programme and how the courses will be organised and arranged (Higher education 2001, OECD 2002).

11 Teaching development units and offices utilise various evaluations methods as analytical tools. These units can be found from the universities of Helsinki, Jyväskylä, Kuopio, Lappland, Oulu, Tampere, Turku, and Helsinki University of Technology, and Lappeenranta University of Technology.

Accreditation scheme for polytechnics

The decision to establish a polytechnic sector in Finland was made in the beginning of the 1990s. The first polytechnics were established as experimental institutions. The standard of former higher vocational institutions was raised and institutions were incorporated into multidisciplinary polytechnics. After a certain period of time all experimental polytechnics were allowed to apply for a permanent status. In this phase of the process there emerged a political and practical need to investigate the standard and quality of the applicant institutions before they were granted the status of a permanent institution.

This Finnish accreditation scheme of Polytechnics has consisted of two separate but interconnected processes. The first process consisted of the evaluations organised by FINHEEC in each of the applicant polytechnics after 1995.[12] The second process consisted of the political decisions made by the Council of State. It has given the permission to operate to those institutions which had reached a certain level of development. In fact, this was a process of accreditation, even though it was called (and understood) as evaluation in Finland.

In practical terms the division of labour was organised as follows. FINHEEC established a separate accreditation subcommittee for the accreditation of Polytechnics. The subcommittee consisted of the representatives of polytechnics, teachers working in the polytechnics, students and representatives of working life. Polytechnics were evaluated on the basis of applications for the first time in 1995 and 1996 and the processes was continued till 1999. Site visits were added to the procedure in 1997. The accreditation subcommittee has compiled public reports of each evaluation which have been published in the publication series of the FINHEEC since 1998 (167 syytä 1998; Virtanen 1999). The Accreditation Subcommittee has also implemented evaluations in case there has been a change in the scope of activities of an accredited polytechnic, or in the case when new institutions have been incorporated with it. (Hämäläinen, Haakstaad, Kangasniemi, Lindeberg, Sjölund 2001).

The criteria used in the accreditation of permanent polytechnics included mainly proven excellence in experimental and development work. Finnish legislation (acts on higher vocational education: 391/91, 392/92, 255/95, 256/95) created one of the decisive starting points of the criteria of assessment. The criteria were developed in mutual discussions involving various partners from polytechnics, regional authorities, students and representatives of industry and commerce. The aim was to agree on minimum standards for permanent polytechnics. (Hämäläinen, Haakstaad, Kangasniemi, Lindeberg, Sjölund 2001). According to the evaluation of polytechnics in 1998 (167 syytä), the assessment was based on the following framework for criteria:

1. mission, vision, goals and aims
2. curriculum design (up-to-date, programme diversity and co-operation etc.)
3. strength of the operational plan
4. areas of strength
5. adequate size in relation to teaching goals and aims
6. the educational level of teachers
7. information and library services
8. co-operation with the working life
   - co-operation with universities and polytechnics and other educational establishments
9. international co-operation
10. regional training and service functions

12 The first nine institutions were given the permanent status without a systematic evaluation in 1995. They started as permanent institutions on August 1st, 1996.

11. the organisation of evaluation
12. learning environment
13. working environment.

The items 13) and 14) were recommended by the Ministry of Education. The members of the subcommittee used a five-point LIKERT scale while rating the institutions. The items 1), 6), 8), 11) and 13) were given double the weight compared with other items.

A case study on accreditation: Kymenlaakso Polytechnic

I will describe one of the typical accreditation processes in more details in order to explain how the accreditation process went in practise. I will take an example from a typical Finnish polytechnic both in size and the structure, Kymenlaakso Polytechnic located 130 km east of Helsinki. Followign the process of most of the Finnish polytechnics it was established in a merger operation at the turn of the 1990s (in 1992). During this process of change six educational establishments which were located all over the region and covered various professional fields were merged into one vocational higher education institution.[13] Kymenlaakso Polytechnic is a private company owned by the city of Kotka and the municipalities of the region. By the beginning of the 21st century it has grown into an institution with 3500 full-time students and staff of around 500 persons. The number of part-time students in further education leading to a degree is about 500 persons (see: http://www.kyamk.fi/english).

In 1998, Kymenlaakso polytechnic sent an application to FINHEEC in which they applied for a permanent status. The Accreditation Subcommittee received the application, read the documents and paid a typical one-day site visit to the polytechnic in 1998. Every site visit followed a similar schedule published in the report (see 167 syytä 1998, Viittä vaille valmis 1999). According to the procedure, the hosts of the visit opened the day by welcoming officially the members of the Subcommittee. After this short ceremony the Committee had an organising meeting. Around 9:30 A.M. the members of the Subcommittee begun to interview the representatives of the students (one representative from each professional field). These interviews took about one hour. Then the members of the committee continued the interviews with the representatives of teachers (three to four persons), which occasion lasted about one hour. The subcommittee also interviewed other staff than teachers (three to four persons) for about a quarter of an hour. After the morning sessions subcommittee had a lunch break. The afternoon session was begun with a visit to the library of the institution (30 minutes) after which the members of the Subcommittee interviewed the representatives of the working life (both employers and employees) for about an hour followed by the interviews of the representatives of the owner of the institution (30 minutes). They also interviewed the rector and the heads of the curricula (one hour). The day of the visit was closed with a seminar open to everybody working or studying in the Kymenlaakso polytechnic. It was assumed that this seminar would last about 45 minutes. (167 syytä, 1998).

After these events – which were repeated in all the eight institutions which applied for a permanent status in 1998 – the Accrediation Subcommittee recommended to the Ministry of Education that Kymenlaakso Polytechnic should be given a permanent status, which also took place. In the report of these accreditation processes the Accreditation Subcommittee analysed the strengths and weaknesses and the future potentials of each applicant. (167 syytä 1998, Virtanen 1999).

13 The following fields were represented in Kymenlaakso polytechnic in 1998: arts and crafts, health and social work, business and foreign trade, forestry and agriculture, technical education, and maritime commerce (167 syytä).

Accreditation of professional courses

The evaluation and accreditation of professional courses has been on the higher education policy agenda since 1996. At that time, there arose a public concern on the invalid qualifications offered by a Continuing Education centre in a certain university. FINHEEC was given the responsibility to register professional courses (Virtanen 2001). This registration of professional courses meant that all the courses to be registered were to be evaluated before registration.[14] In other words, they needed to be accredited. Together with these activities also the concept of accreditation was introduced to the Finnish education policy field.

The accreditation of professional courses is a process that gives a public recognition or registration to professional, non-degree courses that meet good quality educational services. In this way it promises that the course will offer the quality of education it claims to offer. For students the accreditation assures that the course is offered on a reliable basis (Hämäläinen et al 2001).

FINHEEC appointed a subsection (Accreditation Board of Professional Courses, ABPC) to assess professional courses and decide on accreditation. The twelve board members appointed by the Ministry of Education for a three-year term represented universities, polytechnics, students and working life. ABPC started to accredit professional courses by the end of 1998. ABPC has been divided into three committees which concentrate on the following fields of professional training: business training courses, PD-program courses, social and health care courses (Virtanen 2001).

ABPC evaluated 49 courses, 33 of which were accepted and registered as meeting the sufficient quality during the first two years of its functioning (Hämäläinen et al. 2001).[15] 'Sufficient quality' in this context is examined in the accreditation process which contains the following elements:

1. the review of relevant documentation (application)
2. the visit to the course
3. immediate feedback after the visit

The application contains background information on the course (organiser of the course, duration of the course, target groups), on the training itself (why the training has been organised, what are the aims of the training, what is the structure and the contents of the training given during the course, what are the teaching materials, how is the evaluation and quality assessment organised), on the practical arrangements (who are the teachers and units responsible for teaching, what are the roles of working life and students during the training), and the resources available (teaching facilities, funding).

After having received the application ABPC organises a site visit to the course organiser. During the visits the board members analyse the following aspects: 1) basic requirements, 2) work-orientation, 3) course contents and objectives, 4) the educational process, 5) pedagogical arrangements, 6) practical arrangements, and 7) quality assurance.[16] These criteria for good practices were developed by ABPC before they started the accreditation processes. The idea is to develop them continuously with the help of feedback from the field. The criteria can be found also from internet (Http://www.minedu.fi/asiant/kka/docs/Criteria.html).

The final decision is made on a registered/not registered (yes/no) basis. Feedback and recommendations for the course are given after the registration decision is made. The design of the site visit is aimed to be participative and constructive (Hämäläinen et al. 2001). The registration of ac-

14 According to act, this accreditation of professional courses is defined as 'evaluation and registration of professional courses'.

15 The number of registered professional courses is 42 in 2003. Two thirds of them (27 courses) are organised by Finnish polytechnics.

16 Additional criteria is applied with courses taught through a foreign language and for virtual courses.

credited courses is valid for four years, and the register is available on FINHEEC's website (www.minedu.fi/asiant/kka/docs/rekister.htm). If the professional course fails to meet the criteria, the institute may continue to run the course, even though often it leads to immediate further self-development and improvement. Normally the process itself is seen as a useful tool for obtaining an outside view of the course or the institute (Hämäläinen et al. 2001).

Important for the process of accreditation is that the institutions themselves apply accreditation for the professional courses on a voluntary basis. In a market-like situation this a rational behaviour, because it helps to maintain or reach a good reputation in a competitive market condition of professional courses.

The Accreditation Board of Professional Courses adopted the role of advisor and developer rather than that of controller during the first years of its functioning. This interpretation is in line with the policy of FINHEEC aiming to develop Finnish higher education with the help of evaluation. The aim of the accreditation is to credit the programmes on the basis of their capacity to offer good quality educational services instead of just meeting the minimum standards. Following the principles of accreditation and those of FINHEEC, it is up to the institutions to look for the best way to meet the criteria.

The emphasis of development with the help of evaluation makes sense in Finnish context where citizens traditionally trust on public authorities. In this context of public trust, the challenge to improve and develop functioning expressed by public authorities like FINHEEC or ABPC has a significant potential influence on the functioning of higher education institutions. In the Finnish cultural context it is natural that institutions and academics take the suggestions into serious consideration. These suggestions are, therefore, rather significant political act in promoting improvements and change.

International accreditation

International accreditation is more an exception than a rule in Finnish higher education, because normally evaluations have taken place in the cooperation between the higher education institutions and the FINHEEC. Only in two cases the evaluation (or accreditation) has involved also a foreign co-operation partner. These EQUIS (The European Quality Improvement System) accreditations were organised by the European Foundation for Management Development in two universities of Business Administration and Economics with financial support from the FINHEEC (Quality Label? 1998, Hämäläinen et al. 2001). EQUIS, an international system of strategic audit and accreditation, is concerned with quality in management education. The accreditation process is based on a comprehensive self-assessment report followed by a site visit by four international members. In addition to EQUIS Helsinki School of Economics has been accredited by AMBA (Association of MBAs in Britain) being the first business management program in Finland and Nordic countries to receive AMBA accreditation (see: http://www.hkkk.fi/english/-default.asp).

Some polytechnics have independently acquired international accreditation for their quality system by Norske Veritas. The European Foundation for the Accreditation of Hotel School Programmes has accredited (recognised) Bachelor of Science programmes in Hotel, Restaurant and Tourism Management in one polytechnic (Hämäläinen et al. 2001).

5. Discussion on the nature of accreditation processes

On the basis of the above description it may be said that Finnish Government 'accredits' universities when decision is made to establish a new institution. This process should be analysed, however, in the context of Nordic of higher education where higher education institutions derive their formal degree-awarding capacity from the Nation State. In Finland it is supposed that national degrees are comparable and of equal high standard. Therefore, the aims, scope and general structure of degrees are prescribed by law. The State protects, in turn, the value and quality of degrees by controlling which institutions can award them and which educational programmes can qualify for them (see Hämäläinen et al. 2001). In Finland, higher education institutions enjoy great institutional autonomy, which is ensured by law (Universities Act 645/1997). In this context it is only natural that institutions themselves take full responsibility for the standard and quality of the educational services they provide. It is equally natural that in this context national government uses expert bodies to conduct evaluation projects because they lack expertise to evaluate the contents and standard of higher education. In short, in the social context of trust both higher education institutions and Finnish government has trust on the expertise of FINHEEC to organise evaluations and accreditations (see Välimaa & Mollis 2003).

As to the accreditation of polytechnics, the fact that feedback was given to each applicant is more important than its actual contents. Thus, the idea behind this feedback suggests that the aim of the evaluation process was to develop the institutions more than just give ratings to the institutions. In this sense this process of evaluation was both accreditation and development of the institutions. However, it was not accreditation in the sense that it gave a permanent license to function all those institutions, even though some of the polytechnics were given a recommendation to develop some evaluated areas within a fixed period of time (normally two years). It should also be added that normally all the institutions which applied for a permanent status got it, even though sometimes it took several applications before an institution was successful in its attempt. In some cases the Council of States even gave a permanent status to a polytechnic which was not recommend by FINHEEC (Antikainen 2002). These examples suggest, in turn, that the invisible political processes behind these visible accreditation processes normally lead to a positive outcome. The establishment of a polytechnic in a region was normally supported by regional political activities linked with national political actors (cf. Salminen 2001, Antikainen 2002). It has also been suggested that the establishments of polytechnics were supported by national employer organisations, regions and communities together with professional interest groups and vocational educational institutions and their teachers (Rinne 2002). Thus, the denial of the permanent status would have increased political confrontations between and inside political parties represented in the Council of State. Furthermore, it would have been very difficult to deny the value of the development if the institutions were really able to show it. Therefore, one of the political aims of the accreditation process was to force the institutions to develop their activities. Accreditation process created thus a credible external threat to the institutions, which also supported their internal development processes. In this sense both national level and institutional level utilised the accreditation process to advance their own purposes (see Antikainen 2002). On the basis of international evaluation it also seems that polytechnic reform has achieved its national goals (OECD report 2002).

I have explained the process of evaluation which led to political decision to establish a new permanent institution to show that this process was essentially the process of accreditation. The analysis of the documents combined with a site-visit to the institutions concerned laid a creditable basis for the political decision making. My detailed description also aims to show the mem-

bers of the Accreditation Subcommittee had opportunities to get familiar with the standard and quality of the applicant institution, even though on the basis of published reports it is not possible to know how insightful they were in their analyses.

5.2 The role of FINHEEC in national higher education policy making

FINHEEC has an important role in the steering of Finnish higher education system because of two reasons. The first steering mechanism functions through the evaluation of high-quality education units in universities and polytechnics organised by FINHEEC (see reports: Huttula 2000, 2001, 2002; Liuhanen 2000; Moitus 2000; Yliopistokoulutuksen laatuyksiköt 1998). These evaluations are related to the funding of higher education institutions because each high-quality education unit is rewarded with a certain sum in management by results negotiations. The second steering function is more indirect. FINHEEC organises system-wide evaluations in Finnish higher education on various subjects, e.g. the evaluation of vocational teacher training (Lämsä & Saari 2000), or the evaluation of student admissions in universities (Sajavaara et al. 2002). The evaluation outcomes may be used, and have been used, in the political decision-making processes even though one can not be sure how they will be used.

These evaluations have a technical advisory role in the sense that FINHEEC organises the processes following the political outlines set by political decision makers. However, the importance of evaluations organised by FINHEEC is more than technical one because the organisation of the processes and project management gives opportunities to influence on the contents and outcomes of the processes. For this reason FINHEEC belongs to one of the actors in the field of Finnish higher education policy making even though -and because of- it acts in the role of an expert organisation.

6. Analysing evaluation and accreditation processes in Finland

6.1 Actors, purposes and processes

The relationship between concepts and social phenomena of accreditation, evaluation and approval should be approached from the perspectives of *actors, purposes* and *processes*. When accreditation is analysed from *the perspective of actors* we are interested in: who will give institutions and programmes the permission to operate? And who does the actual evaluation work? The Ministry of education is the main actor in field of evaluation in Finland because it funds the higher education institutions and evaluation activities. FINHEEC organises the actual evaluation projects, but the Council of State continues to keep formal power to grant official approval (of institutions, programmes and degrees) in the field of higher education. This power of approval has not been changed. Traditionally (i. e. by the end of 20th century) it has not been called accreditation.

From the *perspective of purposes of accreditation and evaluation* one becomes interested in knowing what are social functions of accreditation and evaluation? In Finland the answer to this question is twofold. First, accreditation and evaluation aim to improve the quality of Finnish higher education system. In this context, evaluation and accreditation have the role of quality assurance in the national system of higher education. Secondly, these processes aim to link higher education insti-

tutions to national innovation system. In this sense the purpose of evaluation is to make the national system of higher education more efficient and more relevant to the Nation State.

However, when accreditation and evaluation are approached from *the perspective of processes* the question should be asked: who does what, when and how? FINHEEC does the actual work of evaluation by organising the team of experts to do the work. They use various methods to evaluate, audit and assess institutions and/or programmes. Finnish government does not evaluate the institutions or programmes but uses the outcomes of experts evaluations. From the perspective of processes one may see that accreditation, evaluation and approval processes mingle with each other in practical activities even though they serve different purposes and the actors may vary from process to process.

In the context of this European comparative report, there is a temptation to define Finnish government as an accreditation agency. However, it is not an accreditation agency. It is rather an „approval agency". The Council of State has always had and it continues to keep the formal power to grant official approval to institutions, degrees and programmes. As a rule, this power of approval has not been called accreditation, even though it contains the elements which relate it to evaluation, accreditation and approval. A revealing example is the approval of university and polytechnic degrees which is continuously in the firm hands of the Ministry of Education without any public evaluation scheme related to it.

6.2 Social spaces related to accreditation and evaluation

These perspectives to accreditation, evaluation and approval can be approached also from a sociological perspective. What I suggest is that there can be found three different social spaces in which social functions of evaluation and accreditation appear differently when we take into account different historical layers and three rounds of evaluation in Finnish higher education. In each of the social spaces evaluation and accreditation play somewhat different roles because they are related to different processes in higher education. Social space as a concept owes to Bourdieu (1988) by trying to capture the idea that they consist not only of actors (persons and institutions) but also of shared or contested understandings of the goals of higher education. This way they create a discursive space in which certain basic assumptions are shared by the actors, even though they may have contradictory interpretations of them (see Herranen 2003). These social spaces do not exist in hierarchical relationship with each other but simultaneously like 'social fields of action' as described by Ivar Bleiklie (2000) interacting and influencing each other.

The Defence of the Nation-state

In this first social space the role of evaluation and accreditation is tied with the making and defence of the nation state. In this context, FINHEEC functions as a part of the national steering system of higher education in the role of expert organisation. FINHEEC has increased the level of professionalism in higher education evaluations. Accreditation practices have also been introduced by and through it. The ethos of evaluation and accreditation in this social space is to improve and develop the functioning of national higher education system with the help of higher education institutions and for their best. This manner evaluation and accreditation will help higher education to become a part of the national innovation strategy as it has been argued in official policy documents (Tiedon 1993, cf. Miettinen 2002). Therefore, within this social space accreditation and evaluation are related to the goals of national higher education policy making.

Quality Assurance system:

The second social space is closely related to the previous one. In the social conditions of mass higher education evaluation and accreditation also serve the needs of higher education institutions. In this context evaluation and accreditation processes aim to improve the quality in the production process of academic degrees. After having said this I do not intend to say that teaching, research and management in higher education institutions are industrial processes, but I wish to say that in this context accreditation and evaluation play the role of quality assurance in the system of higher education. National policy goal is to spread quality assurance practices throughout the system of higher education. As a quality assurance system it may serve, however, not only the needs of the national system but also those of students and institutions.

Humboldtian values in danger

The last social space consists of the traditional values of western higher education, often defined as Humboldtian university ideal with emphasis on academic freedom and institutional autonomy (Clark 1983, Huusko & Muhonen 2003). In this social space evaluation and accreditation creates a potential threat to traditional values of university because it tries to open the 'black box' defended by academic ivory towers. In this social sphere evaluation and accreditation are not valued as an academic enterprise – perhaps with the exception of discipline-specific evaluations- but rather an administrative duty which should be left to evaluation specialists. This way of reasoning is leading to the direction of managed professionals responsible for matters of evaluation and accreditation.

7. Final remarks

It is a matter of fact that the concept 'accreditation' has not been used in Finnish higher education before the 21st century. There has been no social need to define certain evaluation processes as accreditation or approval of institutions or degrees other than approval. Therefore, one should ask: what does the introduction of the concept of accreditation introduce to higher education? Does it mean that processes which combine evaluation activities with (political) decision-making will become more popular? If this is the case, crucial question seem to be: should we increase the professional level of accreditation to make it more transparent and reliable? After having answered yes to this rhetoric question, the next question is an easy one: should we create unified criteria and standards for accreditation? The answer is most probably a positive one. However, together with this notion one should think further and pay attention to the definitions of criteria and standards of accreditation. Namely, the question who defines the criteria is easily changed into the question: who benefits from the criteria chosen? And consequently; who does not benefit from these criteria?

The processes of defining criteria for accreditation appear differently when one approaches them from the perspectives of the Bologna process. The Bologna Process clearly challenges to develop European criteria for both institutional and professional accreditation. One of the reasons may be the need to resist the American dominance over European higher education. In addition to this political dimension, European ideas and models of higher education are far more diverse than the American model of higher education. For this reason one could say that Europeans

should develop their own criteria which respect European variety in higher education. There can be found both political, functional and practical reasons to develop European models of accreditation. Therefore, it seems that in the political context of the Bologna process the issue is not whether it should it be done. The issue is how it should be done.

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Country Report France

Thierry Chevaillier

1. Presentation of the Higher Education System

The French higher education system is currently undergoing deep changes in relation to degree structure and accreditation process. In the wake of the Bologna declaration, new state regulations have been introduced since 2000 that aimed at building a degree structure that is common to all higher education institutions. As their implementation will be phased in step by step until 2006, a study of the accreditation processes in operation in France must present both past and future schemes.

1.1 Size of the System

In academic year 2000-2001, some 2,160,000 students were enrolled in higher education programmes in France.[1] The French definition of higher education is fairly broad: it comprises all programmes for which the *baccalauréat* (end of secondary education degree) or an equivalent qualification is required for access.

1.2 Types of Institutions

Basically, the French higher education system is characterised by a small number of large comprehensive institutions, the universities, accommodating nearly two-thirds of the student population, several hundred smaller specialised institutions with 20% of total enrolment and a large number of very small two-year programmes offered in secondary education institutions which enrol 15% of the student population.

1 For up-to-date statistical data on French higher education, see Repères et références statistiques, the statistical yearbook of the Ministry of Education, http://www.education.gouv.fr/stateval/rers/repere.htm#1.

Universities and Similar Institutions

The number of universities and similar institutions is: Universities (85), Universities of Technology (3), National Polytechnic Institutes (30). In total, these higher education institutions accommodate 1,404,000 students, i.e. an average of 15,400 students per institution. Their legal framework is that of 'Scientific, cultural and professional public corporations' (EPSCP). Accordingly, they are autonomous but are supervised by the ministry of higher education.

There are 19 private universities and university institutes, with 21,000 students, or on average 1,100 students per institution.

Then there are the Teacher training institutes (30) (Institut universitaires de formation des maîtres – IUFM), with a total of 84,000 students, for an average size of 2,800 students. They are less autonomous than universities.

*Specialised Schools of Higher Education (*Grandes Ecoles*)*

A typically French category of institution is the specialised schools of higher education *(grandes écoles*). The majority recruit students who have already studied for two years after graduating from secondary school. Recruitment is competitive and some of these institutions are considered more prestigious than university departments.

Then, there are the independent Engineering schools (153, with 62,000 students, average size: 400 students). These are mostly public institutions, under the responsibility and control of several different ministries (higher education for the majority, but also industry, agriculture, defence, etc.). There are also engineering schools or programmes that are part of universities and that are organised in the same way (90 schools, 33,700 students, average size: less than 400 students).

The 234 business schools are home to 70,300 students (average size 300 students). Mostly private, many are operated by local chambers of commerce and come under the responsibility of the ministry for industry.

There are 252 Schools of Art and Architecture. They enrol 55,800 students, for an average size of 240 students. These schools are under the responsibility of the ministry for cultural affairs and are operated by the state, the regions or some cities.

Other public higher education institutions in this category, of which there are about 200, include various public institutions such as *écoles normales supérieures* (for teacher training), *école des hautes études en sciences sociales*. These schools are under the responsibility of various ministries (veterinary schools, schools of journalism, schools of administration) with 30,000 students in total, which makes their average size 150 students.

Paramedical and Social Programmes

Nearly 100,000 students are enrolled in 500 schools of paramedical and social programmes, with an average size of less than 200 students. These schools are not part of universities. Most are public and under the responsibility of the ministry of Health and Social Affairs. Some are operated by charities (e.g. the Red Cross).

Short Higher Education Programmes Offered by Upper Secondary Schools

This is a large category in numbers of institutions (2,560). However, with 310,000 students, the average size is only 120 students. Most of these programmes (three-quarters of enrolments) consist in two-year vocational courses (higher technicians courses) that would not be considered higher education in other European countries.

The other part comprises very selective preparatory programmes *CPGE* (*Classes préparatoires aux grandes écoles*) leading to prestigious non-university higher education institutions, mostly engineering or business schools.

1.3 Main Types of Diplomas and Certification

Traditionally, the state regulates vocational and higher education degrees, diplomas and certificates. It has a monopoly on 'Academic titles and degrees' as well as on 'vocational and professional titles'.

- National Diplomas (*Diplômes nationaux*). A large number of diplomas are awarded on behalf of the state by institutions that are formally authorised to do so in a process called 'habilitation'. Some of these institutions also confer degrees and academic titles (*Grades et titres universitaires*).
- Institutions' own diplomas (*Diplôme d'école ou d'université*). Public and private universities and higher schools may award self-accredited diplomas usually called *'diplômes d'université'* (DU) or *'diplôme d'établissement'*. Universities are not entitled to recurrent funding from the ministry for higher education for students enrolling in the programmes leading these types of own diplomas. They must fund them out of their own resources, but may charge full fees.
- Professional and vocational qualifications (*Titres professionnels*). These degrees are vocational qualifications that are protected by the state and certify specific training and abilities (e.g. engineer or psychologist). Usually granted on the basis of accredited diplomas.

1.4 Types of Programmes, Access, Attrition

Higher education comprises a wide variety of programmes ranging from two-year vocational programmes to eight years or more studies as in the medical sector.

Most programmes are organised in cycles (usually of two years) and in many fields, students are allowed to change tracks or programmes at the end of a cycle. Access to second cycle programmes may be open or competitive. Access to third cycle higher education is always competitive.

As a rule, access to the first year of higher education is open to all secondary school graduates who hold a *baccalauréat*. In practice, this is only true for the general academic programmes offered by universities. In the 'open sector' of higher education (general academic programmes offered by universities) selection takes place during the first years. Access to preparatory programmes for the *grandes écoles* (*CPGE*) is highly competitive, especially for the most selective schools. Access to short vocational programmes, either in university institutes of technology or in secondary school higher technician programmes is on application; the admission procedure is more or less selective according to subject or region.

Access to medical studies is open but there is a competitive examination at the end of the first year. Only 10 to 20% of the students proceed to the second year. Some of those who fail this exam are admitted to paramedical studies (nursing, osteopathy, speech therapy etc.). The majority, however, turns to other fields of higher education.

In general academic programmes, the rate of failure and drop-out during the first two years is high and students often try a new orientation in another programme. Yet some 30% of students enrolling in these general academic programmes leave higher education without any degree, diploma or certificate.

Once the first cycle of study is completed (usually the two-year DEUG diploma), students proceed to the second cycle and may leave higher education with a degree at the end of each further year of study successfully completed with a *Licence* degree or a *Maîtrise* degree. Following the *Maîtrise*, a third cycle of study begins, leading to a DESS (*Diplôme d'études supérieures spécialisées*), a one-year professional programme, or a DEA (*Diplôme d'études approfondies*, i.e. the first year of a research track opening the way to three to four years of doctoral studies.

The final and higher diploma is the Habilitation *(Habilitation à diriger les recherches*) which is required for application to permanent academic positions at the professorial level. It is awarded after examination of the research record of the applicant by a board of examiners drawn from several universities or research institutions.

1.5 Transition to Work

In recent years, about 60% of every age group has graduated from secondary education, 80% of whom enrol in a higher education programme, which gives an access rate to higher education which is close to 50%.

More than 20% of students leave higher education without a degree. Onethird will leave higher education with a two-year programme diploma (DEUG, DUT, BTS, nursing, etc.). Over 40% graduate from longer programmes.

A recent study by CEREQ provides a comparison of transition to work of all graduates of higher education in France.[2] The unemployment rate three years after leaving higher education varies according to the qualification. Short programmes in the health care and social sector provide nearly all their graduates with a job (less than 1% unemployed), but 10% of students leaving higher education without a degree are unemployed. Concerning long (five-year) programmes, graduates from engineering and business schools are less likely to be unemployed (2 to 3%) than graduates from university academic programmes (6 to 9%).

There is a clear hierarchy of programmes in terms of earnings: Compared to the median earnings of higher education graduates, engineering and business schools graduates earn two-thirds more and graduates from short general programmes (DEUG) onethird less.

1.6 Governance

With a few exceptions, higher education is tightly controlled by the state. The ministry in charge of higher education does not supervise the whole of the higher education system. Other minis-

2 Giret, Jean-François, Stéphanie Moullet, Gwenäelle Thomas, CEREQ, décembre 2002. De l'enseignement supérieur à l'emploi: les trois premières années de vie active de la « Génération 98 »

tries control their own higher education systems (Agriculture, Industry, Cultural affairs) with specific structures, statutes and modes of operation.

Non-profit organisations are in charge of most private higher education institutions, especially Catholic universities.

The unions, especially teachers unions, play a part in the governance of higher education by having seats on the numerous consultative boards that advise the ministers and their administration.

Institutions are more or less autonomous in the management of their operations. They nearly all have governing boards where faculty, students, industrial representatives and local politicians are represented. Heads of Universities are elected for a single five-year term. School directors are appointed by ministers.

2. Accreditation, Approval and Evaluation

Generally, official accreditation and approval schemes involve the state which is represented by the government and more specifically the ministers in charge of the various departments of the government. Ministers must ask the advice or the opinion of specific consultative committees for each type of study programme or institution. For all decisions made at the national level, the opinion of the National Council for Higher Education and Research (CNESER) is required. Consultative committees are partly elected and partly appointed by the minister and they consist of representatives from the education administration, teachers and academics, as well as industry concerned with the programmes to be accredited. CNESER members are elected among students and staff of higher education institutions in a ballot where candidates are presented by unions. A number of representatives of employers and workers in industry, appointed by the government, also sit on this council.

Evaluation of the higher education institutions is conducted by a specialised autonomous agency, the National Evaluation Committee (*Comité national d'évaluation des établissements d'enseignement supérieur* (*CNE*)).

2.1 Accreditation Schemes

Official accreditation, in a large majority of cases, is based on degrees or diplomas. An institution is granted the right to award an accredited diploma on the basis of the programmes it offers or plans to offer and the resources it intends to devote to teaching and training.

*Accreditation of National Diplomas (*habilitation*)*

All national diplomas are accredited by the ministry in charge of higher education after consultation with various consultative bodies. Accreditation is granted to universities following a process that takes place every four years. Universities prepare a development plan, which is submitted to the ministry for higher education. On this basis, a contract is agreed between the ministry and each institution. It includes the list of national diplomas the institution is allowed to award, as well as a commitment of the ministry to fund the institution for the students enrolled in the corresponding programmes.

Guidelines on curriculum, course structure of the programme, name of the diploma and regulation of examinations are set by the ministry.

Accreditation is decided after an examination of the organisation of the programme, as well as the number and qualification of the teaching staff of each institution applying for accreditation.[3]

General diplomas, academic degrees and titles (Diplomes généraux, grades et titres universitaires)

- DEUG (*'Diplôme d'études universitaires générales'),* intermediary diploma awarded after two years of study in universities.
- *Licence,* equivalent to a bachelor's degree, one year after DEUG.
- *Maîtrise*, one year after the *Licence.*
- *DEA (diplôme d'études approfondies*), one year after the *maîtrise*. It is a pre-requisite to enrol for a Ph.D. The DEA is roughly equivalent to a British research master degree.

*Technological and professional national diplomas (*Diplôme de l'enseignement technique supérieur*)*

As a rule, these diplomas are accredited by the minister for higher education on the advice of a mixed consultative committee where academics and representative from industry sit in equal numbers.

- BTS (*'Brevet de technicien supérieur'*, higher technician certificate) a two-year programme.
- DUT (*'Diplôme universitaire de technologie'*, university technology diploma), two years.
- '*Licence professionnelle*' (vocational bachelor degree), three years.
- Master-engineer qualification awarded by IUP (*'Instituts universitaires professionnalisés'*), four years.
- DESS (*'Diplôme d'études supérieures spécialisées'*, specialised higher education diploma), five years.

The new Master degree

A new type of Master degree, a national degree and diploma, has been introduced in France as a step towards a unified European higher education area. It is to be awarded after an overall period of study of five years to graduates of both professional and general programmes, in private as well as public institutions.

The accreditation procedure for this degree is still under discussion. It will have to merge three distinct existing accreditation schemes, one related to general university programmes, one recently introduced for business schools and one longstanding scheme for engineering schools. In the present state of the debate, all programmes leading to master diplomas would be accredited by the ministry of education following screening by panels of experts of the MSTP *(mission scientifique, technique et pédagogique*) appointed by the minister in charge of higher education. Parallel to that, programmes in engineering and business would be assessed by the Committee for engineering qualifications *(commission du titre d'ingénieur*) and the Committee for evaluation of management programmes and diplomas (*Commission d'évaluation des formations et diplômes de gestion*) created in 2001.

3 For a description of the internal process in universities and an assessment of the ministerial accreditation, see: F. Kletz & F. Pallez, 'l'offre de formation des universités: création de diplômes et stratégie d'établissements', Juin 2001, see http://www.cpu.fr/Publications/Publication.asp?Id=138

*State Approval of Institutional Diplomas (*Diplômes visés par l'Etat*)*

After five years of operation, a private school of higher education may apply to the ministry for higher education for approval of its diplomas. The programmes and examination procedures are screened by experts of the ministry who advise the minister. The approval is reviewed periodically.

Private External Accreditation of Diplomas

It is not always clear whether an accreditation scheme concerns institutions or diplomas. Private and public schools of higher education have entered a race to 'external accreditation' under the pressure of the labour market. Almost every business school can boast affiliation to a more or less prestigious group or network, very often international or European. Engineering schools are just beginning to consider similar external accreditation.

Networks and clubs

- *Conférence des Grandes Ecoles*. The French *Conférence des Grandes Ecoles* is a select group of schools that co-opt their members to maintain a high level of quality. They 'own' a post-graduate diploma, the *'mastère spécialisé'* (a registered trademark). They are organised in two chapters (*chapitres*), one for engineering schools, the other for business schools. Of the 234 business schools, only 27 belong to the CGE.
- *Networks of excellence and accreditation by foreign or international bodies*. Schools of business and management and, to a lesser extent, schools of engineering, are looking abroad for accrediting bodies, for example: AMBA, a British group for the accreditation of Masters of Business Administration, EQUIS (European Quality Improvement System), or AACSB (American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business).

Certification of Professional Diplomas and Qualifications

What used to be called *homologation* is mainly a certification by the state of a given vocational qualification, certificate or diploma awarded at the end of a vocational training programme by including it in a national register, the *répertoire national de qualification professionnelle*. The register, which is made public, gives information on the industrial sector and the level of qualification that is relevant to the programme and certificate.

Programmes and national diplomas that are accredited by the state (*habilité*) are registered without further examination and with no time limit. Higher vocational education institutions or industries may apply to the national committee for vocational certification (*commission nationale de certification professionnelle*) for inclusion of a training programme and the resulting certificate in the national register for a period of five years.

This scheme applies to vocational, professional and technological diplomas and certificates. For higher education, this means that most of the institutions that are not universities and some of the programmes offered by universities are concerned.

2.2 Approval Schemes

Official recognition of higher education institutions takes various forms, from the weakest – the mere administrative authorisation to open a school – to the strongest, i.e. creation of a public corporation for higher education and research.

Creation of Public Corporations in Higher Education

Public corporations are legal entities, specifically created by the state for the purpose of educating and training, that are granted formal autonomy to administer themselves and manage their own resources.

Higher education public corporations

EPSCP (*établissement public à caractère scientifique, culturel et professionnel*) are the public universities, the National Polytechnic Institutes and the Technology Universities. The law (Higher Education Act 1984) defines and organises these institutions. Their constitution provides for a federal structure of departments (UFR, schools or institutes), that offer both research and teaching and for an elected executive. They are created by the government after consultation with the National Council for Higher Education and Research (CNESER). Changes in the internal structure of the institutions must be approved by the minister in charge of higher education.

Administrative public corporations

The legal framework for administrative public corporations does not only concern higher education institutions but also all sectors of public administration (*Etablissement public administratif*). Heads of such corporations are appointed by the minister in charge of the government department that controls them (*ministère de tutelle*), i.e. the minister in charge of higher education for the majority of them.

Some institutions, such as the IUFM (teacher training institutes) and some schools of engineering are formally linked to Universities (*rattachés à une université*). Others are autonomous administrative public corporations (most schools of engineering and many other institutions).

Departments of public administrations

Some higher education institutions are mere departments of ministries, without any formal autonomy or corporate identity.

State Approval of Private Institutions

Private institutions of higher education must fulfil a number of minimal conditions to be authorised (*autorisé*) by the state. The conditions concern the qualifications of the teaching staff and administrators, premises and facilities, etc.

They may also apply for formal recognition by the state (*reconnaissance par l'État*). A recognised school of higher education may apply for public subsidies, employ faculty seconded from public

sector higher education institutions, and attract recurrent grants for themselves and bursaries for their students.

Approval of their degrees by the state confers private institutions a status close to that of public institutions in exchange for a periodical review of their programmes and the obligation to have examination boards that are chaired by a professor from a public higher education institution.

To sum up, private schools are ranked in three classes of increasing prestige according to the extent of state recognition they enjoy: authorised schools, recognised schools (*école reconnue par l'État)*, and recognised schools awarding approved diplomas (*école reconnue délivrant un diplôme visé par l'État*).

2.3 Evaluation Schemes

Institutional evaluation

The CNE, the National Council for Evaluation of Universities, was created by the 1984 Higher Education Act. It is an autonomous administrative entity that reports directly to the President of the Republic. The CNE consists of 25 members assisted by administrative staff led by a general delegate. Its members are appointed by the President of the Republic. They represent the academic and research community.

The CNE's mission is to evaluate universities, schools and other institutions in the areas linked to the missions of the higher education public sector, i.e. initial and further education, students' living conditions, research and the use of its results. It also examines the way an institution is governed, its policy and management. However, the CNE is neither entitled to evaluate individuals, nor to accredit programmes nor to apportion state funds. Its reports on individual institutions are published.

The CNE has already conducted institutional evaluations of all French universities and about 50 schools (more than 180 reports have been published so far). It also conducts comparative evaluations of disciplines (e.g. geography, information and communication studies, chemistry, applied mathematics) or of a type of degree course (postgraduate degrees in medical studies, pharmacy courses) across all institutions. And it also advises on national higher education policy issues in its annual report to the President of the Republic.

The institutional evaluation conducted by the CNE includes an internal and an external phase. The evaluated institution prepares an internal evaluation record with the help of guidelines. The external phase is a peer review, consisting of site visits by experts who write confidential reports for the committee. The CNE then builds upon both the internal evaluation and experts' reports to elaborate the evaluation report, which is published.[4] The average duration of the complete evaluation process is about one year.

In its 2002 annual report, the CNE suggested that its institutional evaluations should be synchronised with the development plans of the institutions and the contracts they sign with the ministry.[5]

4 For further information, see http://www.cne-evaluation.fr.
5 http://www.cne-evaluation.fr/WCNE_pdf/bulletin36.pdf

Programme Evaluation

The accreditation process has increasingly been associated with the evaluation of programmes. Application for accreditation of new programmes and review of existing programmes include information that institutions have to provide: transition to work of the graduates, drop-out rates, time to obtain a degree, etc.

Since 1996, universities are required to conduct an internal evaluation of study programmes which includes student surveys. For this purpose, institutions have developed their own statistical and analytical capacity by creating specialised services called '*observatoires*' in charge of collecting data, conducting surveys and producing local indicators on students and graduates.

Higher Education Indicators

In recent years, the central statistical office of the ministry of education started publishing comparative results of all universities in terms of drop-out and efficiency, especially in the first stages of study at university where open entry is balanced by high attrition.

The media also produce sets of indicators and league tables, which are becoming ever more sophisticated and ever less criticised by university officials. They usually draw on data made public by the ministry of education and on surveys conducted with institutions.[6]

New legislation is currently being prepared to further increase the autonomy of institutions; this will stimulate the demand for indicators to monitor the evolution of the higher education sector, especially from the parliament.

Quality Assessment in Staff Policy

Training, recruitment and promotion of academic staff can be seen as essential elements of quality assurance in higher education. Recruitment for long time was considered the only instrument for maintaining and improving the quality of teaching and research in France. The main argument for recruiting permanent academic staff through national competitive examinations ('*concours*') is that it ensures a high level of scientific quality. Once recruited to a permanent position, they are supposed to maintain the high level demonstrated when recruited. There is no further assessment of teaching and research abilities unless a person applies for promotion.

Promotion is largely based on the scientific record of the candidate, i.e., on his publications and research related activities. Until recently, promotion was decided upon by the same national body that recruits permanent staff, the National Council of Universities for lecturers and professors and the National Committee for Scientific Research (or its equivalent) for researchers. Recently, institutions have been allowed to grant about half the promotions open every year, making it possible to assess and reward different profiles of academic staff.

Recurrent evaluation of teaching performances is fiercely opposed on the basis of the principle of independence of the professoriate, defined in a law and upheld by the administrative courts. A 1997 statute ordered universities to organise the evaluation of teaching but it was prohibited to do it in a way that would resemble an external evaluation of individual faculty members. Although a majority of the academic community seems now to accept or support such an evalua-

6 See, for example, the university league tables (palmares des universités) published by the Nouvel Observateur in March 2003.

tion,[7] the legislative framework still seems to be a hindrance to a wider use of evaluation to assess and ensure the quality of teaching in universities.[8] This situation explains why staff development is almost non-existent for academic staff in French institutions.

3. Origin and Consequences of the Schemes of Accreditation and Evaluation

3.1 Purpose of Accreditation and Evaluation Schemes

The role of the state in the accreditation of higher education institutions and programmes is a consequence of the monopoly conferred to the state after the French revolution in order to end the traditional control of the Catholic church over education. The concept of the national diploma reflects this monopoly.

A second function of the state is to improve the information available to potential employers and future employees by certifying and ranking by levels the various diplomas and vocational qualifications issued by all providers of education and training. In addition to the national registry of professional qualifications, the state provides general and specific information on education and training programmes, as well as their relation to the labour market. A national agency for information on education programmes and occupations (ONISEP) and a network of local information and guidance centres produce comprehensive and up-to-date information for the benefit of school pupils and students.

A third function of the state is to support education financially, jointly with local governments. Although local governments have come to finance part of the development of universities and other institutions, it is still the responsibility of the state to provide higher education to all young people who are 'willing and able' to study. In this capacity, the national government has to ensure that institutional funding and student financial support are adequately distributed. Only programmes leading to a national diploma entitle higher education institutions to public funding and students are only supported financially if they attend approved institutions ('*établissements reconnus par l'état*').

Evaluation is required by both funding agencies and institutions as the higher education system has become more diversified and too complex to be directly administered by a central administration. In the 1980s, expansion and diversification of higher education led the Ministry of Education to relinquish the control it was no longer able to exert and to rely increasingly on institutional autonomy to take care of the day to day management of universities. The National Evaluation Committee was created in 1984 when the Ministry was initiating a new relationship with institutions based on institutional development plans and funding contracts signed on the basis of such plans. The introduction of explicit evaluation was clearly triggered by the need for institutions to better understand their operations in order to plan them. At the same time, the Ministry was seeking a more holistic view of institutional performance. The Parliament and other public funding bodies also became aware of the need for assessment of the overall achievements of the higher education system; the financial effort of the nation was greater than ever before be-

7 Rapport Fréville sur 'la politique de recrutement et la gestion des enseignants et des chercheurs' http://www.senat.fr/rap/r01-054/r01-0541.pdf

8 Rapport Dejean sur 'l'évaluation des enseignements dans les universités', see http://cisad.adc.education.fr/hcee/publications-2002.html.

cause of a policy of widening access to higher education, known in this country as 'democratisation'.

3.2 Relations Between Accreditation and Evaluation

Nevertheless, evaluation has never been directly linked with funding. Although accreditation of national diplomas triggers funding of teaching according to a formula linked to the number of students enrolled, no specific financial constraint is imposed on the advisory committees that review the proposals of the universities. They accredit (or propose accreditation) purely on the basis of quality criteria (qualification of the teaching staff and structure of the programme).

In addition to recurrent funding of teaching based on this formula, universities receive additional public grants through a contractual agreement struck every four years with the ministry of education on the basis of specific projects stated in the institution's development plan. Ministry officials stated repeatedly that institutions had a duty to conduct *ex post* evaluations of these state-funded projects. Even if universities did sometimes attempt to do so in the report they produce at the end of each planning period, the ministry has tended to neglect such prescriptions for lack of time and staff. This is why it was recently proposed that the National Evaluation Committee (CNE) should be asked to centre its review of institutions on the achievement of their development plans. This would tie the CNE institutional evaluations to the planning period. As the development plans are for four years, the CNE would assess each university once every four years.

Institutions apply for accreditation of programmes leading to national diplomas as part of their institutional development plan and the ministry accredits the programmes in the contract it signs with each university. In the review process, universities are asked to provide an assessment of the effectiveness of each programme, based on past evidence for renewals and forecasts for innovations. Such assessment takes into account performance indicators such as the time to obtain a degree, ease and speed of transition to jobs for graduates.

3.3 Relations Between Accreditation and Approval

As can be seen from the description of the various existing or planned schemes, the approval of institutions and the accreditation of programmes are not necessarily linked. Public institutions, which do not need approval, have to apply periodically for accreditation by the state for each of their programmes to award national diplomas and to receive public funding.

Accreditation is not necessarily granted to all programmes for which the institutions apply. This feature, which has been central to higher education policy for decades, is the consequence of the overwhelming domination of the national diploma in the minds of the French population. Attempts to relinquish it and grant universities self-accrediting powers have always been nipped in the bud. Employers and students alike only trusted the state to guarantee the 'value' of diplomas, even when there was massive evidence that the content and selectivity of national diplomas varied widely from one institution to another. This may be due to the weakness of external evaluation of teaching on which students could rely for their choice of programme and employers for their recruitment policy.

Nevertheless, the process of programme accreditation by the state has been deeply transformed in the last twenty years. As university curricula used to be defined by the ministry, all that was needed was to ensure compliance with the ministerial regulation. This 'conformity check' was

carried out in a formal way only for new institutions or when institutions applied for new programmes. Once granted, the 'approval' was not questioned in subsequent reviews. The same held true for engineering schools: their accreditation by the Committee for Engineering Qualification entitled them to permanent approval by the ministry.

As the autonomy of institutions in designing their curricula increased, the need for proper accreditation and periodic review began to be felt. New types of programmes were introduced for which there was no national curriculum, but only a few guidelines provided to the universities and therefore a large diversity in structure and content. This was particularly true for the DESS, which are postgraduate professional programmes and the IUP, which are professionally oriented university institutes. As it was no longer possible to check the conformity of local programmes with a national model or yardstick, the ministry altered its approval process and created new bodies and new processes for accreditation.

This was made absolutely clear when, in 2002, it was decided to change the whole degree structure following the Bologna Declaration. The ministry allowed universities to propose new programmes leading to the master's degree and the only guidance they would receive was the criteria that the ministry would use for its accreditation decision. This new policy surprised and annoyed a large part of the academic world, especially the teachers and students unions. It was obvious to all that the French higher education system was subject to radical change. A similar change had also been under way for the *grandes écoles*, as an accrediting body was created for business schools and periodical review of accreditation was introduced for engineering schools.
Over the last decades, the French higher education system has greatly evolved and, surprisingly for those who know the country, in a pragmatic and gradual way.

4. External Influences on Accreditation and Evaluation

As far as external influences are concerned, the situation is somewhat different for evaluation and for accreditation. Institutional evaluation as conducted by the CNE has been developed with little reference to foreign examples. During the 1990s, the 'French model' of evaluation of higher education was often opposed to the harsher and more inquisitive British and Dutch 'models'.

Accreditation on the basis of national diplomas was established at a time when universities were mainly training judges, teachers and civil servants for the state. The private sector of the economy mainly employed graduates from private engineering or business schools and the national diploma made no great sense. With the expansion of enrolments and the diversification of programmes offered by universities, university graduates started competing with those from private or non-university institutions for the private sector jobs and the whole picture became blurred.

France played a leading part in the design of a European higher education area by organising the first meeting in 1998 at the Sorbonne. The French minister of education of the time saw in this process a powerful instrument to reform the national higher education system. The introduction of a new degree structure in the wake of the Bologna conference led to a complete reshuffling of the cards, which is still taking place on the French scene. The construction of a 'European higher education area' and the threat of competition from graduates from neighbouring countries are pushing all institutions towards a common degree structure and a common accrediting system. For the time being, given the weakness of the organisation of higher education institutions in the country, such a system can only be provided by the state.

Glossary

BTS (Brevet de technicien supérieur'), higher technician certificate: diploma for two-year vocational programmes organised in secondary education institutions (Lycées)

CNE (Comité national d'év aluation des établissements d'enseignement supérieur) National evaluation committee

CNESER Conseil National National de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche, National Council for Higher Education and Research

CPGE (classes préparatoires aux grandes écoles) two year preparatory programmes prior to access to 'grandes écoles'

CTI (commission du titre d'ingénieur) Committee for engineering qualifications

DEA (diplôme d'études approfondies), postgraduate diploma, a pre-requisite to enrol for a PhD, roughly equivalent to a British research master degree.

DESS (Diplômes d'études supérieures spécialisées), postgraguate professional diploma

DEUG (Diplôme d'études universitaires générales), intermediary diploma awarded after two years of university studies)

DUT (Diplôme universitaire de technologie), university technology diploma, awarded by IUT after a two-year vocational programme

Licence, equivalent to the bachelor's degree, one year after DEUG (either licence professionnelle – vocational bachelor's degree – or licence générale – academic bachelor's degree)

Maîtrise, one year after Licence.

The Case of Germany
Country Report Germany

Angelika Schade

1. The National System of Higher Education

1.1 Types of Higher Education Institutions

The tertiary sector in Germany includes higher education institutions and other institutions that offer courses qualify students who have completed upper secondary education and obtained a higher education entrance qualification for entry into a profession. The state and state-approved higher education institutions are the followings:

- universities (i.e., Universitäten, Technische Hochschulen/Technische Universitäten, Pädagogische Hochschulen, Theologische Hochschulen);
- colleges of art and music (Kunsthochschulen and Musikhochschulen);
- universities of applied sciences (Fachhochschulen).

Of the 331 higher education institutions (118 universities, 157 universities of applied sciences and 56 colleges of art and music), as of March 2003, 263 are members of the *Hochschulrektorenkonferenz (HRK)*, which is the voluntary association of state and state-recognised universities and other higher education institutions in Germany. According to a provisional statement by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (*Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung)* issued in January 2003, there are 43 private institutions which are not members of the *HRK*.

There are a number of special higher education institutions that only admit certain groups (e.g. higher education institutions of the Federal Armed Forces, of the Police and *Verwaltungsfachhochschulen* – public administration). Holders of a higher education entrance qualification can also choose to enter a *Berufsakademie* as an alternative to higher education. These vocational training institutions combine on-the-job training with academic work and have been established in seven of the sixteen *Länder* since 1974 (cf. Eurydice: Eurybase).

1.2 Size of the Higher Education System

While enrolment numbers are characterised by cyclic variations, there has been a clear trend towards growing numbers of student enrolments in the last 25 years. Between the academic years 1975/76 and 2000/01 numbers doubled (cf. HIS-Ergebnisspiegel 2002, p. 61). Students are distributed by type of institution as in Table 1.

Table 1

Type of institution	Number of students	Percentage of students
Universities	1,388,812	73%
Universities of applied sciences	487,286	25%
Colleges of art and music	32,813	2%
Total	**1,908,911**	**100%**

Source: Statistical information on higher education institutions from the Higher Education Compass, http://www.higher-education-compass.de (January 2003)

The vast majority of students are enrolled in state institutions, which accommodate over 1.8 million (97%), while private state-approved higher education institutions count 34,000 (2%) and church state-approved institutions 2,000 (1%) (Higher Education Compass, January 2003).

1.3 Main Degree Types

The traditional university degree programmes lead to the *Diplom*, the *Magister* and the *Staats-examen*. The average length of studies to obtain a degree is ten to twelve semesters or five to six years. Universities have the exclusive right to award doctoral degrees. Universities of applied sciences award the *Diplom (FH)*, for which the standard time to obtain a degree is eight to nine semesters. The level of equivalence of the old graduation system degrees on the international scale occasionally led to misinterpretations. As the publication of the 'European Glossary on Education' should have made clear, the university *Diplom* in the old graduation system is equivalent to the master's degree in the new graduation system. (Tables 2, 3 below; cf. Eurydice, 1999).

With the amendments to the German Higher Education Act *(HRG)* of 20 August 1998, Germany's higher education institutions, universities and universities of applied sciences, were given the opportunity – initially for a test phase, and now permanently – to introduce bachelor's and master's degree courses. The new graduation system only supplements the traditional system of degrees, as can be seen in the numbers of new degree programmes and students enrolled in them (about 3% in winter 2001). There is, however, a lively discussion about changing the graduation system to bachelor's/master's degree courses, except for parts of the *Staatsexamen* (cf. Wissenschaftsrat 2002).

Table 2: Main degree types (first-degree – graduate/undergraduate)

Degree type	**Number of programmes**	**In per cent**
Bachelor/Bakkalaureus	749	8 %
Diplom (mainly awarded in science and engineering)	1,624	17 %
Diplom (FH)	1,700	18 %
Lehramt (teaching degree)	2,972	31 %
Magister (mainly in arts and humanities subjects)	2,044	22 %
Staatsexamen (in state-supervised professions)	168	2 %
Others	78	1 %
Total	**9,335**	**100 %**

Source: Statistical information on higher education institutions from the Higher Education Compass, http://www.higher-education-compass.de (January 2003)

Some *Diplom/Magister*, *Staatsexamen* and *Abschlussprüfung* programmes follow upon a first degree. The vast majority of postgraduate degree programmes, however, is made up of the new master's degree programmes.

Table 3: Main degree types (postgraduate)

Degree type	**Number of programmes**	**In per cent**
Abschlussprüfung (final exam in art, music)	137	9 %
Diplom	219	14 %
Diplom (FH)	96	6 %
Magister	80	5 %
Master's	789	51 %
Staatsexamen	119	8 %
Others	105	7 %
Total	**1,545**	**100 %**

Source: Statistical information on higher education institutions from the Higher Education Compass, http://www.higher-education-compass.de (January 2003)

We do not yet have any statistics on the labour market acceptance of the various degrees; there is, however, good reason to assume – as first research results and the recent press show – that the new bachelor's/master's degrees are not well-known by personnel managers (e.g. List 2000).

1.4 Transition of Students from Higher Education to Work

On average, higher education graduates have a relatively better position in the labour market than most other groups, as can be seen in the unemployment data (Table 4).

Table 4: Unemployed persons by level of qualification (data: 2001)

Level of qualification	Number
Persons without vocational training	1,386,000
Persons with vocational training	2,356,000
Persons with a university degree	127,000
Persons with a university of applied sciences degree	53,000
Total	**3,742,000**

Source: Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, Zahlenbarometer, 2001/2002

The factors that facilitate or hamper transition from higher education to work are complex and difficult to identify (for more information on this see Kehm, 1999), so they have to be interpreted with caution. The significantly lower number of unemployed in the group of academics should not, for example, hide the fact that members of this group can be found increasingly in under-qualified jobs, in temporary work, or are avoiding unemployment by entering continuing qualification programmes (for more information see HIS-Ergebnisspiegel 2002, pp. 247 *ff*).

The data show significant differences between the subject groups (Table 5); these differences, however, change cyclically.

Table 5: Number of unemployed persons holding an academic degree by field of study

Subject group	2000	2001
Language and cultural studies	15,785	16,882
Law, economics and social sciences	36,459	37,848
Mathematics and natural sciences	15,177	14,945
Medicine	9,913	9,013
Agriculture, forestry and nutritional sciences	4,513	4,810
Engineering	52,664	52,932
Art, music	7,469	8,365
Teaching	19,329	17,493
Total	**176,255**	**180,399**

Source: Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, Zahlenbarometer, 2001/2002

1.5 Governance and Steering of Higher Education

In the Federal Republic of Germany, responsibility for the education system is determined by the federal structure of the state. Educational legislation and the administration of the education system are primarily the responsibility of the *Länder*. The *Länder* Ministries of Education, Cultural Affairs and Science develop policy guidelines in the fields of education, science and the arts, adopt legal provisions and administrative regulations, co-operate with the highest authorities at national and *Länder* level and supervise the work of authorities under their purview and of subordinated bodies, institutions and foundations.

The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Länder* in the Federal Republic of Germany (*KMK*) brings together the *Länder* ministers and senators who are responsible for education and training, higher education and research, and also, as a rule, cultural affairs. This body works on the basis of an agreement between the *Länder* and deals with policy matters pertaining to education, higher education, research and culture that are of supra-regional importance, with the aim of forming a common viewpoint and a common will, as well as representing common interests. Resolutions of the *KMK* can only be adopted unanimously. They have the status of recommendations – with the political commitment of the competent ministers to transform the recommendations into law – until they are enacted as binding legislation by the parliaments in the *Länder*, implemented in the form of administrative action, ordinances or laws. As a rule, higher education institutions have the status of a public law corporation and are public institutions under the authority of the *Länder*. They have the right to self-administration within the framework of the law. The higher education institutions draw up their own statutes (*Grundordnungen*) which require the approval of the *Land* in which they are situated (cf. Eurydice: Eurybase).

The general principles for the legal position of higher education institutions, including the participation of all members of these institutions in self-administration, are laid down in the federal higher education law (*HRG*). On the basis of these principles, the organisation and administration of higher education institutions are regulated by *Länder* legislation for those institutions that come within the purview of each *Land*. The *Länder*'s and higher education institutions' room for manoeuvre in reforming their organisation and administration has been extended through the 1998 amendment of the *HRG*.

2. The Schemes

Whereas quality assurance in teaching in Germany was primarily carried out through ex-ante control (quantitative specification and approval of examination regulations by the state), other countries increasingly pursued it as ex-post control on the basis of evaluation results. Following the international development and with growing quality assurance awareness, evaluation procedures were introduced as from the mid-1990s and accreditation procedures at the end of the 1990s.

2.1 Accreditation Scheme for Study Programmes

Paradigm Shift: From Approval to Accreditation as a Precondition for Approval

Responsibility for the contents and organisation of studies and examinations as well as for the quality of higher education lies with the *Länder*. This has been finally implemented by a system of approving programmes and defining exam requirements. Proposals for standards of study courses and degrees as well as for their mutual recognition were made for a long time through framework regulations on studies and examinations (*Rahmenprüfungsordnungen*), which had to be jointly adopted by the *Länder* and the *HRK*. The creation of these framework regulations has proven to be an extraordinarily ponderous procedure, often taking many years and producing results which, when finally adopted, had already become inefficient because of new developments and therefore proved to be counterproductive, especially with regard to study programmes competing in the international market (cf. Akkreditierungsrat, 2002, pp. 1 *ff*.).

Framework regulations include the quantitative reference data of degree courses, in particular the standard time to obtain a degree (*Regelstudienzeit*), the amount of hours of teaching in required and elective subjects, the number of credits required for admission to examinations (*Leistungsnachweise*), examination details and the length of time allowed to complete the final dissertation. While accreditation procedures were introduced initially for new bachelor's/master's study courses, they were extended through the new 'organisation statute' issued by the *KMK* (KMK resolution of 24 May 2002 in the currently valid version of 19 September 2002) to all study programmes where there is no valid framework regulation. This means that in the long run the former system of framework regulations will be replaced by the new system of accreditation.

The Actors Engaged in the Creation of the Accreditation Scheme

The opening of Germany's higher education system to the developments at European level by introducing bachelor's/master's degree courses specifically aims to:

- increase the flexibility of the range of study opportunities offered,
- improve the international compatibility of German degrees, and thus
- increase student mobility and demand among international students for study places in Germany.

To provide the higher education institutions with the autonomy required for the implementation of the reform, the former system of state control became less widespread. In order to give consideration to the different areas of competence and responsibility of the state and higher education institutions in the establishment of degree courses, the *Länder* ministers of education and culture decided on a functional separation between state approval and accreditation; they also reached an agreement with the *HRK* on the establishment of a cross-*Länder* Accreditation Council (*Akkreditierungsrat*).

The *Akkreditierungsrat* is responsible for the establishment of comparable quality standards for bachelor's and master's degree courses in an essentially decentralised accreditation process, which will be carried out by accreditation agencies. According to its 'organisation statute', as from 1 January 2003, the 17 members of the *Akkreditierungsrat* will include four representatives from higher education institutions, four representatives of the *Länder*, five practitioners, two international experts and two students. This shows the social dimension of the education policy restructuring process – all stakeholders should be involved.

The Basis for and Framework of the Akkreditierungsrat

The introduction of the accreditation system in Germany is based on resolutions passed by the KMK and the HRK. The Akkreditierungsrat was first established for a test period of three years and, following assessment by an international group of experts, was given permanence through the 'organisation statute' adopted by the KMK in 2002. It fulfils its responsibilities by setting the criteria to accredit accreditation agencies and degree programmes and co-ordinating how these agencies assess the content and quality of degree programmes. The resolutions adopted by the Akkreditierungsrat, as well as complementary guidelines, aim to ensure the reliability, comparability and transparency of the procedures.

The resolutions include (cf. Akkreditierungsrat 2002, pp. 31 ff.):

Basic standards for accrediting accreditation agencies:

These standards comprise, *inter alia*, institutional independence, adequate staffing, facility and funding infrastructure, performance of accreditation for all types of higher education institutions and, with respect to all types of programmes and disciplines, national and international competence, evidence of transparency, quality control, documentation and information concerning procedures, and accountability.

Criteria for accrediting degree programmes leading to bachelor's and master's degrees:

The rather general set of criteria refers, *inter alia*, to standards concerning the quality and international compatibility of the curriculum, as well as control of student achievement, professional qualification of graduates on the basis of a consistent and coherent programme design, and assessment of the foreseeable developments in potential career fields.

Frame of reference for bachelor's/master's study programmes:

As there is no single model for bachelor's and master's programmes, but a large variety of possibilities, the criteria defined by the *Akkreditierungsrat* had to take German academic traditions and expectations into account. Moreover, they had to be in accordance with the declarations and statements made at European level. The *Akkreditierungsrat* therefore developed an open framework for bachelor's and master's degrees which has interfaces with existing European frames.

Relation between evaluation and accreditation:

In the *Akkreditierungsrat's* interpretation, evaluation and accreditation serve different purposes and should therefore be dealt with in separate procedures and by different bodies. However, recent evaluation results may be taken into account in an accreditation procedure.

Participation of students in the *Akkreditierungsrat*, in accreditation agencies and peer groups:

The *Akkreditierungsrat* considers the participation of students in the organisation and carrying out of accreditation procedures very important. To facilitate such participation, various student organisations set up a 'students accreditation pool' in summer 2000[1] on the initiative of the *Akkreditierungsrat*.

Monitoring of accreditation agencies:

The *Akkreditierungsrat* is the 'monitoring authority' that determines whether the standards are respected. It co-ordinates, critically monitors and supports the work of the agencies.

1 For more information cf. www.studentischer-pool.de.

Procedure for admission to careers in the public service:

Master's degree courses offered at universities of applied sciences which apply for a decision on admission of their students to careers in the public service have to be accredited through a special procedure which involves a representative of the civil service.

2.2 The System of Accreditation of Study Programmes

Meta-Accreditation and Scope of Accreditation

A system of meta-accreditation and checks and balances exists, since the *Akkreditierungsrat* accredits agencies and is itself evaluated regularly. Accreditation agencies can be accredited by the *Akkreditierungsrat* when they meet the principles and basic standards listed below.

- Accreditation agencies must be institutionally independent of higher education institutions as well as of business, industry and professional associations. The agencies must ensure that higher education institutions and representatives of professional practice are given appropriate opportunities to participate in the accreditation decision-making process.[2]
- Accreditation agencies need to have adequate staffing, facilities, and funding infrastructure, that are reliably ascertained for the medium term. They operate on the principles of efficiency and economy, and will not be profit-oriented.
- Accreditation agencies carry out accreditation for all types of higher education institutions.
- Accreditation agencies must bring together national and international competence. As an essential factor to evaluate the professional qualification of accreditation agencies, such approaches should be reflected, *inter alia*, in the recruitment of experts and in the design of assessment procedures.
- Accreditation agencies must prove that the procedures followed in processes of programme accreditation are comprehensible and transparent. They must provide for internal measures of quality control and suitable documentation and information practices.
- Accreditation agencies are also accountable to the *Akkreditierungsrat* after they have been accredited. In particular, they must inform the *Akkreditierungsrat* without delay of any degree programme for which they have extended accreditation status and submit an annual activity report (*Akkreditierungsrat* 2002, pp. 38*f*.).

In the course of processing the application from the agency to be reviewed, the *Akkreditierungsrat* produces a review report based on the institutional profile submitted by the applying agency, and on one or several consultations with it. The *Akkreditierungsrat* then decides to accredit, conditionally accredit or not to accredit the agency. Subsequently, the *Akkreditierungsrat* monitors the implementation of any conditions imposed and, if the agency was accredited, monitors the observance of the targets agreed with that agency. Each accreditation is issued for a limited time period (three to five years), which is then followed by a re-accreditation procedure.

2 The Akkreditierungsrat considers 'participation by higher education institutions' to mean the academic and scientific community, including especially teachers and students, and by 'professional practice', representatives of economic life who will be proposed by both employer and employee organisations.

The Actors in the Accreditation Scheme

In the course of its three-year pilot phase, the *Akkreditierungsrat* accredited four single-discipline agencies, and three cross-disciplinary agencies, i.e. agencies with responsibility for degree courses across the whole spectrum of subjects. 'Single-discipline' and 'cross-disciplinary' agencies may accredit programmes in all geographical regions, with teaching being the main part of the respective schemes.

The cross-disciplinary agencies are:

- ACQUIN (Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute): members are mainly the universities and universities of applied sciences in several *Länder* as well as in Austria.
- AQAS (Agency for Quality Assurance through Accreditation of Study Programmes): members are mainly the universities and universities of applied sciences in North-Rhine Westphalia and the Rhineland-Palatinate.
- ZEvA (Central Evaluation and Accreditation Agency): members originally were mainly the universities and universities of applied sciences in Lower Saxony; it is now open for membership from other *Länder* and from abroad.
- The single-discipline agencies are:
- AHPGS (Agency for Study Courses in Medical Pedagogy, Care, Health and Social Work): members are mainly the conferences of faculties and deans, and professional associations in the respective fields.
- ASIIN (Agency for Study Courses in Engineering/Informatics and Chemistry, Biochemistry, Chemical Engineering): in 2002 ASII (Accreditation Agency for Study Programs in Engineering and Informatics) merged with A-CBC, the accreditation agency for chemistry, biochemistry, chemical engineering, to form ASIIN.
- FIBAA (Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation): founded by the leading organisations of industry and commerce in Austria, Germany and Switzerland.

Other Actors

A crucial role in the accreditation procedure is played by the peers who should represent higher education institutions, professional practice and the student body. In view of the *KMK* resolution of 2002, the equivalence of corresponding study and examination achievements and academic degrees can be sufficiently ensured by subjecting the content of degree courses to peer review. Hence, it is assumed that the peers have reached disciplinary consensus regarding the essential standards and requirements for a degree course. However, when developing and assessing new, innovative degree courses, peers often have to make far-reaching and crucial decisions. The fact that they wish to see their respective disciplinary societies actively involved in the accreditation processes is only natural. The range of these societies extends from faculty and dean conferences via disciplinary work groups to the associations and umbrella organisations – above all in the field of science and engineering – where science and research and business and industry work together in specialist fields (cf. *Wissenschaftsrat* 1992).

There is no professional accreditation of graduates, but there is an accreditation network – which co-operates with agencies – in which the chamber of architects in its capacity as the association of the profession has been involved in the development of standards of accreditation, for example.

The Procedure for Degree Courses

The accreditation procedure aims to ensure equivalence, facilitate diversity, guarantee quality and create transparency. Allowing higher education institutions as much freedom as possible in structuring their courses, without, however, jeopardising the comparability of future study opportunities, resulted in the *Akkreditierungsrat* formulating relatively general criteria that should be applied to the accreditation of degree courses. In contrast to the somewhat rigid standards and specifications contained in the framework examination regulations, the criteria now provide a flexible content examination framework for the review of degree courses and thus clearly demonstrate the quality dimension of accreditation.

The *Akkreditierungsrat* developed specifications on the accreditation application process for degree courses which mainly cover:

- reasons for the degree course, such as mission statement, goals and aims;
- the planned degree course structure and requirements in terms of content and specialisation, such as organisation, structure and content of the programme, professional qualification of graduates, assessment of foreseeable developments in potential career fields;
- human, financial and infrastructural resources;
- quality assurance measures, such as data on completion rates, student satisfaction, etc. and
- study-related co-operation, especially concerning international programmes (cf. *Akkreditierungsrat* 2002, p. 11).

In the course of processing the application for degree course(s) to be reviewed, a review report is produced by the team of reviewers appointed on a case-by-case basis by the agency. This report takes account of the institutional profile submitted by the applicant, and includes an on-site inspection by the team of reviewers. It is presented for a decision to the agency's Accreditation Commission, which must be made up of representatives from higher educations institutions, professional practice and students. The Accreditation Commission comments on the review team's report and decides to accredit, conditionally accredit or not to accredit the degree course(s) in question. Accreditation can be awarded for a maximum of seven years. After that, a re-accreditation procedure must follow.

A summary of the results of the accreditation procedure are published – from 2003 also in English – on the website of the *Akkreditierungsrat* (www.akkreditierungsrat.de).

Implementation Problems and Shortcomings

The gradual concession of autonomy will only lead fully to the aspired quality increases if the education institutions receive support to achieve it. Accreditation can be used to avert the danger of education institutions developing in different directions in terms of quality. State supervision should concentrate less on cases of isolated crisis management and should be geared more towards system control and results responsibility (see *Arbeitsstab Forum Bildung*, 2001). The accreditation process which is being developed in connection with the introduction of the new academic degrees redefines the accountability and responsibility of higher education and the state. State approval[3] now relates, in particular, to guaranteeing the availability of basic resources, the incorporation of degree courses into the higher education planning processes of the respective *Land* and the keeping of structural targets and standards.

3 Some Länder already dispensed with the approval procedure and now use service and performance agreements (Leistungsvereinbarungen) to steer the higher education institutions, including the range of studies and degree courses which they offer.

There is no law on accreditation but recommendations and regulations by *KMK* and *HRK* serve as a basis for the accreditation system. The legal quality and stability of these foundations is made clear by the fact that they are based neither on an administrative agreement nor on any state treaty. While several agencies are registered associations, a status which provides them with a legal entity and makes them capable of acting, the status of the *Akkreditierungsrat* remains legally undefined. In contrast to the situation in other European countries, where accreditation was introduced and its key factors defined by act of law, the equivalent in the Federal Republic of Germany lacks a foundation which, for example, would allow the *Akkreditierungsrat* to impose sanctions when an agency has failed to observe the directives or standards set by it (see Erichsen, 2003, p. 102). Moreover, there is no appeals or objections procedure, although there is monitoring of the agencies' work by the *Akkreditierungsrat*.

The accreditation system plans to have a competitive relationship between the individual accreditation agencies. This means that one of the *Akkreditierungsrat's* responsibilities is to ensure fair conditions for competition between agencies. However, the agencies carry out their accreditation work on the basis of process and quality criteria set by the *Akkreditierungsrat*, and so the quality seal awarded at the end of a successful accreditation is always the same. Hence, since the agencies all offer the same 'product' in the course of a comparable procedure, competition seems, at first glance, to be restricted solely to pricing and services. Recently, a kind of 'co-operation competition' between the agencies emerged which involves appropriate co-operation agreements with individual societies or networks in which recognition of the quality seal – for example by international professional associations – is linked to the name of the agency. Specifically, this could mean, for example, that a university is forced to use a specific agency if the graduates of a degree course to be accredited are to be accepted in the international job market. Since such a monopoly position would concern the whole structure of the accreditation system, the *Akkreditierungsrat* will also have to prove that it is a competition guardian.

From the outset, using accreditation to guarantee minimum standards triggered controversial debate. On the one hand, critics saw a danger of 'downward' levelling. On the other hand, it was taken for granted that there was generally no need to worry about minimum standards, since, as a rule, these are ensured. The background to the concept of a definition of minimum standards that have to be met by individual programmes is the idea that institutions can develop profiles which extend beyond these minimum standards and can be steered and controlled by the principle of customers' power of demand. In order to allow this principle to unfold, it is first necessary to make sure that the potential customers have that power of demand. This calls for transparency, i.e., customers must be able to inform themselves about the quality of the programmes, products and services on offer and compare these. A first step towards such transparency is the establishment of minimum qualities through accreditation.

Of the 1,500 or so bachelor's and master's degree courses currently on offer, more than 250 have been accredited until April 2003. The great discrepancy that still exists between approved and accredited degree courses, and which critics like to cite as proof of the inadequacy of the accreditation system, comes primarily from the simultaneous introduction of the new graduation system and the accreditation scheme. There is, however, a discussion about the further development of the procedures of accreditation (e.g. leaner procedures for re-accreditation, combined procedure for related study programmes, etc.) to master the large and ever growing numbers of accreditation procedures.

2.3 Accreditation Scheme for Private Higher Education Institutions

Because most of the German higher education institutions are recognised and funded fully or partly by the state, institutional accreditation has not been discussed widely. However, with increasing globalisation and internationalisation and the growing autonomy of the higher education institutions, more and more private (corporate) higher education institutions have been established as foundations. While the minimum requirements for state approval of private higher education institutions are laid down in the *HRG*, the *Länder* use different models to recognise private institutions.[4]

The number of education providers in the field of higher education has increased recently. Recent private initiatives are to found universities that offer study programmes in various co-operative and organisational formats (e.g. domestic universities running programmes in co-operation with foreign educational institutions, foreign universities running their programmes in Germany). For example, such institutions are independent higher education institutions or institutions affiliated to existing state-maintained universities.

The *HRG* defines the requirements needed for state recognition. Recommendations adopted by the *Wissenschaftsrat* on the accreditation of private universities follow the approach taken by degree course accreditation and the system used to accept state-maintained universities for entry into the list of universities qualifying for the *HBFG*[5] university infrastructure-building system (Law on the Joint Task of 'Extending and building new universities') and relate to the establishment and organisation of an institutional accreditation procedure in order to make sure cross-*Länder* minimum quality standards apply to private universities. Any introduction of such a system needs the agreement of the *Land* in which the university is located (cf. *Wissenschaftsrat* 2000, p. 4).

The following fundamental principles, procedures and institutional guidelines apply to the accreditation of private universities. An accreditation aims to check and determine that the defined minimum quality standards have been met. These minimum standards are based on those requirements contained in the *HRG* or in the respective *Land*'s higher education act and must take into consideration the particular profile of the university in question. The following general requirements need to be met:

- The university must have the status of a legal entity in Germany.
- It must present policy concepts on its structure and operations that must correspond to the quality level of a state university.
- The university must have its own controlling and quality assurance system to target performance areas that allow for continuous monitoring and improvement of internal processes and achievement of defined objectives.
- Based on feasibility studies, the university must have adequate qualitative and quantitative resources at its disposal to put its concept into practice, in particular, sufficient human resources, material equipment and infrastructure.

The review of the universities' performance areas is based on the principle of the coherence of the set objectives and their achievability, of the envisaged processes and of the resources provided to this end.

4 There is a special case of accreditation of study programmes by accreditation agencies where the Land ministry takes this as precondition for the application of the private institution for full or partial university status. These are the same procedures as described above.

5 HBFG = Hochschulbauförderungsgesetz (University Construction Funding Act)

Evaluation Schemes

Based on recommendations of the *HRK* and *Wissenschaftsrat*, evaluation procedures for teaching[6] have been introduced since the mid-1990s to increase transparency, strengthen institutional responsibility, support higher education institutions in the introduction of systematic quality-promoting measures and promote the profile, image and competitiveness of German higher education institutions (cf. HRK Project Q 2000; Wolf 2002 for details). The evaluation procedures are expected to highlight the particular strengths and weaknesses of the evaluated institution and thus lead to more systematic strategies of quality assurance and quality improvement. Evaluation as a general task of higher education institutions has meanwhile been introduced by higher education laws in all *Länder*.

The main elements of the evaluation procedures – a cycle of five to eight years is recommended – are internal self-evaluation, external peer review, and follow up.
Content and focus on self-evaluation are primarily in the following fields:

- structure and organisation of the respective department,
- teaching and learning objectives,
- programmes of study,
- academic staff and resources,
- students and course of study,
- teaching and learning,
- opinions of staff and students on teaching and learning,
- situation in the job market and graduate employment.

There is no national institution to co-ordinate evaluation activities. But there are initiatives at *Länder* (agencies), regional and cross-regional level (networks) between higher education institutions. Some other institutions carry out evaluations at the request of single universities or faculties. Their procedures differ to some extent from the recommendations made by the *HRK* and *Wissenschaftsrat* (cf. HRK Project Q 2000). Agencies at *Länder* level are for example:[7]

- Central Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (ZEvA) in Lower Saxony,[8]
- Evaluation Office of the Universities in North Rhine-Westphalia,
- Evaluation Office of the Universities of Applied Sciences in North Rhine-Westphalia.

The networks are, for example:

- Association of Northern German Universities (*Nordverbund*),
- Evaluation Network of the Universities of Darmstadt, Kaiserslautern and Karlsruhe, with the ETH Zurich acting as an external moderator,
- Evaluation Network of the Universities of Halle, Jena, Leipzig.

The regional agencies are responsible for the preparation and administration of the entire evaluation procedure, including keeping of the time schedules and checking completeness of data provided by the departments under review, organisation of site visits, publication of final reports, etc. The agency distributes the self-evaluation report to the peer group members. The site visit by the peers that follows includes interviews with different status groups in the institution. The report written by the peers with support from the agency includes a critical review of the internal evaluation, a definition of problems and an outline of possible solutions. It is becoming increasingly common to find, after the final report, agreements between departments and the head of

6 In some Länder, especially in Lower Saxony, there is also evaluation of research which is separate from the evaluation of teaching but with an attempt to link the two procedures. This is done by other institutions, cf. www.wk.niedersachsen.de.

7 Information on all evaluation agencies and networks can be found at www.evanet.his.de.

8 ZEvA is an agency with two departments, the accreditation and the evaluation departments.

the institution about measures to be taken to improve teaching and learning, optimise the outcome or make sure that certain standards are met within a fixed period, as well as performance agreements (*Leistungsvereinbarungen*) between the institution and the funding ministry.

Since 1998, the *HRK* has run a national programme – the Quality Assurance Project – to enhance the exchange of information and experience in the field of quality improvement measures in German higher education institutions across the Federal States. The key tasks for 'Project Q' are to ensure and develop common standards of evaluation at the national level, collect data on quality assurance, advise higher education institutions, disseminate best practice in the institutions and inform the public.

Other Assessment Activities

Besides the activities mentioned above, a whole range of departments in many higher education institutions has launched evaluation initiatives using different approaches and perspectives.
Besides the cyclical evaluations of the disciplines, there are thematic evaluations. For example, the Association of Northern German Universities (*Nordverbund*) has carried out an evaluation on internationalisation (cf. Fischer-Bluhm & Zemene n.d.).

As another quality assurance procedure, a very limited number of institutions are employing benchmarking, the ISO-9000 certification or TQM/EFQM (cf. HRK Project Q 2003). Moreover, a ranking procedure has been developed and is regularly carried out by the Centre for Higher Education Development (*Centrum für Hochschulentwicklung* – CHE (2002)) and special questionnaires on student satisfaction are used (cf. Evanet). So far, there has been no link between these activities and accreditation.

3. Relationships Between the Evaluation and Accreditation Schemes

3.1 Driving Forces for Decision-Making by Owners, Initiators and Controllers of the Schemes

Evaluation primarily serves as an analysis of strengths and weaknesses of an institution, department or faculty. Accreditation aims to contribute to improving and ensuring the quality of teaching and research by basing the review process on previously and externally defined standards and gives a study programme the right to exist. Because of these differing aims, the procedures are not closely linked since there are different owners of the procedures.

Experience has shown, however, that there is a whole range of overlapping areas. In the longer term, accreditation will need previous evaluation. This applies, in particular, to the future re-accreditations. Previous evaluation could additionally serve to reduce the accreditation load problem. Moreover, it will not be possible, from an economic perspective, to separate evaluation and accreditation in the long run, because the time and cost factors would be too high for institutions. The common features of the two processes, as well as a lower 'burden' for reviewers and higher education institutions justify tighter dovetailing of the processes. If the strict division of evaluation and accreditation were to be maintained, there would additionally be a danger that the quality assurance system could disintegrate into two parts: one for comparability and the other for quality improvement.

3.2 Political Framework

The most significant reforms observed in higher education in the last two decades (see Eurydice 2000) have been the greater autonomy given to higher education institutions in most European countries and the move away from the 'interventionary state' towards a more 'facilitatory state' (Neave & Van Vught, 1991). This often entailed releasing higher education institutions from control through legislation by giving them the right to establish their own statutes in the broadening area in which they are autonomous. The main focus was on reforms in institutional management, in financing institutions and the procedures for assessment and quality control of the educational provision. This has been strengthened with the introduction of accreditation procedures (cf. the reports in Bretschneider & Köhler 2001).

As a response to the fundamentally different needs and conditions of a higher education system which had undergone transformations because of a long term expansion process and challenges of international competition as well as in the role of the higher education sector, quality assurance measures are of great importance. The expectation is that bachelor's/master's degree courses will be able to meet some new demands more flexibly (see the reports in Gützkow & Köhler, 1998). Accreditation is expected to play a role in solving quality problems and problems of international recognition of German degrees, while at the same time increasing student mobility and demand on the part of international students for study places in Germany.

3.3 Consequences for Institutions, Students and Other Stakeholders

As already stated, the discussion on accreditation is closely linked to that on bachelor's/master's degree courses. The introduction of these new degree courses – as research results show – is not without difficulties and obstacles for the institutions (see Schwarz, 2001). The development of new programmes based on the new scheme (modularisation, ECTS, etc.) has resulted in long discussions in the departments and has created additional work for the faculties and institutions. All the more so since the former system of Diplom/Magister degrees still exists.

The institutional differentiation between universities and universities of applied sciences has entered a new phase. Both are allowed to offer bachelor's and master's degree courses and the question of the blurring of the distinction between the two types is on the agenda. The introduction of the accreditation system is meant to solve problems raised in this debate. For example, there is a distinction between more research-oriented and more professionally-oriented degree programmes. In its accreditation application, the institution makes a claim to fit one or the other profile, and the accreditation procedure then has to lead to a final decision on whether the programme can be considered research-oriented or profession-oriented.

In the state-financed system, there are no tuition fees for students as yet.[9] There is, however, a discussion that tuition fees could be introduced for master's programmes: this is already the case for master's programmes designed as continuing education programmes. Financial support for students for the whole bachelor's/master's programme is being discussed. Moreover, it is increasingly expected that the bachelor's should be the regular first professional degree.

The Federal Government and the Länder pointed out that the introduction of the new graduation system must be accompanied by measures that encourage the acceptance of these degrees by

9 Some Länder, e. g. North-Rhine Westphalia, are developing study accounts as an alternative to fees, cf. www.bildungsportal.nrw.de.

industry and society and open up new opportunities in the labour market for graduates (cf. KMK, HRK & BMBF, 2002). But as experience shows, labour market acceptance of different degrees is still not clear. This makes it difficult for students to decide whether to enrol in the new programmes. The expectation of more transparency has been met, however, since the Akkreditierungsrat's information on accredited programmes is increasingly used by 'customers' to make informed choice.

3.4 Projections for the Future

A strong network and close negotiations between all stakeholders and actors in the field of quality assurance are essential. And it makes sense to improve quality assessment activities in faculties and institutions and to encourage discussion on quality (see Berner & Richter, 2002). As Teichler (2003) pointed out, the multiple quality assessment in German higher education institutions shows that there is a danger that a new system of assessment could be developed for each occasion. This would lead to a 'super complex system of quality assessment'. Because of the challenge of continuing financial constraints and the overkill with procedures, an integrated system of quality assurance in higher education seems to be inevitable.

The strong participation of representatives of higher education institutions in the *Akkreditierungsrat* and the agencies is proof that accreditation stands for a system of quality standard development and assurance with science and education substantially sharing responsibility in this field, and participation by trade unions, etc. However, one must be wary of more state control and bureaucratisation (see Erichsen 2002, p. 13).

4. European and International Influences

The objectives of the Bologna Declaration correspond to the goals which the Federal Government and the *Länder* developed to modernise higher education in Germany and enhance the country's international attractiveness (cf. KMK, HRK & BMBF, 2002). With the Bologna Declaration another change was supported: institutional autonomy over the process (especially teaching and curriculum) of higher education was strengthened. There is a multilateral agreement that higher education institutions must play an important role in creating and structuring the European Higher Education Area through continuous efforts to remove barriers and develop a framework for teaching and learning which would enhance mobility and closer co-operation.

This trend towards greater institutional autonomy was accompanied by the establishment of new systems of quality assurance, not least in order to make institutions responsible and more accountable for the use of public funds. Evaluation schemes have already been developed and used in nearly all Member States of the European Union over the last few years. At present additional accreditation procedures are being discussed in many countries as a possible way of making quality assurance systems more effective (see Van Damme 2001). This efficiency has yet to be proven.

Most of the German agencies, be they evaluation or accreditation agencies, as well as the 'Quality Project', are members of ENQA and other international networks, such as INQAAHE. These international perspectives influence national accreditation. With the advent of GATS, which bans any discrimination of foreign suppliers of services (see Yalçin & Scherrer 2002), and the growing interest of higher education institutions in international accreditation, quality foreign

assurance agencies may bring their services into the German market. This is already true of agencies from the USA.

Through the paradigm shift to neo-liberalism, which underlies GATS, the main philosophy of administration regulation and management shifted away from direct control to indirect (market) control, deregulation and participation, but by no means does this shift mean the end of control and regulation as such. First, as we have experienced in Germany, a shift is not a complete replacement of one system by another. Second, there is also much resistance, and even in the organisations concerned with steering that process, various interpretations and changes are experienced over time (cf. von Kopp, 2002). Concerning accreditation, the *Akkreditierungsrat* will open up the system for agencies from other European countries, but as a controlling actor which opens the market for foreign applicants by forcing them to undergo the same procedure as the German agencies have to undergo.

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The National System of Higher Education Country Report Greece

Harilaos Billiris

Quality Evaluation and Accreditation procedures have not yet been established, formally or actually, in Greece. Therefore, the presentation of the Greek case cannot follow the general guidelines of the other national presentations.

1. The National System of Higher Education in Greece

Higher education institutions

Today the Higher Education sector in Greece consists of 19 Universities (including the School of Fine Arts) and the Hellenic Open University and 14 Technological Educational Institutions (TEIs) which belong to the technological (non-university) sector of Higher Education, all public and regionally spread over Greece.

At this moment there are 240 University departments and 170 departments at the Technological Educational Institutions, number which has an increase of 43% at the last 10 years. For the new academic year, 21 new departments are going to open their doors to new students. 6 of them are university departments.

In Greece, each department corresponds to a specific subject or discipline leading to the relative degree. Approving a new department means at the same time approving a new degree. The Ministry of Education is responsible for the approval of any new institution or any new department. However, the development of the corresponding study program belongs to the full responsibility of the institution

Duration of Studies – General Degrees

There are three levels of studies in the Greek Universities. The first level is the undergraduate one which leads to the basic degree, called in Greek „diploma" or „ptychio".

The duration of studies in the first level varies from four to six years. The medicine studies last for six years, while engineering studies, agricultural studies, studies for dentistry and pharmacy, for fine arts and music last for five years. The studies in all the rest fields last for four years.

Postgraduate studies are divided into two levels. The lower one lasts for one year in most cases and leads to the first postgraduate degree which is equivalent to the master's degree. This first degree is called in Greek „metaptychiako diploma idikefsis" which means in English „postgraduate specialisation diploma".

In 1993, 53 postgraduate programs functioned in universities, in 1995, 111 and in 2000, 212. The higher level of the postgraduate studies is the doctorate level and lasts for at least three years.

The studies in the Technological Educational Institutions last three and a half years or four years. The graduates from this sector have access to the postgraduate studies, which are organized exclusively by the universities.

Size of the higher education system

In the academic year 1999-2000 there were 276.902 (141.942 women) enrolled undergraduate students at the Universities and 129.683 (65.623 women) undergraduate students at the Technological Educational Institutions.

40.641 (24.195 women) were new undergraduates students at the Universities and 34.355 (17.953 women) were new at the Technological Educational Institutions. In the academic year 2000-2001, numbers are still growing and 45.224 (28.085 women) were new undergraduate students at Universities and 34.574 were new students at the Technological Educational Institutions.

In the academic year 1999-2000 128.976 were active students at the universities. The 38,4% of them were younger than 20 years old.

At the Technological Educational Institutions for the academic year 1999-2000 79.102 were active students and 47,2% of them were younger than 20 years old.

Life long education

Life long Education is considered a priority for the educational policy of Greece. In this context the Hellenic Open University, started in 1999, is establishing the life long learning.

Hellenic Open University – Undergraduate Students					
Academic Year	**2000 – 2001**		**2001 – 2002**	**2002 – 2003**	**2003 – 2004**
Number of Students	2.556	Women 53,36%	3.340	2.355	3.397

Hellenic Open University – Postgraduate Students					
Academic Year	**2000 – 2001**		**2001 – 2002**	**2002 – 2003**	**2003 – 2004**
Number of Students	1.981	Women 57,19%	2.160	1.970	2.115

Students of the Hellenic Open University are charged with tuition fees annually (600 euros per thematic unit).The thematic unit covers one distinguished sciential subject in undergraduate and

postgraduate studies. Every thematic unit includes three semester subjects. During one academic year, students can attend 1 to 3 thematic units in graduate programs of study and up to 2 thematic units in the postgraduate programs. A percentage of students for economical, social and academic reasons is granted a scholarships, partial or total.

Scholarship Options

Scholarships, grants and financial support through various local bequests and donations by citizens, and private legal entities, are awarded to students at all levels of education.

The State Scholarship Foundation (IKY) is the official institution that grants students scholarships. IKY scholarships are awarded both to undergraduate students who have excelled in the university entrance exams, and those who wish to do a postgraduate degree in Greece or abroad and have succeeded in the exams given for that purpose.

The number of gradua te scholarships awarded by IKY is the following:

Academic year 1999-2000	Academic year 2000-2001	Academic year 2001-2002
2.415	2.654	2.796

The number of postgraduate and doctorate scholarships also awarded by IKY is the following:

Academic year 1999-2000	Academic year 2000-2001	Academic year 2001-2002
279	138	222

Every year the Ministry of Education awards a scholarship to the first three students who have succeeded the National Examination System in each department of the Universities and of the Technological Educational Institutions.

There is also scholarships awarding to a number of students, from the committees of research of some universities.

Transition of students from Higher Education to work

The following tables give the graduates in the different levels of the Higher Education in Greece, as well as the unemployment:

Academic Year	Universities				Technological Educational Institutions		
	Total			Rate	Total		Rate
	Enrolled	Grad		Enrolled/Gad	Enrolled	Grad	Enrolled/Gad
1999 – 2000	40.641	22.774	Women 13.623	1,8/1	34.355	9.211	3,7/1
2000 – 2001	45.224	22.495	Women 13.414	2,0/1	34.574	10.071	3,4/1

Academic Year	Postgraduate				Doctorat			
	Total				Total			
	Enrolled	Women	Grad	Women	Enrolled	Women	Grad	Women
1999 – 2000	1.908	913	1.972	1.061	890	345	779	288
2000 – 2001	2.687	1.475	2.859	1.590	2.546	1.276	875	321

Unenployment						
	Grad TEIs		Grad Universities		Grad (Postgr + Doct)	
1990	7,6%				5,5%	
1995	10,1%				5,6%	
2000	13,2%	Men 7,9%	7,5%	Men 4,9%	5,7%	Men 4,1%
		Women 18,6%		Women 10,6%		Women 8,5%

There are professions which require a professional license.75% of graduates could have a registration in professional organizations(for example chemists),while 31% of graduates should have a professional license from their own Professional Associations or Chambers(Lawyers Association, Medical Association, Technical Chamber of Greece).

From a questionnaire replied from the 70% of the departments, the 60% of the graduates find a relevant to their studies work.

Teaching staff

The main teaching staff at Universities in Greece, the last 7 academic years develops as the following:

Academic year 1996-1997	Academic year 1999-2000	Academic year 2002-2003
7.258	8.223	9.776

For the academic year 1999-2000, 128.976 students were active at the universities. This gives the proportion of main teaching staff to students up to 1/16. For the academic year 2000-2001, 148.772 were active students at the universities, which gives the proportion up to 1/17.

The main teaching staff at the Technological Educational Institutions in Greece, the last 7 academic years develops as the following:

Academic year 1996-1997	Academic year 1999-2000	Academic year 2002-2003
2.201	2.293	2.302

For the academic year 1999-2000, 79.102 students were active at the Technological Educational Institutions, which gives the proportion of main teaching staff to students up to 1/34. For the academic year 2000-2001, 86.659 students were active. So, the proportion is 1/38.

We have to mention here, that there is an extra number of teaching staff at the Technological Educational Institutions, who are contractual and part-time teachers.

Governance and steering of higher education

The Higher Education in Greece is governed in principle by the article 16 of the Greek Constitution, valid from 1975, which says that the Higher Education is public and free of charge. As a result, there is no possibility for private universities to be established in Greece.

Universities and Technological Educational Institutions in Greece are all financed by the State. The Greek Constitution also refers to the state control upon the Universities and the Technological Educational Institutions, which is carried on by the Ministry of Education.

The existing legislation provides for the possibility of setting fees only for postgraduate studies. From the total number of the postgraduate programs only 4% have tuition fees up to 1500 euros per student annually and another 4% has tuition fees from 900 to 1500 euros.

Universities and Technological Educational Institutions have to allocate the government funding through setting up their own budget. The budget of each one has to be approved by the Ministry of Education and by the Ministry of Economics.

Each academic unit has its own leadership and decision-making structure. There is a hierarchical relationship between the levels of academic structure concerning leadership and decision-making (Institution-School-Department-Sector).

The rector and the two vice-rectors are elected for a three year mandate by an electoral body. Undergraduate students are part of the electoral body in a percentage of 80% of the population of all the members of the main teaching personnel of the Institution.

The dean of the school is elected for three year mandate by an electoral body, consisting of the electoral bodies for the election of the presidents of all the departments constituting the school.

The president of the department is elected for a two year mandate by an electoral body, where undergraduate students are part of the electoral body in a percentage of 80% of the population of all the members of the main teaching personnel of the department.

The senate of the university consists of the rector and the two vice rectors, the deans of all the schools and the presidents of all the departments, six to eight representatives of the main teaching staff, one representative of the undergraduate students of each department, two representatives of the postgraduate students, and four representatives of all the other categories of personnel.

2. Evaluation of Higher Education in Greece

Introduction

The Greek presentation on Quality Evaluation of Higher Education will contain three sections: A historical review, the present situation, and an approach to the future (immediate) prospects.

A historical review

In Greece, discussions concerning assessment or evaluation were almost forbidden for the whole university community at least until the beginning of the 1990's. The reasons must be attributed to

the fact that all the relative initiatives in the past were taken by the Ministry of Education in a way more or less provocative to the universities, as the whole evaluation concept was related mainly to increased state control through financial cuts and institutional rankings, and as there was no preliminary dialogue between the state and the universities in any case.

This inflexible and inefficient policy of the Ministry of Education resulted to a generalized opposition of the universities against the idea of evaluation. This was another field for the traditional opposition between universities and state in Greece to emerge. This opposition goes much further than the typical tension between university autonomy and state control, as it has its roots in the lack of mutual confidence between the two parts.

It was in this context, when appeared the first attempts of the Ministry of Education to legislate the establishment of an evaluation procedure for universities in 1992 and 1995. The opposition of the universities against the above legislations was so intense that did not allow for its implementation.

In order to make the whole climate in Greece to be better understood, we note another interesting and relevant phenomenon, which has to do with the generalized negative stance of the Greek universities on the review process of the overall Greek educational system carried out by OECD(Organization of Economic Collaboration and Development) experts on the request of the Ministry of Education during the two-years period 1995/1996. It must be noted that this negative stance was extended also to the syndicates of university students and to the syndicates of teachers in all the educational levels (primary, secondary and higher education). But, the most weird aspect of this phenomenon was the generalized support offered to this negative stance by the mass media in Greece which are supposed both to express but also to form what can be considered as common opinion. However, and beyond this opposition, the above review process was completed during 1996, including a part concerning the evaluation of the Greek Higher Education system as a whole.

The present situation

The Ministry of Education in Greece is working now on the establishment of new evaluation and quality assurance structures. The most positive and promising characteristic of the present situation in Greece is actually the gradual change in the climate throughout the higher education system. This change must be attributed to the combination of two significant factors:

The first has to do with the sensitisation of some Greek universities, as well as of some technological educational institutions of the non-university sector of higher education, to the whole concept of quality and evaluation, which resulted to a number of initiatives which were taken by the institutions themselves and were simply supported by the Ministry of Education.

The second factor has to do with the change in the policy applied by the Ministry of Education. In fact, we can speak for the transition from a top-down process (where the Ministry of Education was planning and controlling centrally the evaluation procedures) to a bottom-up process (where the institutions themselves are taking the appropriate initiatives). In this bottom-up process, the role of the Ministry of Education is actually encouraging and supportive.

This change in the climate, and furthermore in the stance on the concept of quality and evaluation, resulted in a number of significant initiatives, as follows:

- The participation of two faculties (one in each sector of Higher Education) in the pilot project for evaluating quality in higher education established by the Commission of the European Union during the two-years period 1994/1995.

- The participation of two institutions (one in each sector of Higher Education) in the project of the IMHE (Institutional Management in Higher Education) Program of OECD on quality management, quality assessment and the decision-making process, which began in 1994.
- The participation of five Greek universities in the institutional quality evaluation program of CRE during the four years period.

In the same context, the Ministry of Education had set up a huge quality assessment pilot program for Higher Education institutions (both of the university and the non-university sector) for the two-years period 1998/1999. This program was financed by the European Union through the 2nd European Support Framework. The program included both institutional and faculty (departmental) or program assessments. The number of institutions or individual faculties participating on a voluntary basis in this program is quite impressive:

University sector:

Institutional assessments:	7
Faculty (departmental) or program assessments:	42

Non-university sector:

Institutional assessments:	5
Faculty (departmental) or program assessments:	31

The main objectives of this program were to assist effectively the development of a quality culture throughout the overall higher education system in Greece. The general methodological characteristics of the program include a self-evaluation procedure and the review by external reviewers (including the review visit and the preparation of the evaluation report). The publicity and the wide dissemination of the results of each evaluation procedure are prerequisites for the participation of an institution or a faculty in the program. The completion of the program is to be followed by the publication of a final report, under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, summarizing the results of the exercises and analyzing the relevant examples of good practices.

The development of such a huge exercise had obviously many weaknesses, especially as it was not supported by a specialized expertise background. Among these weaknesses we note the lack of concrete and clear directives as regards the detailed methodological aspects, as well as the lack of an effective centralized monitoring and steering mechanism. However, these weaknesses are considered of minor importance, given objectives of the overall process.

The involvement of a large number of Greek Higher Education Institutions in several international or national quality evaluation process on a voluntary basis, has already established a positive climate, quite different from the negative one existing only a few years ago. It is worthwhile to note that after the completion of the earlier mentioned programs,11 out of the existing 19 Greek Universities have participated at least once in a national or international institutional evaluation procedure and similarly 45 out of the 240 University departments participated at least once in a faculty or program evaluation procedure. Similar numbers can be given for the non-university sector of Higher Education. The change in the overall climate is actually evident and therefore, the prospects for the future developments must be considered as quite promising.

The immediate future prospects

On March the 15th of 2003, the Minister of Education notified the Rectors' Conference of the draft law for the National Committee of Quality Assurance and Evaluation (NCQAE) of Higher Education.

In his attached letter the Minister underlines that the draft law emerged from:

- The deep examination and analysis of all the European Quality Assurance Systems and the following discussions with specialists in Europe, which were adjusted to our national specialties, our needs and goals.
- The experience gained by the evaluations of the Greek Higher Education Institutions.
- The exchange of opinions and suggestions between the Higher Education Institutions.

The NCQAE will be an independent advisory body, aiming to:

- Help the Institutions to succeed their goals
- Have an advisory role on Higher Education towards the State and the Government.

It should not be considered that the Committee will deal with any kind of marking, grading, ranking or accreditating the Higher Education Institutions or imposing penalties and giving awards.

The draft law proposes one National Committee for both sectors of Higher Education as an independent authority, which will consist of 11 members (9 academics and 2 students from both sectors).This Committee will be appointed by the Council of Ministers after the proposition made by the Minister of Education, from a catalogue of candidates which will be written in or by the Rectors' Conference, followed by the opinion of a relevant Committee of the Greek Parliament and the students from their own National bodies.

The Committee will have the following competences:

- It will constitute the four-year operational program of Quality Evaluation in Higher Education in Greece.
- It will provide every possible support to the Higher Education Institutions from the aspect of knowledge and experience
- It will have the responsibility of analysis and development of the results of the Quality Evaluation.
- It will keep and update the data bank about the progress in the Quality Evaluation System and the development in an international level.
- It will have the responsibility for the assignment of the external evaluators.
- It will elaborate and organize research for the development of the methodology of the Quality Evaluation system.
- It will organize special courses in order members of the Institutions to acquire experience in Quality Assurance and Evaluation Systems.
- It will develop cooperation with international organizations and research centers which deal with evaluation in Higher Education procedures and finally
- It will organize the statistics and documentation data of the Greek Higher Education Institutions.

The Minister of Education is expecting written comments from the Higher Education Institutions until the end of May, with the view that the law will be voted by the Greek Parliament until the end of June.

Country Report Hungary

Christina Rozsnyai

1. Introduction

1.1 Higher Education Statistics

Before the 'regime change' (i.e. the fall of Soviet-dominated socialism) in 1989/90, roughly 12% of 18-22 year-old Hungarians[1] were enrolled in college or university education. Currently some 35% of the age cohort participate in some form of tertiary education[2] (though selection now includes not only college and university studies but also two-year vocational and other programmes, see section 1.3 of this chapter). The distribution of students among all forms of tertiary education is 34% (117,947 persons) in university-level programmes, 56% (195,291 persons) in college-level schemes, 7% (24,558 persons) in specialised post-graduate programmes, 2% (7,030 persons) in doctoral programmes, and 1% (4,475 persons) in vocational higher education programmes[3]. The declared intent is to raise the overall ratio to 50% by 2010.

Hungary has 18 state universities, twelve colleges, five church-maintained universities and 21 church-maintained colleges, and eleven private colleges. In addition there are eight state-recognised foreign higher education institutions[4], with a license to operate granted by the minister of education. Only one of them opened after 1996, when an amendment to the 1993 higher education act specified that foreign higher education institutions can only be established if their application has been evaluated by the Hungarian Accreditation Committee. These institutions do not receive state funding. Church institutions receive similar normative funding as state institutions and are accredited by the Hungarian Accreditation Committee, whose mandate, however, pertains only to secular programmes. Private institutions that wish to be recognised by the state must also be accredited and may receive state financing if they sign an agreement with the government,

1 Hungarian Ministry of Education at www.om.hu 'Hungarian Higher Education System: an Overview'.
2 Hungarian Ministry of Education at www.om.hu/. 'The Future University: A Great Choice in Education'.
3 Central Bureau of Statistics KSH, 2002. www.ksh.hu.
4 1993. évi LXXX. törvény a felsooktatásról (Law on Higher Education LXXX/1993). In: Akadémiai értesíto. Sept 15, 2000. pp. 72-105. (Main amendments 1996, 1999, 2000. 1996 English version at http://www.om.hu/english).

but here tuition covers a major part of their costs. Tuition at state and church institutions has been introduced and revoked by consecutive governments, but was minimal when it existed. A viable and popular student loan system was introduced in 2001.[5]

1.2 Types of Higher Education Institutions

Hungary has a binary higher education system. The higher education act differentiates between universities and colleges (Act Sections 3 and 4). Education at universities is research-oriented, which means that the approach to teaching is more theoretical and that the academic staff is more involved in theoretical research than at colleges. They, in turn, aim to provide more applied knowledge and skills. According to the law, the difference between the two categories of institutions is in the length of studies required for a first degree (minimum four years for universities, three for colleges); the minimum areas of knowledge or science and different programmes taught ('several' areas each with 'several' programmes, and one area with 'several' programmes respectively); and the level of the degrees of their academic staff (doctorates already for 'docents' at universities, only for professors at colleges). Additionally, universities must have the material and intellectual resources for conducting scientific research, for training for and granting doctorates and for conducting habilitation procedures. Colleges must provide the conditions for conducting research and development. Both types of institutions may be state, private and/or church establishments.

1.3 Main Types of Degrees

It follows from the binary system that Hungarian higher education offers college and university degrees. The law allows either type of institution to offer both types of study programmes, provided that their resources meet the requirements. There have been discussions and agreements relating to the transition from one type to the other. Very often institutions require an additional one year of study to make up for the lack of research-oriented or practical-oriented courses, as the case may be, for students switching from one type of establishment to another. As a credit system is not yet in place at the national level (the government has postponed the deadline for its introduction from 2002 to September 2003), there may be additional requirements for students changing institutions even within the same type.

The higher education act declares that for use abroad college degree holders may refer to their degrees as 'bachelor's' and university degree holders may refer to their degrees as 'master's' (Act Section 24 § 97 (6)a) and b)). The legislators' intention was to define the level of the two degrees, without considering the two-tier character of 'real' bachelor's/master's studies. However, discussions are currently accelerating to work out a system of studies where one level builds on the other, as foreseen in the 'Bologna Declaration' for the 'European higher education area' in 2010. Only universities grant Ph.D. degrees.

5 A Kormány 119/2001 (VI.30) Korm. rendelete a hallgatói hitelrendszerrol és a Diákhitel Központról (Government Decree 119/2001 of June 30 2001 On the System of Student Loans and the Student Loan Center). In: Magyar Közlöny 2001/74. pp. 5452-5458.

In the 1996 amendment to the higher education act, Hungary instituted two-year vocational higher education programmes, one third of which may count towards college or university studies. These may be offered at higher education institutions or other establishments.

Also stipulated in the act are 'complementary undergraduate' programmes, which are either university programmes for college graduates or teacher training programmes for graduates with a first degree (Act Section 124/E (f)). 'Specialised post-graduate education' stipulated in the act (Section 124/E (k)) does not lead to an additional degree, rather it provides in-depth training in an area, which leads to a certificate.

1.4 Main Types of Programmes

The previous section dealt with programme types from the perspective of the degrees they lead to. With regard to the levels of education the higher education act specifically lists them as being accredited vocational higher education; college undergraduate education and college postgraduate education; university undergraduate education; university postgraduate education; and doctoral education (Act Section 84 § 1 and 2). Undergraduate, specialised postgraduate and vocational higher education programmes may be offered in full-time, correspondence, evening or distance education programmes.

As far as subject areas are concerned, a Government Decree[6] lists 56 disciplines within eight areas of knowledge to which study programmes must be assigned. As of February 2003, the Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC) registered over 430 different accredited first-degree programmes, which make up 1,640 programmes taught in the 67 accredited institutions.

Figure 1: Types and levels of higher education provision in Hungary

<table>
<tr><th>min. years</th><th>college</th><th>university</th></tr>
<tr><td>8</td><td></td><td rowspan="3">Ph.D. (or at art universities:) D.L.A.</td></tr>
<tr><td>7</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>6</td><td></td><td>spec. post-grad. max. 3</td></tr>
<tr><td>5</td><td>special post-grad. max. 3 years</td><td colspan="2">complementary (toward university or teacher training degree)</td></tr>
<tr><td>4</td><td>complementary (toward university or teacher training degree)</td><td colspan="2">university (or college-level) undergraduate max. 5 years</td></tr>
<tr><td>3</td><td rowspan="3">college undergraduate (individual courses also at university level) max. 4 years</td><td colspan="2" rowspan="3">accredited vocational higher education</td></tr>
<tr><td>2</td></tr>
<tr><td>1</td></tr>
</table>

6 A Kormány 169/2000 (IX.29) Korm. rendelete az egyes tudományterületekhez tartozó tudományágak, valamint a muvészeti ágak felsorolásáról (Government Decree 169/2000 of November 29 Listing the Disciplines Within the Different Areas of Science, and the Areas of Art). In: Magyar Közlöny 10/10/2000. pp. 6095-6096.

Another set of government decrees concerns the national qualification requirements for all degree programmes. They describe the required content and outcomes of all undergraduate and post-graduate (but not Ph.D.) programmes offered in the country. Higher education institutions are free to set up vocational higher education programmes, undergraduate programmes and their specialisations, specialised post-graduate and doctoral programmes in the discipline in which they have been accredited.

1.5 Transition of Students from Higher Education to Work

There are no formal alumni organisations in Hungarian higher education institutions, and few formal studies were carried out on the placement of graduates in the labour market. As far as I know, Hungarian higher education institutions do not have career placement services, but in the mid-1990s the students at the Budapest Technical University established what has become an annual job fair. It is very popular with both students and prospective employers.

A thorough analysis of graduate employment trends was published in 2002. It was commissioned by the National Higher Education Admissions Office.[7] The figures show that four fifths of full-time university or college students who graduated in 1999 were employed in 2000. It is interesting to note that the unemployment rate among 20-24 year-old university graduates is slightly higher (7% in 2000) than for college graduates of the age group (5% in 2000). By coincidence, the overall unemployment rate in Hungary in 2000 was the same as that of university graduates (7%). That general unemployment ratio is down from almost 13% in 1993, when the unemployment rate for university and college graduates was 3.4% and 3.2% respectively, but, as noted, with a higher education attendance rate within the age cohort of roughly one third of present figures.

1.6 Governance and Steering of Higher Education

The higher education act describes the positions and levels of institutional governance. Section 12 outlines the structure of institutions, which may be divided into faculties, departments, institutes, etc. Higher education institutions are established by parliament and are listed in the higher education act. Faculties are established by government and legislated by government decrees. All other units are established by the institution. That means that higher education institutions have the autonomy to establish their own divisions only below the faculty level. To establish a new higher education institution or faculty, an institution has to submit an application to the minister of education, who, in turn, has to ask the Hungarian Accreditation Committee to evaluate the application. The application is also analysed by the Higher Education and Research Council, an advisory body to the minister (see below, section 10.2.3), which checks the feasibility of the new institution or faculty within the whole higher education context.

Section 13 of the act deals with the operation and management of higher education institutions, which are based on their by-laws passed by their senate. Universities are headed by rectors, multi-faculty colleges by college rectors, single-faculty colleges by directors elected by the senate and university rectors are confirmed by the president of the republic, while college rectors or di-

7 Diplomák a munkaero-piacon (Diplomas On the Employment Market). Study headed by Péter Galasi. In: Mit kínál a magyar felsooktatás? Felvételi Tanácsadó 2002 (What Does Hungarian Higher Education Offer? Advice for Admission 2002). Országos Felsooktatási Felvételi Iroda (National Higher Education Admissions Office). Budapest, 2002. pp. 649-674.

rectors are confirmed by the prime minister. Section 14 deals with the operation of faculties and units of instruction.

2. Accreditation and Approval Schemes

2.1 Accreditation

According to Hungary's first higher education act of 1993, all higher education institutions must be accredited to be state-recognised. The act requires all Hungarian higher education institutions and their programmes to be accredited every eight years. In addition to institutional accreditation, the HAC also conducts separate programme accreditation under a variety of schemes required by law.

Accreditation is carried out *ex post*, via institutional accreditation, which involves all the degree programmes of the institution, and *ex ante*, via preliminary accreditation for institutions applying for licence to operate; via the approval of degree programmes to be launched for the first time in the country (in the form of qualification requirements); and via the approval of new degree programmes at an institution (which have to meet the standards set down in the qualification requirements).

Institutional Accreditation

The first cycle of institutional accreditation was completed in 2001, while the second round will not begin until autumn 2003. The approach and procedure for the second cycle are still in the development phase.

Institutions and Their Units Involved in the Scheme:

The law calls for all higher education institutions in Hungary and their study programmes to be accredited every eight years. Under this mandate the HAC worked out its specific standards and procedures. The premise was that the products of higher education institutions are the diplomas or degrees they issue and that therefore all elements contributing to that degree should be evaluated to arrive at a quality assessment.[8] 'All elements' was defined primarily by input factors. With this approach the three 'units' asked to prepare separate self-evaluation reports encompassed (1) the institution as a whole, (2) the faculty and (3) the study programme leading to the degree. The department, and any other unit contributing to a study programme (e.g. institutes, laboratories, clinics, practice farms, etc.), were assessed and included in the team visits from the perspective of how they contributed to the degree as the ultimate output. At the institutional level, the institution's mission statement and strategic plan, management and governance, regional role, approach to research, and basic statistics regarding infrastructure were inspected, but none was of primary importance. The same items were evaluated at the faculty level.

For study programmes one set of general questions involved everything from its broad aims, including curriculum development policies, to admission requirements, the make-up of the curriculum (including type of work involved, work-load, examination schedule). Another set studied

8 I use the term 'quality assessment' in the general sense, i.e. any approaches of checking quality without wanting to indicate one particular form of it in this particular context.

in depth the courses and subjects (including the academic staff qualifications and subject content, teaching materials and related research). The HAC's *Accreditation Guidebook*[9] contained a detailed description of the accreditation procedure, the HAC's standards for evaluation, and an elaborate set of chapters and tables of facts and figures to be supplied in the institution's self-evaluation. Separate sections were added to accommodate the special considerations for evaluating church-run institutions and distance education programmes. A separate set of criteria exists for the preliminary accreditation for new institutions. Applications should supply some data on the foreseen purpose and role of the institution, the professional background of its contracted academic and non-academic staff, the institution's available infrastructure and its foreseen development, and detailed curricula for the degree programmes to be offered. Preliminary accreditation, as opposed to institutional accreditation of already existing establishments, usually did not involve site visits.
Before working out the next round of institutional accreditation the HAC elaborated a Strategic Plan.[10] It encompasses all aspects of the HAC's mission and purpose, an interpretation of its legal mandate and its tasks, as well as its operation. The Strategic Plan stakes out the basic premises within the legislative requirements under which institutional accreditation should proceed.

Programmes, Subjects and Disciplines Involved in the Scheme:

In addition to degree programmes evaluated in the eight-yearly institutional accreditation process, the HAC accredits national qualification requirements and all new programmes launched at an institution.

As noted before, national qualification requirements, issued in the form of government decrees, set the framework for all degree programmes taught in Hungary. The requirements describe the requisite content and outcomes, including the main examinations, the knowledge and skills to be attained, and the credit points of all undergraduate degree programmes (divided into university and college sections), and specialised postgraduate study programmes offered in the country. New qualification requirements are initiated by institutions. An application for launching a degree programme in which there already are accredited national qualification requirements focuses on the local context in which the proposed programme will run, i.e. the teaching staff and infrastructure, as well as the curriculum. All undergraduate programmes must be accredited. These include full-time, evening, correspondence and distance education tracks, as well as off-site provision.

There is also a government decree that lists the disciplines under which degree programmes in Hungary are grouped. The list must also be approved by the HAC. Institutions which have accredited undergraduate programmes in a given discipline may launch postgraduate programmes (and doctoral schools for universities) in the discipline without further accreditation.

In parallel to launching the second round of institutional accreditation in fall 2003, the HAC will begin to conduct programme accreditation for selected disciplines in the whole country within a short time-span. History and psychology have been selected for the initial review.

Geographic Range Involved in the Scheme:

All institutions and their programmes in the country must be accredited. Additionally, off-site campuses of Hungarian higher education institutions in neighbouring countries must also be accredited by the HAC.

9 Hungarian Accreditation Committee. Accreditation Guidebook for Higher Education Institutions, by Nóra Halmay, based on guidelines by Agnes Kaposi. 7 editions, 1995-1998. Two English editions. Approx. 140 pp.

10 The Hungarian Accreditation Committee Strategic Plan, drafted by senior staff member Tibor Szántó, was written with input from an internal committee, and accepted by the HAC plenum pursuant to resolution 2002/1/II/2.1 in February 2002.

Research and Teaching:

The higher education act stipulates that the HAC assesses the quality of education and 'scientific activity' in higher education institutions. The HAC has not evaluated research per se, but has focused on the research qualifications and activities of the academic staff as the background for the education they provide. In both colleges and universities, the scientific achievements of the teaching staff constitute an important factor in judging the quality of educational provision.

Programme Accreditation

The HAC conducts programme accreditation within and separately from institutional accreditation. The types of programmes are listed in the higher education act (Section 81 §(1) a) and (2) c), d), f)), as are doctoral schools; national qualification requirements; new programmes to be launched at institutions; specialised post-graduate programmes (whereby the HAC only examines if the institution meets quality standards, based on its undergraduate provision, in the discipline in which such a programme is to be launched); vocational higher education programmes (only the discipline as above).

As noted, the Hungarian government issues decrees on national qualification requirements, as well as on a set list of disciplines. The list of disciplines is grouped into eight areas of science: natural sciences; engineering; medicine; agriculture; social sciences; humanities; arts; and theology. Each, except for the last with only one discipline, has listed between five and eleven disciplines grouped into one of the areas.

Institutions, Programmes, Subjects and Disciplines Involved in the Scheme:

The units involved in teaching the programme are listed in the application and include the faculty (if there is one), as well as the department(s) and, if applicable, laboratories, institutes, practice farms, clinics, etc. In addition to a description of the basic requirements for an institution, new higher education institutions seeking license to operate must submit the programmes they wish to launch. For colleges these have to be at least two undergraduate programmes, and for universities at least four undergraduate programmes with two each in at least two areas of science.

An institution granted accreditation in a discipline (see section 10.2.1.2.) may run vocational or specialised postgraduate programmes in its accredited discipline. Once an institution is accredited for a discipline, only new undergraduate programmes have to be accredited. Doctoral schools at universities must be accredited and have to belong to one of the listed disciplines. That means that an institution must meet quality standards in a given undergraduate programme before it can run any higher-level programme.

Geographic Range Involved in the Scheme:

Any programme at any level may be offered outside the institution's main campus. In this case the HAC reviews whether the infrastructure and academic staff involved in the programme meet the necessary requirements. The degree issued for an off-site programme should be equal in content and quality to the one offered at the institution's main campus, and is technically a degree issued by the main institution.

2.2 Supra- and Intra-Institutional Evaluation Schemes

Supra-Institutional Evaluation Schemes

Two Hungarian higher education institutions (Attila József University of Arts and Sciences, Szeged, 1995, and Lajos Kossuth University, Debrecen, 1997) have undergone evaluation by the CRE (now European University Association, EUA). The focus of institutional evaluation by the CRE was the institution's management and quality assurance, as compared to the programme-centred approach of the HAC.

Intra-Institutional Evaluation Schemes

Higher education institutions are free to devise their own internal evaluation schemes to meet their particular circumstances. Both the ministry of education and the HAC have extended their assistance and provided guidelines for institutions. In the new round of institutional accreditation it is foreseen to assess the annual reports for progress in the institutions' quality management and educational provision.

An amendment to the higher education act, which went into effect in September 2000, introduced a clause that authorises the government to 'determine the system of requirements for higher education quality policy' (Section 72 o)). Accordingly, the minister of education set up a team to elaborate guidelines to assist higher education institutions in developing their internal quality assurance mechanisms. Nóra Halmay, a member of the HAC staff and author of its *Accreditation Guidebook*, was invited to join the team and has contributed to the document. The guide, issued in October 2001, is based on the EFQM (European Foundation for Quality Management) model and on the TQM (Total Quality Management) philosophy, and can be downloaded from the ministry web site.[11]

2.3 The Actors

The higher education act regulates quality assurance in Hungary. It authorises the HAC to carry out external evaluation for accreditation, the higher education institutions to take responsibility for their internal quality assurance, and the minister of education to oversee the quality of higher education institutions with respect to their compliance to legislation.

At a broader policy level, the Hungarian parliament and government (which in Hungary is understood to mean the prime minister and all the ministers) also influence the process to varying degrees. Parliament passes laws whereby it determines higher education development and its annual budget, establishes or closes state higher education institutions and endorses non-state institutions (following HAC preliminary accreditation or accreditation), and determines fundamental policy. It also determines the budget of the HAC. The government passes government decrees whereby it establishes or closes faculties (or recognises these as non-state institutions, following HAC preliminary accreditation or accreditation in each case), appoints HAC members, and issues other decrees on higher education, such as on the national qualification requirements for degree programmes or the list of disciplines (the latter two after having received the HAC's opinion), or

11 in Hungarian, http://www.om.hu

the decree on the 'fundamental regulations concerning the organisation, operation, and accreditation procedure of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee.' [12] Furthermore, the government fixes the number of students who may enrol into state-financed higher education institutions each year. With the 2000 amendment to the higher education act, the government also determines the 'system of requirements for the quality policy of higher education.' The minister of education authorises the establishment of undergraduate study programmes (following HAC preliminary accreditation), determines the national qualification requirements for specialised postgraduate programmes (after receiving the HAC's opinion), and appoints the HAC's secretary-general in agreement with the committee's president.

An additional body, the National Higher Education and Research Council (FTT), acts as an advisory body to the minister of education in matters of financial support, feasibility and strategy for higher education institutions and programmes, including state-financed student numbers (Act Sections 76-79). The council works with its own pool of evaluators.

The Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC)

The HAC consists of 30 members, in addition to non-voting members brought in to cover major disciplines which are not represented by the full members. One representative from the national student union is, by law, a permanently invited, non-voting member. In addition, the HAC invites one representative from the national union of doctoral students, one from the FTT, and one from the National Doctoral and Habilitation Council. The HAC also has an International Advisory Board, currently with ten members from Western and Central Europe and the U.S.A., to review the HAC's work and make recommendations for improvement as well as to propose foreign reviewers.

Half the members are delegated by higher education institutions (as agreed upon by the Hungarian Rectors' Conference, the Conference of College Directors, and the Chair of Art University Rectors). Ten members come from scientific research institutions (the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the National Committee for Technical Development). The remaining five members are delegated by professional organisations and chambers, who must consult with each other to chose the delegates. The one area where the HAC has decision-making powers is the establishment of doctoral schools. The HAC's basic authority is to 'express opinions' on various issues, i.e., it has an advisory function and the final decision is made by the minister of education, government or parliament, as the case may be.

For institutional as well as all types of programme accreditation procedures, the HAC involves external evaluators. For institutional accreditation the evaluators make up the visiting team. Separate visiting teams are set up for the different faculties of an institution. They consist of academics and professional experts in the main disciplines taught at the evaluated faculty.

Programmes are evaluated by means of a written application package. The evaluation is carried out by two expert reviewers, with a third one stepping in if the first two were inconclusive. The reviewers' reports are discussed by the HAC's expert committee which is most closely related to the discipline of the programme applied, and the expert committee's report, in turn, is discussed by one of three expert committees for the main areas of science (medicine and agricultural sciences; technical and natural sciences; social sciences, humanities, theology and arts) before going

12 A Kormány 66/1997. (IV.18.) Korm. rendelete A Magyar Akkreditációs Bizottság szervezetérõl, mûködéséröl és az akkreditációs eljárás alapvetõ szabályairól (Government Decree 66/1997 of April 18 on the fundamental regulations concerning the organisation, operation, and accreditation procedure of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee. In: Magyar Közlöny 1997/33. pp. 2073-2080.

up for vote by the plenum. With the 2000 amendment to the higher education act the HAC was given the additional task of evaluating applications for professorial appointments, announced in open tenders by higher education institutions. The idea was to curb the proliferation of professorships institutions in order to ensure a higher salary on the public pay scale for their teaching staff and to receive additional public financing.

The HAC was evaluated by an international panel co-ordinated by the CRE (now EUA). The report, together with the HAC's reply, was published in 2000.[13]

The Higher Education Institution and the Minister of Education

All levels of an institution are involved in the accreditation process, because they contribute to the institutional self-evaluation report. With the exception of doctoral schools, on which the HAC has decision-making powers, the minister of education makes the final decision, or passes on the HAC's opinion on issues that are under the authority of the government or parliament. The minister may overturn the HAC's decisions, but must provide a reason which must be published (Government Decree § 20 (6), pursuant to Act Section 74 § (2)).

General Formal Rules and Legal Regulations

An intricate set of regulations is related to accreditation by the HAC. The highest level is the higher education act, first passed in 1993 and amended several times. (A new law is currently under discussion). The HAC as an organisation is legislated in the act, a related government decree, and its own by-laws. It establishes its own by-laws, which encompass its procedures for all levels and types of accreditation. According to the government decree, the by-laws must be published in the official gazette of the ministry and hence endorsed by the minister. The membership of the HAC must also be published in the ministry gazette, but here the minister does not even have indirect endorsing powers, since the members are appointed by the prime minister. In addition, the HAC draws up its accreditation requirements and standards, which must also be published in the ministry gazette. The HAC also issues the above regulations, from the by-laws down to any of its lesser regulations which are not promulgated in the ministry gazette, in its own *Accreditation Newsletter* and its web site.[14]

Formal Financing

Section 80 §(6) of the higher education act states that 'The HAC is a legal entity, an independent professional body in the service of Hungarian higher education, its secretariat is an organisation with full authority and a public budget. The money for its operation shall be ensured by Parliament separately within the annual budget.' The government decree on the HAC states in §27 that 'The HAC president and members shall receive a fee. The amount and conditions for payment shall be set down in the HAC by-laws.' In §18(7) the decree states that 'The members of ad hoc committees and experts shall receive a fee for their work. The fee and the conditions for payment shall be set down in the by-laws.' With respect to financial administration §31(4) stipulates, 'The chief financial officer of the secretariat shall be appointed and dismissed by the minister on rec-

13 http://www.mab.hu/english/a_links.html
14 http://www.mab.hu/

ommendation of the Secretary General.' Further, §32 sets down that the budget must be approved by the HAC plenum, as well as other details of procedure.

The HAC by-laws contain a separate annex on financial and budgetary procedures, which regulate the amounts and modes of payment of specific items derived from the act, government decree and by-laws.

Formal Stages of the Procedure

Two documents regulate the formal procedures for the tasks set down for HAC in Section 81 of the higher education act. These are the HAC's by-laws and its accreditation requirements.[15] The procedures and criteria for institutional accreditation are additionally described in the HAC's *Accreditation Guidebook*. The new edition will be published late 2003.

Institutional Accreditation:

The procedure is set down in the HAC by-laws, the accreditation requirements, and the *Accreditation Guidebook*. For institutional accreditation, the by-laws contain appendices that regulate the requirements and procedures for the preliminary accreditation of new institutions (Appendix 5) and faculties (Appendix 6) as well as foreign higher education institutions to be established in Hungary (Appendix 7) and the accreditation of institutions (Appendix 8). These procedures set down very briefly what the evaluation will cover and describe the steps of the procedure.

A second set of regulations governing the accreditation of institutions (and programmes) is the accreditation requirements. In terms of the accreditation of institutions the requirements set down the minimum conditions for teaching staff, facilities and equipment, and programme provision which must be met for university and college faculties, for universities, for colleges, and for foreign higher education institutions applying for permission to operate in Hungary. The accreditation requirements concerning the accreditation of institutions are very general, leaving the detailed criteria and procedures to the *Accreditation Guidebook*.

The following round will retain many of the procedural elements, and will continue to focus on the educational provision, with more emphasis on the institutional dimension. Key elements that will be different are as follows. The HAC will no longer assign a grade (on a scale of four) to the evaluated degree programme but will instead provide a detailed analysis; it will examine the institution's quality assurance system; accredit disciplines instead of individual programmes by spot-checking a few programmes and, if the evaluation is positive, will consider all programmes within the discipline accredited (but if the evaluation is negative, all programmes will be evaluated); select the programme for evaluation based on the annual quality audit reports of the institution; and concentrate more on process and output factors of a programme. The institution will have more leeway to focus its self-evaluation report on its own perceived strengths and weaknesses. Concerning its own role and responsibility in the accreditation process, the HAC wants to increase the proficiency of its members and experts in accreditation.[16]

Programme Accreditation:

For programme accreditation, the by-laws contain appendices that regulate the requirements and procedures for the preliminary accreditation of new undergraduate and specialised postgraduate programmes, i.e. national qualification requirements (Appendix 1), for vocational higher edu-

15 http://www.mab.hu/english/a_regulations.html

16 The information is taken from a draft document on the planned approach to institutional accreditation presented to the HAC plenum for discussion on February 1, 2003.

cation programmes (Appendix 2), for launching an undergraduate programme at a higher education institutions (Appendix 3), and for doctoral schools (Appendix 4). The procedures for the first three types of programmes set down very briefly what the evaluation will cover and describe the steps of the procedure. The appendix concerning doctoral schools contains the full procedures and criteria (which for other types of programmes are regulated in multiple regulations), since doctoral schools, which run doctoral programmes within a broad disciplinary area, were only introduced with the 1999 amendment to the higher education act to supersede the accreditation of individual doctoral programmes. Technically, all programme accreditation that is not conducted within the eight-yearly institutional accreditation procedure is preliminary accreditation, since it concerns future programmes.

The accreditation requirements constitute the second set of procedures governing the accreditation of programmes. They apply to both preliminary accreditation and to the accreditation conducted within the institutional accreditation process. The requirements set down what each type of programme must contain in terms of minimum content (teaching staff number and qualifications, curriculum, facilities and equipment) in order to be accredited. The types of programmes are vocational higher education programmes, national qualification requirements, undergraduate programmes, specialised postgraduate programmes, distance education programmes, programmes taught in a foreign language.

Added to the general requirements are the additional criteria for programmes in particular disciplines established by the expert committees of the HAC.

Formal Duration of the Stages of the Process

Institutional Accreditation:

The entire institutional accreditation procedure lasts for eight to twelve months.

Programme Accreditation:

The deadline for the preliminary accreditation of doctoral schools, for national qualification requirements, for new programmes to be launched at institutions, for specialised post-graduate programmes, and for vocational higher education programmes is six months.

Formal Rules for Objection Regarding the Procedures:

The HAC's decisions regarding its assessment of Ph.D. programmes are binding to the minister of education. All other decisions are 'opinions', but the minister can require the HAC to repeat a procedure if s/he believes that the HAC did not observe the regulations. The minister has rejected no more than 1% of the HAC's decisions, mainly in the last two years. The increase is probably due both to a maturing critical attitude towards external assessment (and demand for more substantiated explanations backing up decisions) that goes along with a growing quality consciousness on the part of higher education institutions, and to a particular government's greater propensity to exert its leverage.

Formal Rules for Information; Distribution of Outcomes

The HAC issues decisions concerning applications to establish doctoral schools, and 'opinions' on all other issues. Its decisions and opinions, in the form of resolutions, are published by HAC in its *Accreditation Newsletter* and web site. Resolutions on institutional accreditation, with an explanation of one to several pages (depending on the number of programmes accredited at the

same time), were published in the first cycle. The HAC's strategic plan foresees that an exhaustive evaluation report be published in the upcoming round. As regards programme accreditation, decisions or 'opinions' are published in the *Accreditation Newsletter* and web site along with a brief explanation of two to three sentences. With both institutional and programme accreditation, the decisions passed by parliament, government or the minister of education subsequent to the HAC's 'opinion' are also published in the *Hungarian Gazette* and/or the *Gazette of the Ministry of Education.*

Following a decision in 2001 by the ombudsman for the protection of information, the HAC must publish its reasons for issuing specific decisions more extensively. The HAC conducted a survey of higher education institutions on whether they wished to make the accreditation reports public, and 76% of those that replied were in favour.

2.4 Implementation of Formal Rules

Practical Application of Procedures

The principal concerns regarding the application of procedure in the Hungarian accreditation system stem from the dichotomy between the profuse regulations, which establish one set of expectations (namely towards their adherence), and the engagement of acknowledged scientists and scholars, whose predominantly scientific or scholarly expertise (rather than in accreditation methodology) raises another set of expectations. The acknowledgement of the importance of some formal training in accreditation methodology is difficult to obtain. The report of the panel which evaluated the HAC, organised by the then CRE, recommended 'that the HAC reconsider its requirement that everyone involved in its work hold a scientific degree.' [17] Since then, the HAC has engaged practising professionals in its expert committees and as external evaluators. It remains to be seen to what degree some sort of formal training for evaluators, set down in the draft document on the future round of institutional accreditation, can be realised. The consequence of the former practice was inconsistency, lack of transparency and insufficient justification in the HAC's judgements.

Practical Application of Legal Regulations

The HAC membership is nominated by higher education institutions, research institutions, and professional organisations (see 10.2.3.1). The nominating procedure, as set down in the government decree on the HAC, calls for the delegating organisations to each send the name of their nominee to the outgoing HAC president, who forwards the full 30-member list to the ministry. That means that while the ministry technically proposes the HAC members to the prime minister for appointment, the committee is in fact independently selected by the delegating bodies. The negative implication is, however, that the delegating mechanism does not guarantee the body's continuity nor sure that all major disciplines are represented. Another practical consequence of the legislation regulating the HAC is that the ministry of education is mandated by law to supervise the HAC's observance of legality in its procedures. Furthermore, all HAC's regulations are checked by the ministry before being made public. Thirdly, all HAC's decisions are in the form

17 The External Evaluation of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee. Budapest 2000, p. 173. http://www.mab.hu/english/a_links.html

of ‘positions’ and ‘opinions’ (with the exception of decisions on doctoral schools, where the HAC has decision-making powers), with the final decision being taken by the minister. The minister has the right to reject the HAC’s resolutions, but in this case he must publish the reasons for doing so. In the last few years this has occurred more frequently (as I mentioned above).

Handling of Financial Matters

The HAC’s budget is allocated by parliament through the annual budget law (Act Section 80 § (6)). The annual amount, however, is controlled by the ministry of education to which the HAC’s budget plan must be submitted and which then submits it within its own plan to parliament. As far as payment is concerned, here, too, the money is paid out via the ministry on a monthly basis. In effect this means that the ministry exerts direct control over the overall funds and specific components available to the HAC for its operation.

Time Frames for the Procedures

The HAC generally adheres to the time frames set down in the by-laws and procedures, which in their current form reflect years of experience. The last tally conducted in 2000 shows that between 1994 and 1999 the HAC exceeded the time frames in 15% of institutions and 20% of programmes. The reasons for the lags were mainly because of the request for additional information from the applicants and the slow return of evaluations by external reviewers.

Handling of Rejection Procedures

If the required information is missing in the application, the HAC requests it. Concerning the content of an application, the HAC requires that institutions or programmes meet the criteria set down in its quality requirements. Expert committees do have room for individual judgements, however. In institutional accreditation, no institution was closed because of a HAC decision. In a number of cases, however, institutions were asked to elaborate action plans to alleviate their problems, which were reviewed regularly before final accreditation was granted. In programme accreditation, some programmes were discontinued, but the great majority of rejections concerned applications for new programmes. A number of professorial appointment applications have been rejected. The HAC sends its reports to the applicants, including the detailed decisions for approval or rejection.

3. The Driving Forces Behind, and the Consequences of Accreditation

3.1 Other Schemes

As I have noted, the higher education act recognises only one official form of external quality assurance for higher education institutions in Hungary, namely accreditation, as carried out by the HAC, with the final decision (with the exception of doctoral schools) being taken by the minister of education. Any other quality evaluation is carried out by individual institutions or units as they see fit.

3.2 The Driving Forces behind Accreditation, and Ongoing Qualitative Changes in Hungarian Higher Education

Since the higher education act makes accreditation in Hungary mandatory, the owners, initiators and controllers of the process carry it out in compliance with the law. Exploring the underlying reasons why accreditation was introduced in Hungary is another question, and to my knowledge there has not been any systematic research on this topic. Studies carried out by foreign scholars have tried to summarise the reasons for accreditation versus other schemes in Central and Eastern Europe. Of course there are several common denominators (see below), but these essays examine the common trends and do not consider the substantial differences between these countries.[18] The handful of Hungarian studies I am aware of are mainly descriptive and not very analytical.[19]

Accreditation as the approach to quality assurance[20] in Central and Eastern Europe is in many ways more rigid than the quality assurance approaches in Western Europe. The choice of accreditation, as opposed to quality evaluation or review of quality without a pass/fail judgement, has its roots in the historical and cultural context of the countries in the region, and therefore varies from one country to the next not only in the details, but also in the degree of rigidity. When developing its accreditation model, the HAC's intention, beyond passing a yes/no decision on the institutions or programmes it evaluated, was to act as a quality consultant and bring constructive criticism into its evaluation procedure and reports. How far it has succeeded in this may be open to debate. The introduction of new mechanisms of social and political interaction is far from linear and affects the higher education sector.

Accreditation was the preferred method of quality assurance in Central and Eastern Europe because:

…the need with the emergence of democracy to establish comparability with Western higher education; the necessity to re-evaluate the curricula to rid them of politically distorted content; the urgency to modernise programme content and approach as well as to introduce more flexible programme structures. …

Answers such as a steep rise in private institutions in some countries, and in pressure to allow access for a large number of students to a previously elite sector may also be part of the explanation, although these trends were experienced in Western Europe as well, albeit more gradually. There has been the blunt postulation that accreditation is the approach most suited to a region accustomed to an autocratic mentality.[21, 22]

I surmise that the introduction of accreditation in Hungary was a trade-off for the state relinquishing the total control over higher education institutions that existed before the regime change, and granting them a certain degree of autonomy. Accreditation was to ensure that the quality of higher education, which enjoyed international recognition – at least until the early 1990s – should not be lost. I also surmise, however, that over the years state control has grown as

18 E.g. Voldemar Tomusk, 1997. External Quality Assurance in Estonian Higher Education: Its Glory, Take-off and Crash. Quality in Higher Education, 3, No. 2, pp. 173-181. Don F. Westerheijden, 2001. Ex Oriente Lux? National and Multiple Accreditation in Europe After the Fall of the Wall and After Bologna. Quality in Higher Education, 7, No. 1. pp. 65-75.

19 E.g. Magdolna Rébay, 2001. Felsõoktatási akkreditáció, európai trendek (Higher Education Accreditation, European Trends). Educatio 2001/4. pp. 719-723.

20 I use 'quality assurance' as a collective term, i.e. without wanting to indicate one particular form of quality assurance, such as accreditation or evaluation, in this particular context.

21 Voldemar Tomusk, When East Meets West: Decontextualising the Quality of East European Higher Education. Quality in Higher Education, 6, No. 3, 2000. pp. 175-185.

22 Carolyn Campbell and Christina Rozsnyai, Quality Assurance and the Development of Course Programmes. Papers on Higher Education. UNESCO 2002. 60-61 pp.

compared to the launching phase of the new national higher education system in the early 1990s, just as the legal structure has become increasingly intricate with the multiplication of amendments to the higher education act and the ongoing consolidation of the political environment. A new higher education act is currently on the drawing board and it is hoped that it will grant institutions more autonomy. A number of factors point in this direction. Whereas Hungarian rectors and college directors had practically no experience in institutional management in the business sense of the word, a decade of immersion in international trends and practices and increasing responsibility to keep their institutions afloat under considerable financial pressure is beginning to change this tendency.

Moreover, the ministry of education has launched a broad programme to develop higher education, which includes a finance reform. Part of the programme focuses on restructuring the entire financing system. A preliminary study analysed the current weaknesses of higher education institution budgetary allocation and financing, and the higher education system as a whole.[23] The aim of the reform, if and when it becomes reality, is to ensure more rational, transparent and efficient expenditure of public money by higher education institutions in a budgetary system which can better adapt to social changes and to give institutions more flexibility in the use of the money they receive from the state budget, while ensuring greater co-ordination of the projects on which the money is spent. Growing financial responsibility must be accompanied by greater liberty in management, including less over-regulation, and covering everything from enrolment quotas to study schemes.

In September 2002, the pay-scales for college and university teaching staff were raised by 54%,[24] and it can be hoped that the practice of teaching staff having several jobs in various parts of the country will give way to the conviction that the quality of higher education must be safeguarded by all players involved. This topic also comes up in discussions concerning the quality of education, and in preparation of the new higher education act it is to be hoped that a balance will be found to regulate multiple positions without infringing on the teaching staff's personal rights.

The introduction of the ECTS-compatible credit system in September 2003, and the variety of study schemes that will gradually follow, will loosen up the educational structure and its regulations in favour of broader guidelines.

Finally, as the 'European higher education area' is increasingly becoming a reality and Hungary continues to establish its niche in it, the global forces will have many positive consequences for the country's educational system.

3.3 The Consequences of Accreditation for Higher Education Institutions, Departments and Scholars

In the first round of accreditation, Hungarian higher education institutions learned the implications of quality assessment. By conducting self-evaluation from the institutional to the department level, the notion of 'quality culture' has become a reality. Beyond saying that an accreditation decision has the potential to threaten the very existence of a higher education institution, the HAC has functioned as much as a consultancy as a bureaucratic authority. This, together with the institutions' own self-evaluations, have helped institutions to recognise their strengths and weak-

23 János Matolcsy, A magyar felsooktatás finanszírozási rendszerének reformja (The Reform of the Financial Structure of Hungarian Higher Education). Magyar Felsooktatás 2001/9. pp. 19-20.

24 Antal Stark, A felsooktatás 2003. évi költségvetése (The Higher Education Budget for 2003). Magyar Felsooktatás 2003/1-2 http://www.magyarfelsooktatas.hu.

nesses and to act on them. I realise that my statement may not meet with the unanimous agreement of those who work in higher education institutions. Yet a survey the HAC conducted among all higher education institutions in Hungary for its external evaluation by the CRE panel (see section 10.2.3.1) shows that about 80% were satisfied with the HAC's work up until 1999.[25]

How far the next cycle can improve on the first, in particular by shifting its focus on input to output data and tailoring the procedure to the individual institution, remains to be seen. Perhaps a more important question is to what degree accreditation has contributed to the improvement of the quality of higher education in Hungary. One must look at the complexity of problems facing Hungarian higher education before trying to answer the question. The study for the financial reform project mentioned above pinpoints the weaknesses of the Hungarian higher education system.

- 'Characteristic of the system is the low efficiency of its operations, marked by acute shortages and visible squandering,
- 'Elected institution heads with limited authority and with accountability to their own institutional senate find it difficult to tackle even those problems which could still be solved, as this would involve conflicts of interest,
- 'The structure of provision is determined more by tradition, the teaching staff's preferences, and by what changes additional state financing might promise,
- 'The minimum income institutions earn points to their low integration in the economy and society, due in part to the lack of any institutional framework for setting up such relationships, and in part to private companies' distrust of state-financed institutions,
- 'The effort of university staff to obtain a higher income manifests itself in the form of private businesses that use the university facilities and equipment and its name, and which are tolerated by the institutional leadership,
- 'The frequent changes in the framework for institutional operation determined by the state (which stem from the state's dilemma as to whether it should play a direct or indirect role in higher education) make it difficult for institutions to see their long-term incentives and to make long-term plans,
- 'Institutions are dissatisfied with the many regulations on financial management (earmarked budgetary estimates, the required spending of surpluses within a limited time period and fixed in form, etc.) stemming from the law on the state budget, which they perceive as a strait-jacket but which, in the present system with no practical structure for the flow of information and no ownership rights, provide necessary but not apparently sufficient guarantees for the state to supervise the autonomous institutions,
- 'Recurring cases of bankruptcies or near-bankruptcies of institutions, which come as a surprise to the administration, stem not just from the lack of sufficient financing but also from the status of the institutions and the internal leadership structure, i.e. the system of responsibilities.' [26]

Faced with such formidable problems, which may be explained by the legacy of a dictatorial regime and the lack of a model for transforming higher education into an educational service sector of the kind required by a new democratic society, the remit of the HAC to 'accredit the educational and scientific activities in higher education and to carry out quality assessment' (Act Section 80 § (1)) is not broad enough to safeguard the quality of the sector. Beyond the political

25 The External Evaluation of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee. Budapest 2000. p. 55. http://www.mab.hu/english/a_links.html

26 János Matolcsy, Megkezdõdött a finanszírozási rendszer reformja projekt (The Reform Project on the Financial Structure Has Started). Magyar Felsooktatás 2002/1-2. p. 22 (My translation – CR).

power plays that Hungary, like most new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe, continues to witness, it may have been the feeling that the HAC alone could not deal with the complex problem of safeguarding the quality of higher education that led the policy makers in the 2000 amendment of the higher education act to authorise the government to oversee higher education quality (Section 72 o)), while taking away the remit of the HAC to function 'for the ongoing supervision of the standard of education and scientific activity in higher education, … and for the supporting o quality assurance … ' (Act prior to 2000 amendment, Section 80 § (1)).

Let us now answer the question: to what degree has accreditation contributed to the improvement of the quality of higher education in Hungary? Though not quantifiable, higher education quality is generally perceived to have deteriorated in the past decade. The reality alone that attendance has tripled would have required enormous flexibility in the sector, while many players in all parts of the sector put great efforts into conserving the status quo, even if that could only be an uphill struggle. Another consideration is that competition for students in Hungarian colleges and universities is just beginning (and only in a few financially profitable fields as economics and law). The government sets the number of students who may enrol and institutions receive normative financing according to student numbers.

However, several studies have investigated the comparative market value of diplomas from particular institutions.[27] And from the study cited above, as well as from the many discussions brought about by the Bologna process [28] concerning the plans to restructure educational programmes to accommodate the credit system and the two-cycle structure, it appears that both the government and the sector's leadership are taking action to tackle the problems.

As far as the HAC is concerned, it has formulated the implications of the committee's role within Hungarian higher education together with the complex of tasks derived from it in its Strategic Plan. The plan sees the HAC as a service organisation within higher education and within society, and stakes out the HAC's challenges for the future in the light of the changes higher education must undergo to accommodate the Bologna process. The plan has also set down the principles along which the second round of institutional accreditation should proceed. It should be less formalistic than before and focus more on substance than on indicators, should develop the improvement of the accreditation process and the HAC's advisory role rather than call on institutions to account for their quality. The staff and the committee's members should receive more methodological training. The HAC's activities and decisions should become more transparent and public. Listing these aspirations means that these features were not sufficiently present before and that they are necessary to fulfil the HAC's stated role. Very much depends on the committee's new members who will be elected when the current term ends at the close of 2003.

3.4 The Consequences of Accreditation for Students and the General Public

While accreditation reports issued by the HAC could inform prospective students, their parents and the public at large, of the quality of provision at a given institution or programme, this was not the case. One reason was that the report and the reasons behind the decisions were not pub-

27 E.g. Péter Galasi, János Timár, Júlia Varga, Pályakezdõ diplomások a munkaerõpiacon I (Fresh College and University Graduates in the Labor Market I). Magyar Felsõoktatás 2001/1-2. pp. 46-48. (The study was supported by the Ministry of Education). Or the earlier mentioned study, Diplomák a munkaero-piacon (Diplomas On the Employment Market). Study headed by Péter Galasi. In: Mit kínál a magyar felsooktatás? Felvételi Tanácsadó 2002 (What Does Hungarian Higher Education Offer? Advice for Admission 2002. Országos Felsooktatási Felvételi Iroda (National Higher Education Admissions Office). Budapest, 2002. pp. 649-674.

28 E.g. as seen in the Hungarian Rectors' Conference statement from its December 17, 2002 meeting. Unpublished.

lished, only the accreditation decision and a short explanation. With the publication of the full report in the future, it is hoped that this requirement to serve the public will be fulfilled.

The HAC and accreditation have not been able to balance the threat to the quality of higher education posed by the rise of mass education. Higher enrolments were actively promoted by government until recently. Even though the demographic decline Hungary is experiencing is reaching the age cohort, the structural demands the numerical increase brings to higher education are evident. A new tendency seems to be arising to curb the expansion of higher education until the financial and system changes that can ensure its quality are in place.

4. International Influences

4.1 The Effects of the Bologna Process and Globalisation

The Bologna process affects two aspects of Hungarian higher education: the restructuring of the traditional binary system into a two-cycle system of studies, and the introduction of the credit system.

The recalculation of programmes and curricula to make up credit units is probably the easier of the two tasks. Yet this too requires a change of mentality, which is not unanimously accepted by all the actors involved. The fact that students are offered a variety of curriculum structures is perceived by some as a loss of the well-established fundamentals on which traditional curricula were built. But both the credit system and the loss of traditional structures are a consequence of mass education and hence an unavoidable development. The Credit Decree[29] requires all higher education institutions in Hungary to have the credit system, as defined in the law, in place by the academic year 2003/04. The national qualification requirements for degree programmes (see above, section 10.2.1.1.2) already assign credit points to all programmes.

A much more difficult problem is the conversion of the traditional binary higher education system into a two-cycle, bachelor–master structure. The ministry of education has set up a working group to define the core issues and to integrate the input of professional groups. At the time of writing it can be said that every participant in Hungarian higher education is aware of the momentum of the Bologna process that will ultimately result in the introduction of the two-cycle structure in many, if not all, degree programmes. It appears now that medicine, law and some humanities programmes will continue to be offered only at the master's level (though, of course, there will also be shorter health care and legal studies).

Student mobility is relatively low compared to many western European countries. Hungary has been involved in TEMPUS programmes since 1990. In the academic year 2000/2001, 2001 Hungarian students studied abroad under Socrates–Erasmus. More than a quarter (536) went to Germany, with 275 going to France, 205 to Italy, 199 to Finland, and 135 to Great Britain. Under CEEPUS, the Central and Eastern European Higher Education Exchange Programme, there were 184 undergraduate and master's students from Hungary in 2000/2001.[30] In addition, there are some government and international scholarships. An estimated 3% of full-time students study

29 A Kormány 200/2000. (XI.29.) Korm. rendelete a felsooktatási tanulmányi pontrendszer (kreditrendszer) bevezetéséről és az intézményi kreditrendszerek egységes nyilvántartásáról (Government Decree 200/2000 of November 29 on Introducing the Credit System in Higher Education and Unified Registration of Institutional Credit Systems. Magyar Közlöny 2000/116. pp. 7260-7265.

30 TEMPUS Hungary, http://www.tpf.iif.hu/newsite/tka/sajtoszob.htm, Statisztikák (Statistics).

abroad on a private basis. The recognition of studies abroad is proceeding smoothly at the national level, as the Hungarian Equivalence and Information Centre, a department of the ministry of education, is an active member of the ENIC/NARIC network. Information is much less unequivocal concerning the acceptance of foreign studies of returning students at specific higher education institutions. It seems to be dependent both on the flexibility of the institutional department and, to some degree, the subjects studied.

Concerning the effects of the Bologna process on the 'quality assurance' [31] of higher education in Hungary, the HAC is a participant in many international organisations and events and is an active actor in the Bologna process in the area of accreditation at the European level. HAC members are aware of the many projects on multilateral and international accreditation schemes. Discussions have been held within the HAC on the transformation from the binary to the linear, two-cycle study structure. The HAC has guidelines (as part of its by-laws) to deal with the evaluation of foreign institutions and has set up an ad hoc committee to deal with special problems arising in this regard. Moreover, the committee has discussed the evaluation of transnational distance education programmes as an issue to be dealt with in the near future. But these programmes have not yet made their mark on Hungarian higher education.

All in all it can be said that higher education and the HAC are reacting with some delay to the Bologna Declaration, to which Hungary was a signatory, but that discussions at many levels have taken off in the last year or so. The rigidity of the Hungarian structure of higher education poses an enormous challenge to the whole system and to all players concerned. While the Bologna process is providing the momentum to rethink the structure and purpose of higher education, I am not sure that a flexible, market- and consumer-oriented, financially feasible higher education system that is open to change, ready to promote mobility, to accept a variety of compatible educational patterns and is service oriented and sensitive to the needs of all levels of society, is imminent. A complete reconsideration of the existing value system is necessary and a frame of mind that revolves around elite education must adapt to a new reality. While the transformation that took place in higher education after 1989/90 was a step towards a more flexible system than the congealed structure of the previous decades, the Bologna process is providing the impetus for a truly qualitative change. The HAC has recognised the need for change, as can be seen in its Strategic Plan and the actions it has taken and is planning to take. I can only hope that it will not lose the capability and authority to be a proactive player in the quality assurance of Hungarian higher education.

4.2 International and Local Models of the Hungarian Accreditation Scheme

In the three years leading up to Hungary's first higher education act in 1993, many players contributed to the discussion about the future architecture of Hungarian higher education. These were the Rectors' Conference, the College Directors' Conference and the Chair of Art University Rectors, as well as policy makers following the change of regime in 1989/90. The methodology for accreditation was taken from the U.S.A. and evaluation models from Western Europe. In this regard, the first president of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee, András Róna-Tas, deserves credit for exploring a number of systems and adapting the main components to a feasible scheme for Hungary.

31 The European Higher Education Area. Joint declaration of the European Ministers of Education, Convened in Bologna on the 18th of June 1999. http://www.mab.hu/a_linkek.html

The first accreditation scheme was developed by the HAC after consultation with higher education institution academics and staff, and was tested in a pilot phase in 1994, in which two universities and four colleges were accredited. Subsequently, the HAC contracted a consultant, Ágnes Kaposi of Kaposi Associates in London, who worked out the principles and procedural guidelines for a new guidebook. Dr. Kaposi was already involved in evaluating a college in Hungary and had some insight into the local conditions. The second and subsequent editions of the *Accreditation Guidebook*, written by staff member Nóra Halmay, have remained fundamentally the same.

The new accreditation guidelines for the second round will be based on a number of sources. First, the HAC has been actively involved in international quality assurance organisations and meetings in the last ten years and has gained considerable experience. The basic concept is set down in the HAC's Strategic Plan. The HAC has set up an internal committee, which has discussed this aspect of the Strategic Plan and the future accreditation scheme in great detail. Finally, Nóra Halmay, who is contributing to the new guidebook, has actively participated in a team created the Hungarian ministry of education, which has produced guidelines to set up internal quality evaluation schemes that are intended to assist higher education institutions.

5. Other Quality Assessment Activities in Institutions or Units

Higher education institutions have their own teaching and research requirements which form part of their by-laws which set down the obligations regarding teaching load, publications, etc. for positions of all levels. In addition to these requirements, individual merit is recognised when renewing contracts and including staff in external research projects. This can supplement the staff member's income. Teaching staff in Hungarian higher education institutions are public employees. Their remuneration follows a pay-scale set by government, although it has recently raised professors' salaries to what is considered an acceptable level. The salaries of lower-level teaching staff continue to be far below earnings in industry.

There is no tenure per se, and permanent status is linked to the level of a position. The higher education act (Section 6 § 14 (2)) states that lecturers and readers can be appointed for a term of four years, which is not renewable for lecturers but renewable once for readers. Full and assistant professors may hold their positions until they reach the retirement age of 70. One important quality control mechanism is the introduction in the 2000 amendment to the act (pursuant Section 81§(2)j)) of the requirement that the HAC evaluate applications to positions of full professor. Here, the HAC checks the educational and scholarly or scientific background of applicants. This is, in fact, a form of peer review.

Promotion is decided at the appropriate levels of the institution, depending on the level of the position. (Section 6 of the act describes the achievements, such as teaching and research experience and scientific degrees, that applicants to the various positions must possess.) No doubt, merit, and hence quality, does play a role in the promotion of teaching staff. Once the senior level has been attained there is little quality control. It follows from the above that there are no financial bonuses for special achievements in Hungary. External research contracts in fields where these exist may bring additional income to departments and individuals, but they are ad hoc and are by no means a systematic way of rewarding quality.

A Study of Practice and Procedures in Higher Education Country Report Ireland

Maureen Killeavy

1. Introduction

Third level education in the Republic of Ireland has undergone considerable expansion in recent years both in terms of the numbers of student registered in the various institutions, and the extent of institutional provision and the range of courses of study available to students. During the ten year period between the academic years 1989/1990 and 1999/2000 the numbers of students registered at third level rose from 62,137 to 115,696 representing an overall increase of over eighty percent (Department of Education and Science, 2001). The marked rate of increase in the numbers of students taking part in third level education was consistent throughout the period although some small variations occurred from year to year (Higher Education Authority, 2000). At an institutional level also, there has been substantial expansion of the system both in the enlargement of existing institutions and in the establishment of new universities and institutes.

The structure of the Irish third level education system is binary or two-tier comprising the university sector and the institutes of technology. Traditionally, the universities have institutional autonomy, a right that has been underwritten in the legislation of 1997 (Universities Act, 1997) The universities are, however, funded by the state and are not independent of external control in that their duties and responsibilities have been laid down in the new legislation. They are also monitored by a statutory body, the Higher Education Authority (HEA), which allocates state funding to the universities. The other major sector of the two tier or binary third level education system is made up largely of the institutes of technology (ITs) which operate under the monitoring agency, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC).

It is necessary to point out that the term accreditation as it is used in Ireland does not refer to the same process as it does in other European countries. In this state it is customary for universities to award or confer degrees while it is usual for most of the non-university institutions, to have their qualifications awarded by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, the statutory body instituted by government for this purpose. In some higher education institutions outside the university sector however, degrees are validated and awarded by one of the universities with which the institution has an association. Accreditation as it is used in Ireland refers to the process by which relevant degrees are accredited by professional bodies as appropriate qualifications for membership of the profession in question. Some of these professional bodies which grant ac-

creditation are national bodies while others are organised at an international level. Throughout this study the meta-terminology devised by the Centre for Research on Higher Education and Work, University of Kassel, is used as far as possible to facilitate the comparative focus of the project.

2. The National System of Higher Education: Ireland

2.1 Size of the Irish higher education system

The third level education system in Ireland is broad in scope and encompasses the university sector, the technological sector, the colleges of education and private independent colleges. The first three groupings comprise 34 institutions including eight universities that are largely autonomous and self-governing while being substantially state funded (Higher Education Authority, 2003). Because of this it would be incorrect to categorize them as either solely public or private as they have, in varying degrees, characteristics or attributes of both types of institution.

The fourteen institutes of technology that are located throughout the country provide a range of courses from craft to academic level. While there is a difference in the degree of state control across the Irish higher education area this difference is not directly attributable to the private *vs* public nature of the institutions. Both the universities and other third level institutions receive their funding in varying amounts from the state to defray part or all of their costs. As a consequence, they are publicly accountable and they are also subject to legislation. There are a number of private third level institutions in Ireland, some of which operate under HETAC regulations while others operate independently on a commercial basis.

The number of students participating in higher education in Ireland has increased substantially in recent years with an estimated fifty-five percent of students now going on to higher education on completion of post primary school (Higher Education Authority, 2003) Unlike a number of countries that experienced a decline in the numbers of students entering third level education, the participation rate in Ireland has continued to increase each year. At present it is among the highest in the world (Department of Education and Science, 2001). The Higher Education Authority (2003) suggests that these rapidly growing numbers reflect growing retention rates within post primary schools, demographic trends and increasing transfer rates into higher education.

Entry to third level education for Irish students is based upon performance in the final post primary state examination, the Leaving Certificate. This form of selection was introduced in 1968 when students entering the medical faculty in University College Dublin were selected on the basis of their results in the Leaving Certificate Examination (Commission on the Points System, 1999). The system was gradually developed and extended during the following ten years to become a common, centralized selection system for entrance to all the Irish universities and most of the third level higher education institutions. Currently, the vast majority of students entering higher education in Ireland are selected on the basis of points attained in the Leaving Certificate. The minimum points requirement for various courses of study at university are laid down by the institutions and places are then allocated to students on the basis of merit.

2.2 Sectors in the higher education system

Traditionally, the higher education system in Ireland has comprised two sectors, the university sector including the recognized colleges and the colleges of education, and the technological sector, reflecting the binary structure of the system. All of these institutions are substantially funded by the State. In recent years, however, a number of independent private colleges have been established. These offer a range of courses, some of which are accredited by the relevant statutory body, while other private institutions offer degree courses that are validated by universities outside Ireland.

There are eight universities in Ireland. Four of these are now separate but linked institutions reflecting their former federal organisation within the National University of Ireland following the reconstitution of the sector by the Universities Act 1997. These four include:

University College Dublin (UCD), the National University of Ireland, Dublin; University College Cork (UCC), the National University of Ireland, Cork; the National University of Ireland Maynooth (NUIM); and,

University College Galway (UCG), the National University of Ireland, Galway

The remaining four institutions comprise:

The University of Dublin (Trinity College);

Dublin City University (DCU);

University of Limerick (UL); and,

St. Patrick's College Maynooth (The Pontifical University)

The National University of Ireland also includes five separate recognized institutions:

The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, (RCSI);

National College of Art and Design, (NCAD);

The Institute of Public Administration, (IPA);

The Shannon College of Hotel Management; and,

St. Angela's College of Education for Home Economics in Sligo

These five institutions are designated recognized colleges. Courses and academic staff in these colleges are recognized by the NUI, which awards degrees to students who successfully complete recognized courses.

Trinity College Dublin (TCD), the first and only constituent college of the University of Dublin was founded in 1592 by Queen Elizabeth l. Three colleges for the education of primary school teachers and one college specializing in the education of teachers of home economics are associated with Trinity College. The University of Limerick was established in 1972 as the National Institute for Higher Education Limerick and Dublin City University was established in 1980 as the National Institute for Higher Education Dublin. Both institutions became universities in 1989 following the passing of amendments to the relevant legislation. There are two colleges of education; St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, and the Mater Dei Institute of Education associated with Dublin City University. Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, is similarly associated with the University of Limerick. St. Patrick's College Maynooth, which was founded in 1795, incorporated the national seminary for the education of Roman Catholic priests and the Pontifical University founded in 1896.

The third level institutions are associated with the National University of Ireland including the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, (RCSI); the National College of Art and Design, (NCAD) are designated recognized university colleges. The RCSI that was established in 1784 became a recognized college of the National University of Ireland in 1977. This College provides a full-

time undergraduate degree course in Medicine together with specialist postgraduate training in the medical area. Institutionally, and in a similar manner to Trinity College Dublin, it has certain characteristics of a private institution.

Three of the eight colleges of education located throughout Ireland: Mater Dei Institute of Education, St. Angela's College of Education, and St. Catherine's College of Education for Home Economics, offer programmes leading to a teaching qualification for specialized subject areas at post primary school level. The five remaining Colleges of Education provide approved degree courses that lead to a BEd degree qualifying the successful candidate as a primary teacher. The Church of Ireland College of Education, Froebel College of Education, and Coláiste Mhuire, Marino, are associated with Trinity College Dublin. Mary Immaculate College of Education and St. Patrick's College of Education are associated with the University of Limerick and Dublin City University respectively. The undergraduate programmes in these colleges entitle successful candidates to the award of a BEd degree.

The National College of Art and Design (NCAD) which is a recognized college of NUI can trace its origins back to 1746. It provides a wide range of certificate, diploma, primary degree and graduate programmes including teacher education courses. The Institute of Public Administration (IPA) in its capacity as a recognized college of NUI offered degree and diploma courses some by distance education

The other major sector within the Irish third level education system involves the fourteen institutes of technology which are located throughout Ireland and provide higher education to large numbers of students. These developed from the earlier Regional Technical Colleges (RTCs) which were established nation wide as part of the major expansion in third level education provision which occurred in the 1970s. (HEA, 2003). The largest IT, the Dublin Institute of Technology, (formally established under the Dublin Institute of Technology Act, 1992), has been granted the right to award degrees. This new institution incorporated seven existing institutions, covering a wide range of courses in such areas as Architecture, Technology, Marketing, Catering, Commerce and Music. In the past a considerable number of these courses had been offered at degree or professional qualification level.

As part of 1970s expansion in third level education provision the National Council for Education Awards (NCEA) was set up in 1971 with academic responsibility for the non-university third level sector. The Higher Education and Training Awards Council (HETAC) was established in 2001 as a national body under the Qualifications (Education and Training Act) 1999 to take on the role formerly the task of the NCEA. The HETAC is the validating body for most of the courses run by the Institutes of Technology and this body confers national certificates, diplomas and undergraduate and postgraduate degrees up to doctorate level.

2.3 Types of degrees

The Irish universities and the Dublin Institute of Technology confer academic awards on successful students in their own colleges. Most non-university colleges receive academic qualifications at degree level from the Higher Education and Training Awards Council which also sets and monitors standards at all levels of higher education and training up to PhD level. Typically teaching at undergraduate level is by way of a programme of lectures supplemented by tutorials and, where appropriate, practical demonstration and laboratory work. Masters degrees are usually taken by course work, research work or some combination of both. Doctoral degrees are awarded on the basis of research.

Table 1 presents a broad outline of the courses of study at undergraduate and postgraduate degree level offered in the seven Irish universities.

Table 1: The disciplines and professional fields in which degrees are offered in Irish Universities

Discipline/Professional Fields	**TCD**	**UCD NUI, D**	**UCC NUI, C**	**UCG NUI, G**	**NUI, M**	**DCU**	**UL**
Arts and Human Sciences	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Commerce & Business	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
The Natural Sciences	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Engineering & Computing	✓	✓	✓	✓	–	✓	✓
Architecture	–	✓	–	–	–	–	–
Medicine	✓	✓	✓	✓	–	–	–
Dentistry	✓	–	✓	–	–	–	–
Nursing	✓	✓	✓	✓	–	✓	✓
Veterinary Medicine	–	✓	–	–	–	–	–

This table indicates that Trinity College Dublin and the NUI Universities, UCD, UCC and NUIG offer undergraduate and postgraduate degree courses in Arts, Human Sciences, Commerce/Business Studies, Science, Engineering and Medicine. In addition UCC offers courses in Dentistry, UCD offers courses in Veterinary Medicine and Architecture while NUI Maynooth provides programmes in Arts and Science. DCU offers courses in Business, Computing and Mathematical Sciences, Engineering and Design, Science and Health, Education and Humanities. The University of Limerick provides courses in Business, Education, Engineering, Humanities, Informatics and Electronics and Science. In general the provision of professional studies, particularly in the medical and associated areas is centred in Trinity College Dublin and the former university colleges of the NUI. The programmes of two new universities that were formerly National Institutes of Higher Education (DCU and UL) are concentrated (although not exclusively) in the sciences and technological areas. A number of courses leading to non-degree qualifications are available, usually confined to graduate students, in the universities.

The institutes of technology provide a comprehensive range of courses ranging from second/level craft apprenticeship programmes right through to two year National Certificate, three year National Diploma and four year degree programmes in the applied fields of Engineering, Science (including Computer Science), Business Studies and Humanities and postgraduate studies. In addition, these Institutes play an important role at regional level in providing for recurrent educational needs by way of part-time day and evening programmes. The DIT offers a broad range of courses covering Apprentice, Certificate, Diploma, Degree and Professional awards and is the validating body for its own awards. The provision of third-level part-time evening courses is a very important function of the DIT.

Table 2 presents a broad outline of the courses of study at certificate, diploma, undergraduate and postgraduate degree level offered in institutions in the non-university sector of the Irish third level education system. The awards in question are most usually granted by bodies outside the institutions attended by the students; however, it should be noted that the Dublin Institute of Technology grants its own awards. While some of the courses offered are of pre-degree level they may, in certain circumstances entitle successful candidates to transfer with credit to one of the universities to complete a relevant course for a higher qualification. A similar initiative was an-

nounced by the National University of Ireland in its qualifications framework policy document relating to student access, progression and transfer (NUI, 1999). These innovations, although not relating to degree level courses, are a significant development in that they anticipate a more widespread introduction of a credit system within higher level courses.

Table 2: The level and duration of qualifications in the non-university sector of the Irish third level education system

Type of Award or Degree	Duration of Programme
One year certificate	One year full-time course
National certificate	Two year full time course
National diploma	One year post National Certificate. Three years in total
Graduate diploma	Usually a one year course. Designed for graduates seeking a vocational reorientation
Bachelor's degree	One year post National Certificate. Three years in total
Master's degree	One-two year(s) duration. Either by research or through a taught programme
Doctorate PhD	Three years or more of original research

3. Accreditation and its Evaluation Framework

As has been pointed out, Irish universities award or confer degrees which are validated by these institutions themselves while the term accreditation refers to the recognition of academic qualifications by professional bodies as appropriate for membership of various professions. Most of the non-university third level institutions have their qualifications awarded by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council, the statutory body instituted by government for this purpose. One institution outside the university sector, the Dublin Institute of Technology has been granted the right by government to confer degrees and in some cases third level institutions outside the university sector have their degrees validated and awarded by one of the universities with which the institution in question has an association. No formal system for the accreditation or quality assessment of degrees at a national level is in place in Ireland, However, quality assessment does take place within various rubrics and both quality assurance and accountability are mandatory within the third level education system. In Ireland, Quality Assurance (QA) and the assessment of quality within QA is not focused on the degrees conferred by the university but rather on fostering a quality culture in all the activities of the institution.

The accreditation of degrees in the Irish universities is a matter for the institutions themselves as is the assurance of quality within the various departments of each university. Over the years serious attention has been paid to issues of quality and procedures, and structures have been developed in relation to these matters. Since the Report of the Commission on Higher Education (1967) which was followed by the establishment of the Higher Education Authority (1971) the importance of quality in higher education has grown. In some countries this trend followed a model involving direct state intervention and the institution of bodies such as *The Quality Assurance Agency* in the UK, *The Comite National d'Evaluation* in France, *The Danish Evaluation Institute* in Denmark and *The Australian Universities Quality Agency* in Australia.

In Ireland, however, a „more devolved model of self-regulation within a clear legislative framework" has been devised for the purpose (CHIU 2003, p. 19). This was in accordance with

the partnership model that has continued to typify policy development within the public sector in Ireland over recent years (Government of Ireland, 2003). The Conference of Heads of Irish Universities has been the body that has shaped policy and developed the area of quality improvement and quality assurance with the close collaboration of all the universities across the sector. The development of the self regulatory type of procedures that are now in place has been made possible by the provisions of the Universities Act, 1997, which guaranteed „the autonomy of each university to determine its own quality assurance procedures free of the bureaucracy which has become associated with quality assurance procedures in other countries." (CHIU, 2003, p. 7)

While the regulation and formalization of accreditation is in certain respects a novel development within the Irish universities, the assurance of the quality of degrees has always been undertaken in a serious and organized manner. The sector has traditionally utilized the services of international experts within the external examination system to ensure the quality of both the degrees and research activities of the institutions. This system involves an annual external quality review of primary and higher degrees by international experts who act as assessors. Last year over ninety experts from sixteen different countries examined and reported on all aspects of degree programmes including assessment procedures in each department within the Irish university system (CHIU 2003 pp. 72-73). In addition external agencies and professional bodies grant recognition to a number of university degrees through a process of continuous monitoring and review. At a less formal but nonetheless important level the system of peer review of research publication and the peer assessment of applications for research funding are important elements of the Irish university system. The fact that a major criterion of suitability for academic appointment, tenure and promotion is a candidate's research record is indicative of the importance of peer evaluation. This is established on the basis of scholarly publications in refereed academic journals that have achieved a creditable standing in the Citation index.

3.1 Quality assurance in Irish third level education: Current developments and procedures

Section 35 of the Universities Act, (1997), requires the Chief Officer of the university to establish procedures for quality assurance aimed at improving the quality of education and related services provided by the university. This section of the Act with its emphasis on quality improvement and on university autonomy provides the framework for the achievement of this goal. While the Higher Education Authority has a monitoring function in relation to quality assurance and quality improvement (QA/QI), the duty of operationalizing the scheme in each university lies with Chief Officer and the Governing Authority of the university itself. University College Dublin was one of the first universities to develop new Quality Assurance/Quality Improvement procedures under the recent Irish legislation and its lead has been followed by the other institutions. The procedures developed by UCD include the establishment of a QA Office and the appointment of a Director and a Standing Committee on Quality by the Academic Council of the university. The mission statement of the Quality Assurance Office outlines the rationale and values that underpin the operation that is documented fully.

„The Quality Assurance Office is dedicated to enhancing the quality of all aspects of the work of the University through co-operation with staff and students as they interact with one another for the advancement of teaching, learning and research. Our activities are based on respect for the

individual, on fair and equal treatment of all colleagues and on gaining the respect of the University community through the quality of our own work." (QAO, University College Dublin, 2002)

The evaluation process for academic departments in University College Dublin is based on EU methodology and refined by the experience gained during the three year pilot project involving ten departments that had volunteered to participate. The evaluation included a self assessment report prepared, in consultation with all staff in the department; and included an evaluation by students as required by the Universities Act 1997, 35(2). Follow-up was an integral part of the process and each reviewed department is provided with a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) based on the self-assessment report and the peer review report. The QIP includes proposals for implementing improvements relating to the following organizational and administrative matters, shortcomings in services, procedures and facilities, inadequate staffing facilities and other resources. The original five year plan for the review of academic departments has been extended to ten years by which time in 2008 the academic departments will have been reviewed.

The aim of the QA/QI process is to provide a framework within the university that can work toward achieving the goal of a quality culture (University College Dublin, 2001, p.4). The other universities have adopted similar procedures and structures. University College Cork (UCC, NUI,C) has appointed the Quality Promotion Unit to operate QA/QI in the institution and similar developments have been put in place throughout the sector. The growing approval of the way QA/QI has been developed within the sector is due the democratic nature of the model that reflects the idea of partnership advocated in the National Development Plan 2000-2006. While the universities have institutional autonomy they are subject both to the Higher Education Authority which has responsibility for monitoring policy matters, accountability quality assurance and budgetary allocation, and to the Universities Act (1997) and other relevant legislation such as the Freedom of Information Act, (2000).

Accreditation within the institutes of technology and issues related to QA are subject to the conditions laid down in the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999. This Act provided for the setting up of the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland to establish and maintain a framework of qualifications, to act as the overall guarantor of the quality of awards and to facilitate and promote access, transfer and progression. As a result the Further Education and Training Awards Council and the Higher Education and Training Awards Council was set up to provide certification within the framework of qualifications. The latter is the validating body for most of the courses run by the ITs and confers National Certificates, Diplomas and Degrees up to doctorate level. HETAC/DIT Diploma or Certificate holders may, in certain circumstances, be able to transfer to the Universities to complete courses for a higher qualification.

The 1999 Act heralded an important difference in the assessment of degree and diploma courses in the non-university sector of Irish higher education. The HETAC and formerly its predecessor the NCEA were responsible for the appointment of external examiners for their courses for which they were the validating body. That arrangement will no longer be in place from the beginning of the academic year 2004 in accordance with section 23 and section 28 of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999. From 2004 the responsibility to establish procedures for both the assessment of learners and quality assurance will be devolved to the providers in question. This is similar to the protocols in operation in the Higher Education Authority institutions.

The development of a national framework of qualifications setting out arrangements for access, transfer and progression for learners is a key feature of the Act. Thus each learner will be able to determine her or his own educational goals and see how they can be fulfilled. This will make achieving educational and training goals a continuing and lifelong ambition. All Irish awards are

included in the national framework of qualifications maintained by the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland. In 1999 a similar initiative by the National University of Ireland relating to its diploma and certificate courses was announced (NUI, 1999). This innovation was undertaken in response to the „need for the greater integration of all the University's awards and for the promotion of the concept of a ladder of qualifications that would be compatible with developing structures outside the University and specifically with the National Framework" (NUI, 1999).

The National Framework of Qualifications was designed to be a single, nationally and internationally accepted certification structure covering all extra-university third level courses. It also includes all further and continuing education, and training programmes must be strategically placed between the second level and university qualifications systems. The purpose of this holistic approach is to ensure that access and progression into higher education are made flexible and amenable to those who had heretofore found such access or progression difficult if not impossible.

The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999, stipulates that the standards set for awards are informed by internationally accepted best practice and brings the operation of the National Academic Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) under the umbrella of the National Qualifications Authority (NQA). Founded twenty years ago NARIC is the official body for the regulation and recognition of higher education diplomas that are awarded on completion of professional education courses of at least three years. In this way it is envisaged that NARIC, in cooperation with similar bodies in other countries, will also facilitate the integration the education systems throughout Europe.

3.2 Time span and scope of procedures

The time-span and scope of procedures related to accreditation and quality assessment varies throughout the third level education system although certain features, most notably those related to frequency and transparency, are common throughout third level education. The system of external examination of degrees operates annually and involves the inspection and assessment of course work, the examination procedures and the standards achieved by candidates for degrees. Typically, an oral assessment (including practical tests where appropriate) of a representative selection of degree candidates by the external assessor form part of the external examination system.

Proposals to institute a new degree or qualification within the university sector involve lengthy procedures. The academic standards and the need for the new course must be examined at departmental, faculty and academic council level within the university. With individual departments in competition for scarce resources and funding, the proposals for establishment of new courses must be accompanied by a certified impact statement detailing the costing implications. Currently, proposals that are not self-funding are not considered except in the exceptional circumstance in which an outside body guarantees to provide the financial resources necessary.

Apart from these considerations a number of features that derive from recent legislation have implications for the maintenance of standards and accountability within the higher education system. The Freedom of Information Act (1999) which applies to the education system provides for a measure of public accountability. At an individual level this legislation also gives students the right to view the papers they presented for examination and the institutions have appeals procedures in place to deal with any alleged injustice in assessment. The most powerful role related to rewards and sanctions in the university sector lies with the Higher Education Authority which has the responsibility for reviewing the strategic development and the quality assurance procedures of

the institutions (Universities Act, 1997). When viewed in conjunction with its monitoring responsibility and its annual role in allocating governmental funding its power is of major significance.

4. Accreditation in Higher Education: Main Actors and Procedures

State involvement in accreditation and evaluation within the Irish higher education system is not based on direct intervention. Proximate and immediate matters concerning the operation of the third level education system are delegated to the statutory bodies instituted for the purpose. More broadly based policy matters are developed following extensive consultations with the relevant stakeholders in the system. This practice is in accordance with the partnership model that has been the basis for policy development within the public sector in Ireland. Widespread discussions such as those during the National Convention on Education, 1994, and the Commission on the Points System, 1998, are typical of the consultative process in the partnership model.

The state is the main provider of funding and resources for the Irish higher education system and this provision is made through the Higher Education Authority to the university sector and similarly through the Higher Education and Training Awards Council to the institutes of technology. The functions of these statutory bodies include the monitoring of the system in terms of both quality assurance and standards.

The Higher Education Authority is the planning and development body for higher education in Ireland. It was set up on an ad hoc basis in 1968, and was given statutory powers in the Higher Education Authority Act 1971. The Authority has wide advisory powers throughout the whole of the third level education sector. In addition it is the funding authority for the universities and a number of designated institutions. Its principal functions are:

- to further the development of higher education;
- to maintain a continuous review of the demand and need for higher education;
- to assist in the coordination of state investment in higher education and to prepare proposals for such investment;
- to allocate among universities and designated institutions the grants voted by the Oireachtas;
- to promote the attainment of equality of opportunity in higher education and democratisation of higher education.

The Authority was given additional responsibilities under the Universities' Act, 1997. These include reviewing the following:

- University strategic development plans;
- University quality assurance procedures;
- University equal opportunity policies and their implementation.

The legislation also charged the Higher Education Authority with the tasks of „advising the Minister for Education on the establishment of new institutions of higher education; continually reviewing the demand for higher education; and making recommendations on the provision and distribution of places for students throughout the national system of higher education." A major function of the HEA is the overseeing of the financial operation of universities and colleges and the distribution of government funding within the sector.

The extension of the remit of the Higher Education Authority, initially suggested in the Government White Paper of 1995 and contained in the Universities Act of 1997 include: „...advising the Minister in relation to higher education policy generally across the whole sector, and on spe-

cific issues; overall responsibility for the operational decisions arising from the implementation of agreed policies, including budgetary allocations to the colleges; ensuring that all higher education institutions put into effect policies which promote equality of access, participation and benefit…; ensuring…a balance of level, type and variety of programmes among the various institutions…; ensuring that systems and processes are in place which will facilitate the necessary public accountability and provide for the evaluation of cost-effectiveness…; ensuring that quality assurance procedures are in place in all institutions and…are monitored; promoting links between institutions, society and the economy." (Government of Ireland, 1997)

This extension of the functions of the HEA, in particular the linking of the responsibility for policy matters, budgetary allocations, accountability, the evaluation of cost effectiveness and the monitoring of quality assurance procedures in one body gives that body a very powerful role within the third level sector.

The Higher Education and Training Awards Council is the statutory body responsible for the co-ordination, development and promotion of higher education outside the universities. It approves courses and confers degrees, diplomas, certificates and other educational awards. It sets and monitors standards in the colleges and, through it, a transfer network operates whereby students can move from Certificate to Diploma to Degree level depending on examination performance. Qualifications awarded by this body are internationally recognized by academic, professional, trade and craft bodies. Apart from the Institutes of Technology, HETAC has a range of designated institutions including national institutions such as the National College of Ireland (NCI) and a wide range of religious and other private colleges.

A number of the professional areas of study in third level education are regulated by professional bodies, some of which have a legal charter. While some of these bodies provide courses of study which they assess themselves, others validate or accredit the degrees awarded to students by one of the universities or institutes of technology as suitable for entry to the profession in question. Legal studies leading to an academic award are provided by the universities. Such courses, however, are academic and while they may be the first steps in a legal career, they do not entitle the recipient to professional accreditation. Legal studies leading to a professional qualification in Ireland are provided by two bodies, The Honorable Society of King's Inns, and the Law Society of Ireland. These bodies are responsible for professional training in one of the branches of the two tier legal system. The courses run by the Honorable Society of King's Inns lead to the professional qualification of barrister-at-law, while the courses run by the Law Society of Ireland lead to qualifications enabling the holder to practice as a solicitor.

The more usual practice for entry to the professions is for professional bodies to give recognition or validation to a degree awarded by an academic body. This applies in a number of areas including architecture, engineering, nursing, psychology, teaching, and social work. The usual practice is for the professional body in question to set up an accreditation committee for a degree for which recognition is requested by the awarding institution. If the degree is assessed as a suitable entry qualification for the profession, accreditation is given and the course in question is monitored annually by the professional body to ensure the maintenance of standards. Some of the professional bodies involved in this process are nationally based while others are European or international bodies.

International and EU involvement in the accreditation process is customary rather than subject to regulation or legislation. The practice of external examination of degrees by international experts is a time-honoured practice in Irish universities. Further, student and staff exchanges under the various EU programmes such as Erasmus and Comenius have necessitated the provision of courses of a comparable standard to that in other EU countries. Apart from these institution-

ally based considerations the fact that many Irish graduates find appointments in other countries means that their qualifications are accepted internationally. However, as in other countries, further progress is required in developing equivalencies between programmes to facilitate inter institutional developments.

5. Developments and Current Trends in the Area of Evaluation

5.1 During the Last Two Decades

During the last two decades in Ireland there has been a growing impetus to codify and regulate the provision of higher education both in the university sector and in the institutes of technology and other institutions. The changes that have been introduced involve legislative provision and the setting up of new and the strengthening of existing statutory bodies. These changes have occurred, in part, as a result of the growing numbers of students taking part in third level studies and the consequent funding requirement on the exchequer to fund the system. Alongside the gradual massification of Irish third level education the growing closer association between countries in the European Union and the effects of globalization generally have signalled a need for a process of standardization. Such a system would facilitate the establishment of equivalencies, similar to those existing between qualifications at post primary or second level education. The Irish government and the universities and other institutions have indicated their acceptance of such developments in their cooperation with the initiatives associated with the Bologna Declaration.

Within the university sector significant developments in the area of evaluation involve the recent legislation codifying the role and functions of the university and the establishment and strengthening of the HEA as the body with the remit reviewing the demand and need for higher education together with the allocation of the monies voted by government among universities and designated institutions. This conjunction of the functions of the monitoring of the universities; the allocation of funding; the review of each university's strategic development plan; and the coordination of state investment in higher education in one statutory Authority gives that body a pivotal role in relation to evaluation (Higher Education Act, Universities Act 1997).

Within the non-university sector the major development in the area of evaluation has been the passing into law of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999. This act provides for the setting up of the National Qualification Authority of Ireland (NQAI) for the purpose of establishing and maintaining a framework of qualifications, acting as the overall guarantor of the quality of awards and facilitating and promoting access, transfer and progression. This Act also provided for the setting up in the following year of the Higher Education and Training Awards Council and the Further Education and Training Awards Council to provide certification within the framework of qualifications.

While FETAC is concerned with the non-higher education provision within the post second level sector its linkage with HETAC under the NQAI is a significant development in relation to higher education. The qualifications provided by the institutions accredited by FETAC will, as part of the national framework of qualification, provide students with access, transfer and progression routes to both further qualifications and higher education as appropriate. This ensures that the national framework of qualifications will function as the accepted certification structure cov-

ering all extra-university third level, and all further and continuing education and training programme at post second level education.

6. Accreditation and the Internationalization of Higher Education

6.1 Range of Activities, Level of Involvement

The Bologna Declaration (1999) which was further ratified at the Salamanca Convention (2001) and by the communication issued by the meeting of the European Education Ministers in Prague (2001) has signposted an era of increased emphasis on both quality assurance and standards so as to facilitate the comparability of qualifications throughout Europe. The 1999 declaration that was signed by 31 states gave a commitment to the promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance as a basis for developing „comparable criteria and methodologies." The authorities of universities throughout Europe, including the European University Association (EUA) and thirty two rectors conference have supported the development of quality benchmarks for their institutions. To meet the challenges for Irish universities the Conference of Heads of Irish Universities has proposed a Framework for Quality in Irish Universities and issued guidelines for implementing quality assurance and quality improvement. This has been supplemented by the establishment of the Irish Universities Quality Board (IUQB).

The Bologna Agreement contains provisions relating to a wide range of activities in higher education. One of the most urgent of these for Irish third level institutions is student mobility. Governments and institutions are required to remove obstacles to student mobility according to the Declaration. This means that the European Credit Transfer System which is now widespread in Ireland must be extended to allow for credit transfer as well as credit accumulation.

Issues relating to accreditation cannot be viewed in isolation but rather must be examined within the changing landscape of the sector as an entity with interlocking and interdependent parts. In Ireland both the government and the stakeholders in the system have been concerned that while the last decade was marked by a continuous growth in student numbers, current projections suggest that the number of students leaving post primary schools will decrease by 35% in the coming decade. (CHIU, 2003). Further, concern has been expressed that the attrition rate among students, which can exceed 30%, is an indication that colleges are not meeting the needs of students. This is likely to result in surplus capacity across a sector that may have difficulty in responding to changing demand. To combat this, and to deal with other problematic factors recent policy initiatives in Irish third level education have focused on integrating planning and on making the system more responsive to regulation and control by governmental agencies and statutory bodies which operate within the system.

The climate of opinion among policy makers in Ireland has been changing in recent years; this is evident from the nature and type of policy documents not only from official sources including the Department of Education and Science and the statutory bodies but from the institutions themselves (CHIU, 2003). The emphasis is no longer on third level education as being of value in itself and as the right of all students. Rather, it is viewed as an important, if indirect, input into the future economic growth and prosperity of society and as a right that carries duties and responsibilities. These and other indicators of change are highlighted in the Skilbeck Report (2002) which was commissioned by the Higher Education Authority. This report does not advocate a pre-eminent cultural role for the university in Ireland but rather applies the language of commer-

cial activity to the sector. The report argues that universities should attract funds from a variety of sources while focusing on improving quality and 'value for money'. It also identifies the need for greater flexibility in the system to facilitate responsiveness to changing demands and needs.

The development of a transparent system of assessment and marking, cross disciplinary courses and cross institutional arrangements are recommended by the Skilbeck Report. Such developments at local level would serve to facilitate cooperative endeavours between universities in different countries and pave the way for some of the aspirations noted in the Bologna Declaration. However, although some of the Skilbeck proposals are not without merit they are embedded in procedures and structures with slight reference to cultural and socio-political values. Facing University Challenges: An IFUT View (2003) asserts that the arguments presented by the report overemphasize the short term economic challenges and are based on a narrow view of the university – that of an educational business responsive to the marketplace.

The future focus of the higher education in Ireland may well be largely determined by economic considerations and by the forces of globalization. Perhaps the most far-reaching proposal suggested in the Skilbeck Report, and the one most pertinent to the future role of Irish universities is the recommendation that the institutions recreate themselves. It is suggested that they should do this by broadening their horizons, enhancing their power and capabilities and becoming global players. The suggests that not all universities are sufficiently well placed to enter the highly competitive global market and consequently, some institutions may be more suitably placed within a local and regional context. The focus of such regional institutions should be the building of partnerships with local industry and community and they should have as their primary target the growth and development of the region. The other universities with the capability of following the global course as a competitive force and becoming more entrepreneurial should focus on „selling such services as undergraduate and post graduate places and consultancies on the global market as Australia, Japan, Switzerland and the UK among others no do so successfully" (Skilbeck, 2001, p.147). This recommendation seems to suggest that the future for Irish third level education depends on the ability of the system to exploit the world market for services as envisioned in the General Agreement on Trade and Services (European Commission, 2003).

This suggestion that the Irish university sector should subdivide into two strands with two markedly different functions would, if put into practice, have major policy implications. While this suggestion is not emanating from governmental sources *per se* it is very significant in that it comes from a report published by the Higher Education Authority, the statutory body whose functions include the monitoring and funding arrangements for the sector and the Conference of Heads of Irish Universities. The division of the university sector in terms of function and focus and the need for all institutions „to demonstrate maximum efficiency, ability to generate resources and a readiness to reform" is proposed as a response to the challenges of modernization and more particularly to globalization (Skilbeck, 2001, p.146). The emphasis on this aspect of developments within the sector would seem to indicate that the major stakeholders in the university sector not only favour globalization but also are ready to recommend strategies for dealing with it.

The climate of opinion among the policy makers and stakeholders regarding the role and functions of the university is currently undergoing major change. The emphasis is no longer on education as of value in itself and the vision of the university as advanced by Newman in the Nineteenth Century seems to have faded. The representatives of government and the university authorities are in agreement on the need for change and the direction in which change should occur. The recent Skilbeck Report (2002) stresses the responsibility of the university to contribute to the future economic growth and prosperity of society. Professor Skilbeck (formerly Deputy Direc-

tor for Education, OECD) proposes that third level institutions continually appraise the quality of their teaching, research and service roles and set standards based on international benchmarking for their future development within an increasingly global environment. These views were echoed by Dr Roger Downer, President of UL who emphasized the vital role that universities must play in shaping tomorrow's world in his speech on behalf of Conference of Heads of Irish Universities. These views were also echoed by Dr Don Thornhill, Director of the Higher Education Authority, who stressed that universities must accept that new strategies are inevitable if universities are to remain competitive and relevant to Ireland of the 21st century. The intended result of such policy proposals would seem to be the standardization, integration of structures and procedures and the systemization of accountability measures within an increasingly globalized third level education system.

Country Report Italy

Carlo Finocchietti, Silvia Capucci

1. The National System of Higher Education in Italy

1.1 Size of the System

Italian higher education is organised in a binary system: university education, and non-university education. The university sector consists of 77 institutions subdivided into two main categories: state universities (63 institutions) and non-state universities legally recognised by the competent State authority (14 institutions). The university population currently is 1,800,000 students.

The non-university sector covers, first, higher education institutions for music, dance, figurative and applied arts (fine art academies, national academies for dance and drama, national school for cinema, music conservatories, higher institutes for applied arts). Next, there is higher integrated technical education and training (IFTS programmes). The sector also comprises second level professional programmes under the responsibility of the Regions. Finally, there is higher education for languages (interpreters and translators).

1.2 Outcomes of the Bologna Declaration: Reforms of Higher Education Cycles and Qualifications

The main purpose of the 1999 reform was to endow all higher education institutions – and above all universities – with greater teaching autonomy, which was unprecedented in the Italian educational tradition. With reference to the university sector, the 1999 reform has now been fully implemented. Universities autonomously define the teaching rules of their degree programmes in their institutional teaching regulations *(Regolamento Didattico di Ateneo*-RDA); in particular, the RDA determines the name and the educational objectives of each degree programme, the general framework of the teaching activities to be included in the curriculum, the number of credits to be attributed to each teaching activity, and the modality of the final degree examination.

In conformity with the objectives of the Bologna Declaration, the 1999 university reform has also defined the new architecture of the system. Italian university studies are now organised in three cycles.

The **first cycle** (undergraduate studies) consists of one type of degree programme, called *Corsi di Laurea* (CL), which aims at providing undergraduate students with an adequate command of general scientific methods and contents as well as specific professional skills. Access is based on the Italian school leaving qualification, which is awarded after passing the relevant state examinations, following completion of 13 years of schooling; equivalent foreign qualifications may also be accepted. Admission to individual degree programmes may be subject to specific course requirements. First degree programmes last for three years. The first degree *(Laurea*-L) is awarded to undergraduates who have earned 180 credits.

The **second cycle** (graduate studies) includes three types of degree programmes: Corsi di Laurea Specialistica-CLS; Corsi di Specializzazione di 1° livello-CS1 and Corsi di Master Universitario di 1° livello-CMU1.

CLS are aimed at providing graduates with an advanced level of education for the exercise of a highly qualified professional activity in specific areas. Access to CLS is based on the Italian first degree (L) or an equivalent foreign qualification; its length is two years. The degree, *Laurea Specialistica*-LS (second degree), is awarded to graduates who have earned a global amount of 300 credits, including those of the first degree that have been recognised for access to the CLS (maximum 180); it is also compulsory to write an original dissertation. A limited number of CLS regulated by specific EU directives (dentistry, medicine, veterinary medicine) share the following features: the educational requirement for access is the Italian school leaving diploma or an equivalent foreign qualification; admission is always subject to entrance exams; courses last for five years, except medicine which takes six years.

CS1 are devised to provide the knowledge and abilities needed for the practice of a few specialised or highly qualifying professions (e.g. teaching, legal professions); they may be established exclusively in application of specific Italian laws or EU directives. Access is by a *Laurea* (first degree) or an equivalent foreign degree; admission is subject to the passing of a competitive examination; the course length varies between two and three years. The *Diploma di Specializzazione di 1° livello*-DS1 (first level specialisation degree) is conferred to graduates who have earned 300 to 360 credits, including those of the first degree that have been recognised for access to the CS1.

CMU1 are advanced scientific programmes or continuing education courses open to the holders of a *Laurea*-L or an equivalent foreign degree; admission may be subject to additional conditions. The course lasts for a minimum of one year. The *Master Universitario di 1° livello*-MU1 (first level university master) is awarded to graduates who have earned at least 60 credits.

Third cycle degree courses (postgraduate studies) consist of *Corsi di Dottorato di Ricerca*-CDR (research doctorate programmes); *Corsi di Specializzazione di 2° livello*-CS2 (second level specialisation programmes); *Corsi di Master Universitario di 2° livello*-CMU2 (second level university master programmes).

CDR aim at training postgraduates for very advanced scientific research or for very high professional appointments; they envisage the use of suitable teaching methodologies such as updated technologies, study periods abroad, internships in specialised research centres. Access is based on an Italian second degree (LS) or an equivalent foreign degree; admission is subject to passing very competitive exams; the official length of studies is at least three years; the writing of an original dissertation is necessary to obtain the third degree called *Dottorato di Ricerca*-DR (research doctorate).

CS2s provide postgraduates with the knowledge and skills required to exercise highly specialised professions (e.g. medical specialities); they may be established exclusively in application of specific Italian laws or EU directives. Access is through an LS (second degree) or an equivalent foreign degree; admission is subject to a competitive examination; the course normally lasts for one year, except for all the CS2s of the health sector which may take up to five years.

CMU2s are advanced scientific programmes or continuing education courses that are open to holders of an LS or of an equivalent foreign degree; admission may be subject to additional conditions. Studies take at least one year. The degree *(Master Universitario di 2° livello*-MU2) is awarded to postgraduates who have earned a minimum of 60 credits.

Finally, the reform included the adoption of the Diploma Supplement (DS) and of a national credit system based on the ECTS. Therefore, Italian degree programmes are now structured in credits (CFU = *crediti formativi universitari)*; a university credit corresponds to 25 hours of work, including personal study. The average annual workload of a fulltime student is fixed at 60 credits.

Scheme of the University System **(DM 509/99)**

degree-courses *corsi di studio*	**degrees** *titoli accademici*	**Credits earned** CFU	**years** *anni*
1st cycle – undergraduate studies/students			
Laurea degree course *Corso di Laurea* – CL	1st degree/Laurea degree *Laurea*-L	180	3
2nd cycle – graduate studies/students			
2nd *(Laurea*) degree course *Corso di Laurea Specialistica*-CLS	2nd degree (2nd *Laurea)* *Laurea Specialistica*-LS	120	2
1st (level) Specialisation degree course *Corso di Specializzazione di 1° livello*-CS1	1st (level) Specialisation degree *Diploma di Specializzazione di 1° livello* -DS1	120 – 180	2 – 3
1st (level) University Master degree course *Corso di Master Universitario di 1° livello*-CMU1	1st (level) University Master degree *Master Universitario di 1° livello* - MU1	60+	1+
3rd cycle – postgraduate studies/students			
Research Doctorate programme *Corso di Dottorato di Ricerca*-CDR	*Research Doctorate degree* *Dottorato di Ricerca*-DR		3+
2nd (level) Specialisation degree course *Corso di Specializzazione di 2° livello*-CS2	*2nd (level) Specialisation degree* *Diploma di Specializzazione di 2° livello*-DS2	60 – 300	1 – 5
2nd (level) University Master degree course *Corso di Master Universitario di 2° livello*-CMU2	2nd (level) University Master degree *Master Universitario di 2° livello* - MU2	60+	1+

1.3 Governance of the University System: From Centralisation to Autonomy

In the last decade, there have been substantial developments in terms of distribution of power in the management of university education. The first important step towards decentralisation was made in 1989, when the Ministry for Universities and Scientific and Technological Research (MURST) was established as a separate entity from the Ministry of Education with a view to further promote the two sectors of university education and scientific research by attributing their co-ordination to the same authority. One of the purposes of this reform was to separate the responsibility for decisions in matters of university policy, entrusted to MURST, from their actual management, a task attributed to individual universities and research bodies. Another objective was the implementation of university autonomy. At the end of this reform process, MURST merged once again with the Ministry of Education to form the present Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR).

A second significant development was the transfer of power from the central government to individual universities. Full institutional autonomy was gradually achieved through a series of legislative acts: statutory and operational autonomy was sanctioned by Law 168 of 1989, financial autonomy by Law 537 of 1993, autonomy for the recruitment of the teaching staff by Law 210 of 1998, and finally teaching autonomy by ministerial decree 509 of 1999.

A third important change consisted in the transfer of normative and regulative powers from Parliament to the Government by means of provisions leading to deregulation, power delegation, the decentralisation of functions, and administrative simplification.

The fourth important modification took place in the organs representing the different components of the academic community as well as in the advisory bodies assisting the Minister in matters of university policy. Most were reformed or newly established (e.g. National University Council, Italian University Rectors' Conference, National Council of University Students, National Committee for the Evaluation of the University System).

Concerning the management of the system, the most significant innovation was undoubtedly the gradual decentralisation of competences from the central government to individual institutions. This has resulted in a shift from a type of management based on strong ministerial authority to a new model in which the central government has yielded all operational powers to universities, even though it retains some financial and policy responsibilities. Universities have increased their power over the management of operational processes and achieved full autonomy (statutory, financial, didactic, staff recruiting).

2. Accreditation, Approval and Evaluation

2.1 Why Programme Accreditation?

In Italy, the system of accreditation of university degree programmes was launched in 2001. On the one hand, universities had just designed the new degree programmes and were applying to the state for funding. On the other, in order to allocate funds efficiently, the Ministry of Education (MIUR) asked the National Committee for the Evaluation of the University System (CNVSU) in order to elaborate a scheme of programme accreditation. Only accredited programmes would obtain ministerial financial support.

As a consequence, 2 distinct but correlated procedures came simultaneously into being: 1 for formal approval of new university curricula (see section 12.2.3), and 1 for the accreditation of the programmes themselves, after checking if they met the minimum quality standards (see below).

2.2 Accreditation of Degree Programmes: CNVSU's Proposal

In its proposal, CNVSU adopted the definition of accreditation proposed in the 2001 CRE report: 'Accreditation is a formal, published statement regarding the quality of an institution or a programme, following a cyclical evaluation based on agreed standards'. If we analyse that definition, the essential feature of accreditation is evidently the need to pre-determine the requirements that are unanimously regarded as indispensable ('agreed standards') to guarantee the desirable quality levels. It is useful, therefore, to adopt a system of 'cyclical evaluation' based on quantifiable, verifiable and representative indicators. Eventually, the publication of the evaluation outcomes ('published statement') aims to provide an explicit, substantial – and not purely formal – acknowledgement of the qualitative levels ascertained.

The objectives of the Italian system of programme accreditation have been determined as follows:

- reduce autoreferential elements as well as the merely bureaucratic respect of the formal requirements typical of the Italian system centred on the legal validity of study qualifications;
- create a system of clear information and transparent, verifiable guarantees on the qualitative standards of individual study programmes; this objective leads to greater rationality in the choices made by those subjects that apply to the university system from the outside as interested actors: the students and their families who have to decide how and where to invest in education, as well as companies, industries and bodies, both private and public, that need graduates.
- contribute to a competitive system that can operate fairly within a university context that is characterised by a wide and diversified educational offer; actually, this could cause the risk of the distribution of misleading information on very different programmes bearing the same denomination or on very similar courses with different names;
- promote within individual institutions a constant process for quality improvement by sensitising all actors involved to the necessity to verify regularly the consistency of pre-determined objectives, allocated resources, organisational commitment, educational outcomes.
- CNVSU's working plan provided for two subsequent implementation phases. First, a starting phase – pre-accreditation – in which the minimum standards were determined in terms of resources for an institution to offer sound education in the different classes of degree programmes, and, within individual classes, in each programme (number of teachers, their qualification, number and sizes of classrooms, libraries, laboratories, etc.). The second phase of accreditation also had to consider the minimum standards in terms of the qualitative characteristics of the education process and of its outcome in terms of graduates.

2.3 The Approval of Degree Programmes

The procedure for the approval of university degree programmes is articulated in the four phases outlined below.

Phase one – Drawing up of university teaching regulations (RDA)

Individual institutions codify the rules for the organisation of the teaching of their degree courses in the *Regolamenti Didattici di Ateneo* (RDAs). University teaching regulations and their amendments are issued by rectoral decree. Each RDA determines:

- the names and objectives of the degree programmes and the numbers and definitions of the respective classes;
- the general framework of the educational activities to be included in the curricula;
- the number of credits to be attributed to each educational activity;
- the main features of the final examinations for the different degrees.

In conformity with the University's statutes, RDAs also regulate the organisational aspects of the teaching work that is common to all degree programmes. In particular they define:

- objectives, times and modalities for the competent authorities to jointly provide for planning, co-ordination and control of the outcomes of the different educational activities;
- the procedures concerning university teachers' and researchers' annual teaching duties, including integrative activities, guidance and tutoring;
- the procedures concerning the organisation of tests, subject examinations, and the final degree examination;
- modalities for the assessment of students' performance; the grading scales are 18-30 (subject exams) and 66-110 (degree examination); the highest grades (30 and 110 respectively) may be followed by a special distinction *(lode);*
- the evaluation of the initial education of the students to be admitted to first and second cycle degree programmes (CL and CLS respectively);
- the organisation of educational activities for the evaluation of the initial education of students to be admitted to CL as well as those related to additional educational obligations;
- the setting up of a university service for the co-ordination of all guidance activities to be carried out in co-operation with upper secondary schools, and of a tutorial service for all students in each degree programme;
- the introduction of specific organisational modalities for teaching part-time students;
- the procedures to determine the university structure or person responsible for each educational activity;
- the evaluation of the quality of all activities;
- the ways to make both procedures and decisions public;
- the rules for the awarding of joint degrees.

The RDAs also determine the modalities according to which individual institutions must issue the Diploma Supplement. In conformity with the Lisbon Convention of 1997, it registers the main information on the specific curriculum completed by students to obtain that degree.

Phase two – Teaching regulations of degree programmes (RDC)

The teaching regulations of each degree programme *(Regolamento Didattico di Corso di studio*-RDC) are determined by the competent teaching structure in compliance with the RDA, taking into account the respect of freedom of teaching and of teachers' and students' rights and duties. Individual RDCs define the organisation of the respective degree programmes. In particular, each RDC determines:

- the list of curricular subjects with the subject areas of reference; it also specifies all other educational activities and, if necessary, the modular structure of certain subjects;

- specific educational objectives, credits, and those subjects or other educational activities that may be propaedeutic;
- curricula offered to students; the rules are also laid for students to submit their individual study plans, if necessary;
- the typology of available teaching/learning activities, distance education included, exams, and other ways of assessing students' performance;
- provisions regulating attendance, when compulsory.

Phase three — Consultations and approvals

The proposal a new programme must be accompanied by the opinions and supporting motivations of advisory bodies. First, the *University Evaluation Unit* gives its opinion on available resources and their congruence with the objectives of the programme.

The *Regional Co-ordinating Committee* (CRC) then advises on proposals for new programmes. The CRC is made up of the rectors of the universities in the same Region, the president of the Regional Council and a student representative. The CRC also co-ordinates initiatives in such matters as the planning of access to university studies, student guidance and welfare services, advanced professional education, lifelong and recurrent education, and the use of university facilities. Moreover, the CRC co-ordinates relations between the university system and the school system, the education institutions of the Region and the economic and social representatives of that territory.

The *employers'* advice is also compulsory. Universities must consult local organisations representing industries, services and the professions to check the congruency of the educational proposals with the economic needs of the regional territory and the occupational opportunities that may be realistically offered to future graduates.

The *National University Council* (CUN) must check the proposals to determine whether they correspond to the compulsory curricular content according to the decrees approving the various degree classes and the teaching activities provided for by the RDA (university teaching regulations). The CUN may either approve the proposal or ask the university authorities to reconsider their proposal.

Finally, the office for university autonomy and students' affairs of the Ministry of Education (MIUR) examines the proposals, checks their procedural correctness, the compulsory advisory opinions, and issues the decrees approving the respective university teaching regulations.

Phase Four — Approval of RDAs

Once this process of consultations and control has been completed, the rectors of individual institutions approve the university teaching regulations. The RDAs are the internal legal basis to launch new degree programmes.

2.4 Minimum Standards for Accreditation

These are the aims that are agreed upon and the criteria that are adopted in the evaluation of the resources which are regarded as indispensable for the accreditation of new study programmes.

Objectives of the Control of Minimum Standards:

- Ensure all students (and their families) that each university has the resources necessary to support its educational offer.
- Through the dissemination of information to those concerned, guarantee that the educational offer of each institution is transparent and can be compared with that of other universities.
- Check the congruence between the supply, the demand for education, and available resources.
- Allow both MIUR and universities to allocate available resources efficiently through specific incentives and disincentives.

General Evaluation Criteria:

- One credit (CFU) must include approximately eight hours of 'front' teaching.
- Different reference dimensions have been identified with respect to students who enrol in the degree programmes of the various classes.
- Each permanent teacher normally covers 120 teaching hours in the classroom. It is assumed that such a teaching engagement is mainly (50%) for the Laurea programmes (first cycle) – E.g.: 60 hours x CL + 40 hours x CLS + 20 x CDR, master courses, etc.
- The subjects in which available teachers are competent must be consistent with the profiles offered in terms of number of credits assigned to 'basic', 'qualifying', 'similar/integrative' educational activities.
- University facilities (classrooms, labs, etc.) must be adequate for all enrolled students (full-time, part-time).

Variables Used:

- Programmes offered by the Faculties (due to the transformation of already existing programmes and to the setting up of new ones).
- Enrolled students.
- Permanent teachers available in the different subject areas.
- Usable facilities (classrooms, laboratories, libraries).

Calculation of Adequate Student Numbers:

- Full-time students are usually expected to have an average workload of 60 credits per year, corresponding to at least 1500 hours. The institution must guarantee teaching services at least to the amount determined in the decrees that approved the degree classes (generally corresponding to 650-750 hours per year).
- Part-time students are required to engage in an average workload that corresponds to the number of credits for which they enrolled (less than 60). The teaching load for the educational activities reserved for such students (whose proportion will remain limited) is determined accordingly as the proportion of the 60 credits required from full-time students.

Diversified Dimensions of Degree Programmes of the Different Classes:

On the basis of preliminary analyses of the data concerning students who matriculated in 1999-2000, four groups of degree programmes have been identified with reference to the different classes; a referential quantity (maximum student number) and a variability interval have been attributed to each group. This type of evaluation was considered necessary to ensure minimum quality standards of the educational offer. It allows for timely adjustments of overcrowded courses through their diversification or subdivision, and avoiding courses with very few students, which

could cause inefficient use of resources (excess educational offer). A higher number of matriculated students than the maximum value of the interval shows the need to adjust the resources and/or to provide for the subdivision or diversification of the offer. A lower number of matriculated students than the minimum shows a probably inefficient use of resources.

Number of Permanent Teachers:

The minimum number of permanent teachers for a *Laurea* programmes is determined to cover at least 80% of the subjects related to the main types of educational activities (basic, qualifying, similar and integrative).

- one-cycle CLS: 15;
- teachers engaged both in the CL and CLS in the first study programme of the class: 16; in the subsequent programmes: twelve;
- teachers engaged in one programme typology in the first study programme of the class: nine (CL) and seven (CLS); in the subsequent programmes: seven (CL) and five (CLS).

Facilities:

- *Classrooms* must be able to host all students enrolled in each course year for 15-20 hours per week at least (60 CFU x eight teaching hours in the classroom = 480 seat-hours per student). If we calculate teaching periods of 28 (24) weeks a year, it amounts to 17.1 (20) seat-hours per week. Hence, a classroom that can adequately host a full class for 30-40 hours per week during the teaching periods may meet the needs of the students of two classes.
- *Laboratories* must be suitable to give all students the opportunity to use them. Availability of work places must be compatible with the requirements fixed in the teaching regulations of the different programmes or in specific regulations (e.g. in the case of *numerus clausus* programmes such as dentistry, medicine, or veterinary medicine).

Application of Minimum Standards:

Minimum standards have first been applied to first-degree programmes (CL). The total number of teachers needed for the programmes of a Faculty has been determined by the sum of a + b + c:

a = minimum number of teachers for new and transformed CL: Nr. of classes x nine + (Nr. of programmes – Nr. of classes) x seven;

b = minimum number of teachers for one-cycle programmes: Nr. of classes x 15 + (Nr. of classes – (Nr. of programmes) x 15;

c = number of teachers employed in interfaculty programmes.

The number of teachers calculated according to the formula above must be subtracted from the number of teachers available in the Faculty. A result below zero shows a lack of minimum standards, whilst a result above zero shows the presence of teachers who are employable in CLS (second cycle programmes).

Criteria for Special Funding (Innovation):

The following criteria must be checked in the new CL for the allocation of special funds reserved for teaching innovation:

- Timeliness and completeness of procedures for the establishment and launch of the CL;
- Permanent group of teachers mainly engaged in the CL (minimum standards in terms of 'stable' teaching);
- Attractiveness: the number of students enrolled in the first year must be higher than the minimum planned;

- Evaluation of CL quality must be regular, and refer both to organisation and outcomes, according to both national and international criteria;
- Employability and connection with the context: clear definitions of the professional profiles and labour market; consultation with local representatives of the various socio-economic components (industries, services, the professions).
- Setting up of a 'trend committee' for each CL (which includes representatives of the labour market);
- Percentage of contract teachers who, hired from outside the academic world, are competent in specific professional fields;
- Inter-university and international co-ordination; regional planning of educational supply in conformity with the educational needs of the territory; international agreements for the co-ordination and exchanges.

Evaluation Effects:

New CLs (i.e. not originating from previous *Laurea* programmes) must meet minimum quality standards to be included in the programmes that serve the objectives of the 2001-2003 planning and the related funding. If individual universities do not allocate the resources for teaching innovation in conformity with the pre-determined criteria, their quota of ordinary funding may be reduced.

Programmes that lack minimum quality standards are not funded nationally. Universities may decide to abandon them or to run them all the same using their own financial resources. In particular cases, it is also possible to submit an adjustment plan to the CNVSU to reach the minimum quality standards.

Agenda for the Development of CNVSU's Analyses:

- 2001-02: check of compatibility of total number of teachers per faculty with the educational programmes offered.
- 2002-03: check the number of teachers available to ensure the CFU required (basic, qualifying, similar or integrative). Details on the availability of adequate facilities (classrooms and labs).
- 2003-04: check teachers' specialisations in relation to the areas of the subjects offered. Map of available classroom places, of the need for laboratories, and facilities to support students. Advertise the programmes.

2.5 Other Accreditation Systems

Degree Programmes in Engineering

The Council of the Presidents of the Italian Faculties of Engineering has elaborated SINAI (the national system of evaluation and accreditation of degree programmes in engineering). The Council had two main motivations: a) the on-going process for the implementation of university teaching autonomy; b) the academic and professional recognition of qualifications within the European Union.

Regarding the former, as a consequence of curriculum liberalisation, automatic validation of academic and professional qualifications will no longer be possible. Degree programmes belonging to the same 'class' may lead to professional profiles with diverse competences, not only in dif-

ferent institutions, but also within the same university. This may occur even if the degrees bear the same name. Besides, a further consequence of the institutional autonomy process will be greater competition among universities. Hence, the problem of quality assurance becomes extremely important: competition in educational goals of a high standard will be necessary. The implementation of institutional teaching autonomy must therefore be accompanied by a rigorous application of quality control of educational objectives as well as of the structuring process and final product of individual degree programmes.

The second reason why it is urgent to start a national scheme of programme accreditation is the academic and professional recognition of qualifications within the European Union. At the European level the emerging trends in quality assurance and mutual recognition of qualifications in engineering all point to the need for trans-European co-ordination to facilitate recognition and mobility.

The accreditation system of programmes in engineering is based on their evaluation. It is now an internationally shared opinion that a system of accreditation of degree programmes (CdS) must be based on an evaluation of the CdS. We note that evaluation of a CdS may concern either teaching (from the educational objectives of the CdS to the resources and methodologies which allow for their achievement) or organisation (the evaluation must make the application of the procedures devised for the observation and control of teaching and its outcomes credible). Some accreditation systems prefer to evaluate teaching rather than organisation (e.g. ABET); others (in particular those inspired by ISO-9000) prefer to evaluate organisation.

To achieve the highest objectivity and efficiency, the SINAI method integrates evaluation of teaching and of organisation in a single procedure, thus adopting an approach that is original at the international level. Its designers were conscious that the introduction of an evaluation culture in CdS must take place gradually. The procedure would consist in six fundamental steps: production of data, indicators, and parameters; their analysis; drawing up of an annual self-evaluation report; regular control and external evaluation by an independent body; quality improvement measures; observation of effects.

Master Programmes in Business Administration

Accreditation of MBA programmes has been consolidated over the years. The accrediting agency is an independent association, ASFOR (Association for business management training). Established in 1971 to promote a management culture and develop the educational offer in that field, ASFOR now has more than 50 members (higher schools, universities, and other institutions). It participates in the main European projects on the development of management and quality control.

The main objective of its accrediting process and of the granting of the label 'accredited by ASFOR' is to make a clear distinction between those Master programmes which meet a significant set of requirements – to be evaluated globally – and the thousands of programmes offered as 'Master's'. At present, there are some 20 programmes which are accredited by ASFOR. The decision on the significance and solidity of individual programmes is based on:

- check of existence of objective and explicit criteria that the organising institution sends in beforehand (objective and comparable basis for evaluation);
- partial evaluations expressed by each of the bodies involved in the accrediting process.

Through its accrediting operations, ASFOR intends to provide a useful service to the potential clients of master programmes: they may avail themselves of a guidance tool. It is also a service for companies: thanks to the existence of minimum quality standards, they may rely on a more ho-

mogeneous product. Finally, ASFOR aims to support the higher education institutions: when applying for accreditation, they accept to engage in the constant upgrading of their respective programmes.

The minimum compulsory standards for ASFOR accreditation are:

- applicants' selection: applicants' personnel data (age, academic qualifications, previous professional experience at managerial level) and admission procedures;
- teaching: minimum length in hours, study plan (compulsory subject areas), on-the-job projects, academic staff, teaching direction;
- evaluation of participants' performance: expected outcomes must be determined at the beginning of the programme, checked at regular intervals, formally assessed at the end;
- placement procedures: percentage of master's degree holders who are employed at their level within six months;
- programme funding.

Accreditation of Non-State Institutions of Higher Education

Italy has 14 non-State universities, almost one fifth of the present total number of Italian universities. Most have been established recently. In particular, the *Università Carlo Cattaneo – 'LIUC'* at Castellanza, the *Università Campus Bio-Medico* in Rome (1991), the *libera Università degli Studi 'San Pio V'* in Rome, the *Università Vita-Salute San Raffaele* in Milan (1996), the *libera Università di Bolzano* (1997), the *Libera Univerrsità Europea 'Jean Monnet'* at Casamassima and the *Università della Valle d'Aosta* (2000).

In the history of Italian universities, institutional accreditation has taken different forms in relation to the main transformations affecting the university system. In the system in force in the post-war period up to the 1980s, institutional accreditation took place through a process which resulted in the legal establishment of a university or the transformation into State universities of private institutions *(libere università)* or of separate branches of State universities. It is possible to trace in all these procedures some implicit measures of quality assurance: certain minimum standards are required, together with the favourable opinion of the advisory bodies made up of representatives of the academic staff. Those involved in the process included the institution applying for accreditation and the Government, Parliament, the Ministry of Education and the National University Council.

Institutional accreditation changed when university planning on a national basis was introduced with the first four-year Plan of university development (1986-1990). The establishment of new universities lost its former element of spontaneity and became subject to criteria of rational planning and specific provisions to be included in pluri-annual plans for the development of the university system. This new phase involved the Regional Co-ordination Committee, made up of the Rectors of the universities located in the same Region, and CRUI (Conference of the Rectors of Italian universities): they both had to give their opinions on the individual proposals and the university development plan as a whole.

More recently (as from 1996), the legal process of formal approval has been supported by an external evaluation carried out independently of the Ministry of Education by the Observatory for the Evaluation of the University System, which later became the National Committee for the evaluation of the university system (CNVSU). CNSVU examines teaching, research and buildings; the availability of adequate human resources for teaching and administration; and the availability of necessary financial resources and the articulation of the budget. If CNVSU gives a favourable opinion, the next step is the formal establishment of the non-State university. The ju-

ridical instrument that is used is a ministerial decree which simultaneously approves the Statute and the RDA (university teaching regulations), legally recognises the institution, and authorises it to award legal degrees. The process for the accreditation of non-State universities does not only consist in an *ex ante* evaluation. CNVSU also periodically checks the situation *ex post* – that is after the formal approval of the institution and the publication of the related decree – to ascertain consistency of the subsequent development phases of the university with the development plan submitted for approval. Therefore, at later stages, CNVSU checks the existence of the minimum standards in relation to teaching, instrumental equipment, building structures, financial resources, and personnel in order to verify that there is an adequate number of permanent teachers, researchers and technicians, depending on the university, as well as adequate infrastructures and services for all students.

This is CNVSU's way of interpreting its role as the 'guide' of Italian universities towards the evaluation culture. Its methodology of *ex post* evaluation aims to control how far the newly recognised institutions carry out their initial development plan; how consistent a plan they have elaborated for the adjustment of their facilities during the first years of their newly-acquired legal status; time and modalities in which the new institutions succeed in obtaining all the resources needed to carry out a regular teaching and research work at university level; the availability of teachers in the transition phase in relation to those required for their future permanent status.

3. Analysis of the Processes: Actors and Regulations

Following the publication in the Official Journal of the Italian Republic of the legal tool introducing university teaching autonomy (DM 509 of 3 November 1999), universities actively engaged in designing new degree programmes. This took about one year (2000-01). As soon as the institutions officially presented their educational offer for the academic year 2001-02, the procedures for the approval and accreditation of the new programmes started in early 2001. The Ministry of Education (MIUR) decided to set in motion a monitoring process to check if individual universities, when designing the new curricula, complied with all features and requirements they had submitted for approval, and if the degree programmes really met the minimum quality standards agreed upon.

MIUR began by requesting the co-operation of CNVSU, the national committee for the evaluation of the university system (i.e. the Italian Agency for Quality Assurance in university education), but other actors were also rapidly involved in the approval and accreditation procedures.

It seems relevant to point out that, in the present phase of the process, a discrepancy has been observed between the accrediting actors on the one hand and a large component of the academic world on the other. While at the national level the complex legal provisions of programme approval and accreditation have been implemented, at the institutional level there is very limited awareness of what is going on among academics and administrative officers who are not directly involved. Action should therefore be taken to inform the academic and university staff about accreditation and to sensitise them to the need for regular quality evaluation in every day university life.

3.1 The Italian System of Programme Approval and Accreditation: The Actors

The procedures for the accreditation of degree programmes have been agreed upon by a technical team made up of CNVSU, MIUR, CRUI and CNSU.

CNVSU

The National Committee for the Evaluation of the University System (CNVSU) determines the criteria for the evaluation of all universities; draws up an annual report on the evaluation of the university system; promotes the experimentation and implementation of quality assessment procedures, methodologies, and practices. It also carries out technical evaluations of the proposals to establish new State or non-State universities in order to authorise them to award legal degrees. Furthermore, CNVSU defines the data that universities must transmit periodically to the Committee itself. It elaborates and executes an annual plan of external assessment sessions concerning individual institutions or single teaching units. It reports on university planning (level of accomplishment and results), carries out research on the state of university education and student welfare services with a view to implement social justice and democracy in education, and on policies regulating access to university programmes. It carries out studies to define criteria for the redistribution to universities of the balance quota from the total funds for their ordinary financing. At the Minister's request, the CNVSU also carries out preliminary investigations and advisory sessions, defines standards and parameters and elaborates technical legal texts with reference to the different activities of individual universities and to the projects and proposals they submit to the Ministry.

CNVSU is an independent body that interacts autonomously with individual universities and the Ministry of Education, University and Research; it has a technical and administrative secretariat and has a specific place in the national budget.

MIUR

The Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR) was established in 1999. It merged the facilities, financial resources, staff and functions of the former Ministry of Education (MPI) and Ministry for universities and scientific and technological research (MURST). Concerning university education, MIUR plans the development of the university and research systems; is responsible for legislation on general education matters and financing of universities and public research bodies; monitors and evaluates the education system; transposes the EU and international legislation into the Italian education system; deals with European harmonisation and international integration; implements university autonomy; supervises non-university institutions of university level; regulates university access; participates in the activities related to the access to the civil service and regulated professions; ensures a connection between university and school education as well as between vocational and professional training.

CRUI

The Conference of the Italian University Rectors (CRUI) is an association of the rectors of all Italian universities, both State and non-State but legally recognised. CRUI pursues the following goals: a) present the needs of the university system to government and parliament, based on an

in-depth analysis of issues; b) express its views on the university development plan and on the state of university education; c) promote and support university initiatives at national and international level by developing close relations with similar associations within and outside the European Union.

CNSU

The National Council of University Students (CNSU) was conceived as an advisory body of student representatives. It elaborates proposals for the Minister on: a) projects to restructure the university system; b) ministerial decrees on general guidelines for the organisation of degree courses, and providing means and methods to promote student guidance and mobility; c) criteria for the use of the balance quota, i.e. the amount of the total fund for the ordinary university funding which is determined through the re-equilibrium formula. In addition, CNSU: d) elects its representatives at CUN (National University Council); e) may submit proposals on other university matters of general interest; f) draws up for the Minister a national report on student conditions in the university system; g) may interrogate the Minister about facts of national consequence concerning teaching and student life.

CUN

University proposals for new degree programmes are also subject to the advice of the National University Council. CUN is an elective body representative of university autonomy. It formulates proposals and advice on: a) university planning; b) criteria for the use of the balance quota from the fund for the ordinary financing of universities; c) decrees regulating the structure of degree programmes; d) the definition of subject sectors; e) recruitment of university teachers and researchers.

Other Relevant Actors

Italian universities have set up a system for the internal evaluation of their operational management, teaching and research activities, and student welfare services. Availing themselves of comparative analyses of costs and results, all institutions verify the correct use of public resources, research and teaching productivity, the regular development and the fairness of their management. At each institution, evaluation is in the hands of a collegial body, the *university evaluation unit*. Its composition, objectives and functions are regulated by the university statutes: it is made up of five to nine appointed members, at least two of whom are chosen among scholars and researchers who have experience in the field of quality assessment, even if they do not belong to the academic community. University evaluation units are granted the following rights: operational autonomy, access to all necessary information, and dissemination of their proceedings within the legal limits of the respect for privacy. Evaluation units periodically collect anonymous students' opinions on the teaching activities of the respective institutions.

With respect to the new degree programmes, the approval and accreditation process made use of the database on the educational offer of all Italian universities (http://offertaformativa.miur.it), which was constituted to:

- provide telematic support for the elaboration of the new degree programmes, from their planning to ministerial approval and the control of minimum quality standards;

- provide full information on the educational offer of individual universities and on the teaching content of all their programmes (these are described by means of a common standardised grid) in order to guide students in their choice of studies.

3.2 Degree Programmes: From National Definition of Curricula to Institutional Teaching Autonomy

As with higher education systems in some other continental European countries, the Italian university model was based on academic programmes and degrees whose content was rigidly defined by national regulations under the supervision of the State. Because of such centralised control in addition to their academic significance, university degrees also had 'legal validity' and produced juridical effects (e.g. in relation to public competitions for functions in the civil service or for access to regulated professions).

Over the years, national university regulations have evolved considerably; the most interesting phases of their evolution are summarised in the following paragraphs.

In a first phase, the national teaching regulations consisted in a series of detailed rules and tables which fixed the names of the different programmes, their legal length, the number and names of compulsory subjects, the modalities of final degree examinations, and the names of the degrees to be conferred. The most obvious consequence was national homogeneity of degree programmes in the same field and of the same type. The laws that produced these regulations date back to the early 1930s; the act most commonly quoted as the main legislative reference is the decree No. 1652 of 1938.

A partial liberalisation was introduced in 1969 to satisfy the pressing requests from university student associations. Students were allowed to submit individual study plans, which were different from those defined by the teaching regulations, provided they respected the pre-determined number of subjects and chose from the list of subjects actually offered by the respective Faculties. These 'personal' study plans were subject to the approval of the competent Faculty Councils whose members, when making their decisions, had to take into account the educational level and the professional competence to be achieved by those students through the degree programmes concerned.

The national regulations underwent a substantial revision in 1990 with the *riforma degli ordinamenti didattici universitari* (reform of university teaching rules; Law No. 341 of 1990). Its main objective was to restructure all degree programmes on the basis of the greater university autonomy, and promote greater flexibility of the system. In this respect, the 1990 reform:

- sanctioned revision of curricula of all degree programmes, defined criteria for their regular updating, and modified administrative revision procedures;
- introduced the principle that the educational content of a programme is partly optional, meaning that national regulations must determine only general subject areas to be covered; hence, once the minimum standard of homogeneity necessary to preserve the legal validity of individual degrees was granted, much leeway was given to individual institutions;
- pursued the recomposition of knowledge by opposing fragmentation in ever more specialised fields and in ever more subject courses, through the definition of subject areas.

The DM 509/1999 reform had to reconcile two conflicting factors: the institutional autonomy in the definition of university curricula and the need for legal validity of degrees through their reference to national regulations. The *'classe'* was introduced as a solution. The degree programmes of the same cycle and typology which share the same qualifying educational objectives

and the related indispensable teaching/learning activities, independently of the names they are given in individual universities, were organised in groups called *'classi di appartenenza'*. In relation to each class of degree programmes, at national level the qualifying educational objectives were identified along with the teaching/learning activities necessary to achieve them; these activities have been grouped in six main types:

a) basic education;
b) subject fields characterising each class;
c) subject fields connected with or integrative in relation to those characterising the class, with special reference to cultural contexts and interdisciplinarity;
d) educational activities chosen by students;
e) educational activities aimed to check students' competences in foreign languages, and to train them for the final degree examination;
f) other educational activities devised for the students to acquire further competences in foreign languages, information technology and telecommunications skills, abilities to create relations, or any additional skill or competence that can help their transition to the labour market; these activities are also meant to facilitate students' choice of a future profession through direct contact with the labour market (e.g. professional guidance and training periods).

The central authority determines a minimum number of credits that are compulsory at national level for each of the above. Individual institutions autonomously define the content and development of the curricula in a national context.

4. Accreditation and Evaluation Schemes in Relation to Europe and Globalisation: The Italian Debate

4.1 The Debate on the Legal Validity of Study Qualifications

The internationalisation of Italian higher education opened a lively debate on the legal validity of both academic degrees and professional titles. Three main positions have emerged recently in this debate, ranging from the will to abolish legal validity definitively to the belief that it is still necessary and even useful.

Abolitionists

Associations in favour of free education are inclined to repeal the idea of legal validity by doing away with the national teaching regulations and the state examinations that entitle one to exercise a profession. The abolitionist position is based on the belief that educational initiatives arising from the social context need to be carried out freely. This opinion is shared by the representatives of the Italian liberal culture, large groups of the industrial world and some Catholic associations that are active in the educational sector.

Abolitionists generally take the USA as their model, focusing on the lack of state curricular control and on the qualitative competition among educational institutions at different levels. The issue of the value of degrees is left to the evaluation of the labour market rather than of the state.

Realists

The opposite position, although in favour of institutional autonomy, recognises the utility of the legal validity of qualifications and the need to retain it in a large number of sectors. The supporters of this opinion believe that global deregulation is promoted as a mythical device that is capable of eliminating the limitations of the Italian educational system, whereas in reality it would cause more problems than it would solve. The system of legal validity of qualifications has a function in many sectors, for example in the case of programmes for the health-related professions, as well as those for other regulated professions. More generally, it protects consumers. Besides, with respect to university education, the 'realists' maintain that the recent reform of the system has already considerably modified the concept of the legal validity of qualifications.

The realists' position has a wider cultural background. They fear that a generalised and drastic abolition of the legal validity may cause a transfer of powers in educational matters from the state to professional corporations rather than to the labour market. They also see the risk that deregulation may incur high social costs. It would offer greater opportunities to the economically powerful to obtain the most valuable qualifications (or simply the most advertised ones), thus countering values of equality and solidarity. Therefore, in the realists' opinion, a solution which provides for some public control over study programmes and qualifications is more democratic.

Accreditationalists

The third, more recent, position aims at gradually replacing the national teaching regulations by the new practice of programme accreditation for quality assurance. The supporters of the accreditation model associate its adoption with the processes of increasing teaching autonomy and stress its importance to ensure the quality of the educational offer of higher education institutions.

4.2 Italy and the Bologna Process

Italy immediately transposed the principles and criteria of the Bologna Declaration into national legislation. The ministerial decree 509/1999, while defining a number of detailed provisions concerning the university system, also determined the complete reform of its overall framework by dividing it into cycles, establishing first degrees which granted their holders an initial effective transition to the labour market, introducing a credit system based on the ECTS, and adopting the Diploma Supplement. This was in conformity with the two international agreements signed by the European Higher Education Ministers at the Sorbonne and in Bologna in 1998 and 1999, respectively.

In order to promote the Bologna Process further, Italy has modified its national legislation to allow Italian universities to design integrated curricula leading to joint degrees, in collaboration with foreign institutions.[1] Moreover, Italy has considerably developed the internationalisation of its university system thanks to two specific projects launched in 1999 and 2001 respectively.[2] Both are supported financially by the Ministry of Education through a co-financing plan.

These two projects undoubtedly encouraged the internationalisation of universities. They facilitated international programmes for mobility of students, teachers and researchers, which cre-

1 See paragraph 9 of art. 3 of DM 509/99.
2 See art. 7 of Ministerial Decree 313/99, and art. 10 of Ministerial Decree 115/01, respectively.

ated a cultural climate in the universities that initiated and sustained international and intercultural initiatives. This stimulated the process of university self-assessment, as it gave greater opportunities for comparison with university systems of partner countries, the integration of curricula or the introduction of an international and intercultural dimension in teaching and learning activities, in research and in services.

The first internationalisation project resulted in the financing of 178 degree programmes (out of 477 proposals submitted by 68 institutions); the overall financial commitment amounted to ITL 52 billion (almost € 27 million), of which ITL 20 billion (*ca.* € 10 million) came from the Ministry and 32 billion (*ca.* € 16.5 million) from the universities concerned.

As the first project met with widespread approval (witness the number of submitted proposals), the Ministry decided to open a second round for the period 2001-2003. The new proposals, again based on the principle of co-financing, were to meet some more specific requirements. For example, the Ministry favoured inter-university co-operation proposals that aimed at the study of themes related to the Bologna Declaration's common European Area of Higher Education. Examples are accreditation, credits, diploma supplement, assessment, quality assurance, and academic recognition of qualifications. Besides, the proposed initiatives were to be devised to improve the quality of university organisation and its administrative structures from an international perspective and to produce positive effects on the university system. The overall financial commitment of the proposals submitted amounted to over € 22 million, € 15.5 million of which came from the universities concerned.

4.3 Italy and GATS

The principle of the free movement of professional services, which is one of the main GATS objectives, recently found a concrete application in Italy. In the legal process that led to the latest national legislation on immigration of citizens from non-EU countries, some regulations have been approved concerning the recognition of professional qualifications awarded to non-EU citizens by non-EU education institutions and professional bodies (cf. articles 49 and 50 of the Presidential Decree 394 of 3 November 1999). Italy has applied to these professional qualifications the same recognition mechanisms provided for by the EEC General Systems. In so doing, Italy has taken an innovative course aimed at facilitating the free movement of all professionals, independent of their nationality.

5. Other Quality Assessment Activities in Higher Education

Among the various actions for quality assessment in the Italian university sector, two initiatives should be mentioned in particular. They concern student evaluation of both university administrative structures and of teaching methodology.

The 'Good Practice' Project – financed by the National Committee for the Evaluation of the University System (CNVSU) – aimed at improving university management by analysing the effectiveness and efficiency of the administrative activities at different universities. Some specific objectives of the project were to:

- make adequate provisions for management effectiveness in relation to different types of 'clients', both inside each institution (teachers and researchers in particular) and outside each institution (mainly students).
- check the possibility of adopting the same testing model not only to compare the performance of different universities at the same moment, but also to analyse the development of a single university over a certain period.
- carry out the benchmarking not only of performance, but also of processes, to increase the number of available instruments to better understand the reasons for variations in results at various institutions;
- facilitate the dissemination of the project data and conclusions to all university administrative officers by creating a managerial panel for consultation.

The second is the 'Euro-Student' Project – currently run by the *Fondazione Rui*, which also started it in 1995 – consists of a national survey of the study and living conditions of Italian university students. The inquiry, which is updated every three years, is now in its third round. Data are collected by means of a questionnaire which the students fill in anonymously. Students' assessment of university teaching is examined with great care. In this respect, the final report offers interesting information at national level on the evaluation of different teaching modalities (in particular, university lectures), of university teachers' performance with reference to their professional competence, knowledge of their specialisation, teaching aptitude and method, ability to arouse their students' interest, etc.; and about the teaching facilities of individual faculties.

Country Report Latvia

Andrejs Rauhvargers

Acronyms

HEC	Higher Education Council	
HE	Higher education	
HEI	Higher education institution	
HEQEC	Higher Education Quality Evaluation centre	
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science	
LRC	Latvian Rectors' Council	
LSC	Latvian Science Council	
LSU	Latvian Student Union	
AC	Accreditation Commission	The body that takes decision upon accreditation of *programmes*. Its decision is based upon - self-assessment report of the programme - expert assessment reports - information and data regarding the programme suplied together with application for accreditation
PA	programme accreditation	
IA	Institutional Accreditation	
SE	self-evaluation	
AR	accreditation regulations	
LR	licensing regulations	
LHE	law on higher Educational Establishments	
TCCPEE	Tripartite Cooperation Council of professional education and employment	A sub-council of the state-level Tripartite Cooperation Council, established specifically for coordination of the opinions of state, employers and Trade Unions upon development of professional education in Latvia
PECC	Professional Education Cooperation Council	PECC is a cabinet-approved consultative and coordinating body comprising representatives from these ministries in charge of professional education, municipalities, professional education institutions & employers
EC	Evaluation commission (= evaluation expert team)	Expert team formed for evaluation of institution/programme in question

1. Executive summary – Outline of Quality assurance system in Latvia

Reasons for establishing quality assurance system in Latvia. They need to establish a quality assurance system followed from several factors.

Firstly, there was a need felt to review of the whole system after switch from one-tier (mostly five year) programmes to bachelor/master structure.

Secondly, there was a need to evaluate programmes in the private higher education sector that started developing after adoption of the Education law of 1991 in order to establish which of them are of a sufficient quality to be granted the right to issue state-recognized diplomas/degree certificates.

Thirdly, as regards state sector, under tight state budget conditions both state and society were willing to be sure that the budget allocated to state higher education institutions was used for programmes of a sufficient quality.

Finally, a very important factor was the opinion shared by all stakeholders – that at Latvia's reintegration into European and wider international cooperation and with the prospectives to join European Union, Latvia had to work towards ensuring that Latvian degrees/diplomas are recognized and accepted in other European countries both for academic and professional purposes. This was the particular reason why Latvia's regulations for accreditation include a requirement that the expert teams visiting institutions or programmes should include no more than one expert from Latvia. In fact the most common composition of evaluation teams is the following: one Latvian expert, one from the neighbouring countries Estonia or Lithuania (knowing the system quite well but not being involved) and one from Western Europe or, more seldom, North America.

Thus, the accreditation scheme was aimed to be a threshold one – it was designed to evaluate whether the institution or programme meets the minimum quality standards so – recognized diplomas/degree certificates could be issued. As it will be shown in the main text, the work done at HEIs at the self-assessment stage also gave them a much better understanding of how to improve their own quality and thus initiated emerging of internal quality culture in the institutions.

Short history: Starting point in the establishing of higher education quality assurance system in Latvia was the international seminar on higher education quality assurance, organized in Riga October 24-25, 1994 by the Council of Europe. Well-known European higher education quality experts were chosen as speakers at this seminar and participants were selected from the leadership of higher education institutions and high-ranking ministry officials from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The need to establish quality assurance system was widely discussed and it was agreed that Baltic states should cooperate in establishment of the quality assurance systems with a view to establish comparable criteria and procedures in all the three countries and to further use each other's experts in the evaluation teams.

At the end of the seminar Ministers of all the three states arrived and they signed a protocol on Baltic cooperation in higher education quality assurance. For further coordination of actions in establishing of quality assurance systems and recognition of foreign qualifications, the ministers also decided to establish Baltic Higher Education Coordination Committee (BHECC). BHECC included representatives from Rectors' conferences, ministry representatives responsible for establishing the quality assurance systems, and heads of the recognition centres (ENIC/NARIC). Cooperation through the BHECC helped establishing comparable higher education quality assurance systems in the Baltic States using each other's experts in the evaluation

teams visiting higher education institutions and programmes. As well, BHECC drafted a Baltic recognition agreement to complement the Lisbon Convention.

Two stages for recognition of a new programme/institution: licensing and accreditation. Starting any new programme or higher education institution in Latvia is a two-stage process.

First, a *license* is needed to legally start student admission (licensing procedures will be described in Chapter 3). Secondly, two years after starting a programme, it has to be submitted for accreditation.

Accreditation scheme involves *both* accreditation of programmes and accreditation of institutions. As it follows from Accreditation regulations[7], state – recognized documents certifying higher education can be issued after completion of an accredited programme. At the same time, the rights to issue State-recognized documents are only given to these HEI, which are also accredited institutionally.

1.1 Procedure: self-assessment-expert visit-decision-publication[8]

Bodies involved: The body coordinating the accreditation process is the Latvian Higher Education Quality Evaluation centre (HEQEC). HEQEC is a non-profit organization owned jointly by the Ministry of education and Science and higher education institutions. HEQEC itself does not participate in decision-making but it consults HEIs at the stage of drafting self-evaluation report and it organizes the evaluation.

A HEI or a programme compiles its self-assessment report and submits it to HEQEC.

International expert groups: For each particular programme or institution HEQEC establishes an expert group – at least three experts, one from Latvia, (usually) one from Western europe or North america and one from Estoniaor Lithuania. The experts read the report, visit the institution/programme in question and present evaluation report. The further procedure depends on whether a programme or an institution as a whole is being accredited. At *programme accreditation* the decision is taken by the Accreditation Commission, which is established by the Ministry of Education (but includes representatives of different stakeholders). At *institutional accreditation* decision is taken by the Higher Education Council[9].

Assessment checks compliance with educational and professional standards and seeks for international comparison: At both self-assessment and expert evaluation programmes are assessed against standard of academic higher education or standard of professional higher education plus standard of the profession in question. A comparison with at least two similar programmes in the EU member states is required.

Bologna process did not start accreditation in Latvia – it was running already: Accreditation scheme in Latvia started functioning already in 1996. Thus, in 1999 – at the time when Bologna declaration was signed, Latvia already had accumulated some experience in accreditation.

First accreditation round completed, recurrent accreditation can have shortcut:. First cycle of accreditation in Latvia was completed in the fall of 2001. It is likely that in future more emphasis will be made on internal quality culture in the institutions – these institutions/programmes which have their first accreditation and further submit yearly self-assessment reports will in future undergo a simplified accreditation procedure.

2. Higher education system in Latvia

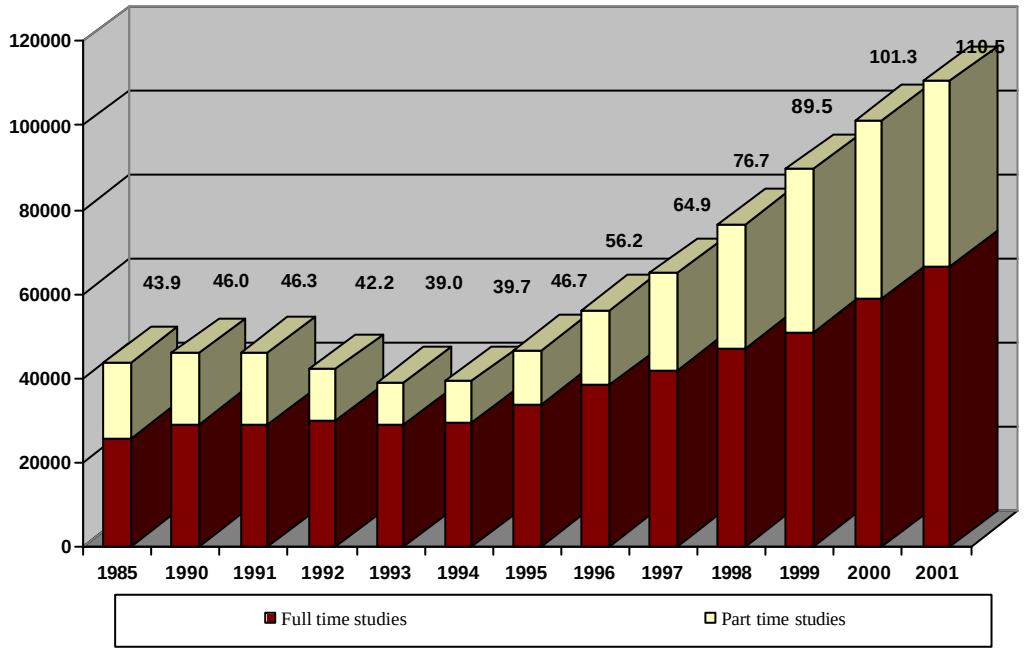
2.1 Size of higher education system (data of the study year 2001/2002)

Students: A sharp increase of student number has been observed since 1994[10].With 2,450,000 inhabitants, the year 2001/2002 student population in Latvia was 110,500 and comprised 32% of the age cohort of 19-24 year olds.

The most popular fields are social sciences – 51% of student population (incl. 28% for business administration and economics), teacher training 16 % and engineering 10%. Humanities and natural sciences each have attracted 7% of students, services 3%, health care 4 %, agriculture 2%.

The number of full-time 66,577 or 60.3% students study full-time and 43,923 or 39.7% part-time.

Figure 1: Dynamics of total enrolment to higher education studies in Latvia in the period 1985-2002



In the academic year 2001/2002 nearly 1.5 times more students studied in professional programmes (59.2%) than in academic ones (40.2%).

12395 students (11.2%) studied in the second cycle towards their Master degrees and 1301 students (1.2%) in doctoral programmes.

Institutions: There are five state universities and six other[1] state HEIs granting doctoral degrees. In the academic year 2001/2002 this group of institutions together accounted for 74952 or 67.8% of all student population, see table 1.

1 The „other" state institutions granting doctoral degrees usually are specialized university level institutions.

Table 1: Enrolment in Latvia's HEIs, 2001/2002 academic year

I. Institutions granting doctoral degrees	
State universities	*Enrolment*
University of Latvia	31727
Riga Technical University	15446
Latvia University of Agriculture	8920
Daugavpils University	4697
Riga Stradina University	2715
Other state institutions	
Jazeps Vitols Latvian Academy of Music	429
Art Academy of Latvia	592
Latvia Academy of Culture	712
Liepaja Pedagogical Academy	4396
Latvian Academy of Sports Education	1480
Police Academy of Latvia	3838
II. Institutions granting degrees below doctoral level and/or professional diplomas	
State institutions	
Latvian Maritime Academy	662
National Academy of Defence of Latvia	377
Rczekne Higher School	3661
Riga Higher School of Pedagogics and School Management	5476
Stockholm School of Economics in Riga	344
Riga Graduate School of Law	75
Banking Institution of Higher Education	2129
The Ventspils College	602
Vidzeme College of Higher Education	575
Private institutions	
Higher School of Social Work and Social Pedagogics „Attistiba"	627
Latvian Christian Academy	539
Turiba Business School	3170
Transport and Telecommunications Institute	1723
Riga International College of Economics and Business Administration	2742
Business Institute RIMPAK Livonia	117
Baltic Russian Institute	5755
Institute of Social Technologies	1398
College of Information Systems Management	894
International Institute of Applied Psychology	718
Riga Aeronautical Institute	418
Higher School of Economics and Culture	775
Higher School of Psychology	264

These nine State institutions which grant degrees below doctoral level, accounted for 13901 or 12.6% students, while the share of the thirteen private institutions was 19,410 or 17.3% students.

2.2 Types of institutions

The types of HE institutions in Latvia have to be interpreted with care. Although the law provides for division of institutions into university and non-university type, it only sets higher requirements for research and staff qualification to university-type HEIs. At the same timed no distinct substantially different features are set for the non-university HEIs. As a result, the two „types" are rather two different stages of development – a non-university HEI can strengthen research activities and thus „grow" into university type. In such a way, the formal division of institutions into „university" and „non-university" types does not coincide with a division into academic and professional HEIs.

At the same time, the law allows any institution to implement both academic and professional programmes – if it can achieve the accreditation for the particular kind of programme.
For the above reasons, we avoid using university/non-university division in this report, rather grouping institutions according to degrees/diplomas they are entitled to confer.

2.3 Main types of degrees/qualifications

Inspired by the Bologna declaration and aimed at a transparent and easily understandable degree system in Latvia, the Law of Higher Educational Establishments was amended in the year 2000. Among other changes, system of degrees/qualifications was modified, mainly through introduction of two-tier bachelor-master structure also in the professional higher education. However, the transition is not yet completed therefore at present both programmes leading to the „old" and „new" degrees/qualifications coexist. We therefore believe that both the degree system before and after the year 2000 have to be mentioned here.

Before amendments of year 2000

In *academic higher education* the two-tier bachelor/master structure was started as of 1991. It must be noted, however, that the bachelor and master degrees were interpreted as purely academic qualifications mainly aimed at preparation of graduates for further research activities. For this reason, the degrees could only be awarded „in a branch of science", i. e. according to a list of branches of science approved by the Research Council. It implies that no interdisciplinary or professionally oriented bachelor or master degrees could legally be awarded. The duration of studies for bachelor degree is set 3 to 4 years, for the master degree – no less than 5 years including bachelor phase.

In *professional higher education* two main types of programmes existed – the relatively short (2-3 year) programmes lead to „first-level professional HE diploma" which can be used as a labour market qualification or, alternatively, credit transfer is possible towards the longer professional programmes. The mainstream, however, were the longer – no less than 4 year programmes. The duration in some disciplines could be up to 6 (medicine) or 5 (dentistry, pharmacy, some other disciplines) years. These programmes lead to diplomas certifying a „Second level professional higher education qualification". With the exception of the programmes in medicine, dentistry and pharmacy, holders of the II-level professional higher education diplomas were not eligible to further studies toward doctoral degrees. In the case if the programme comprised standard for a

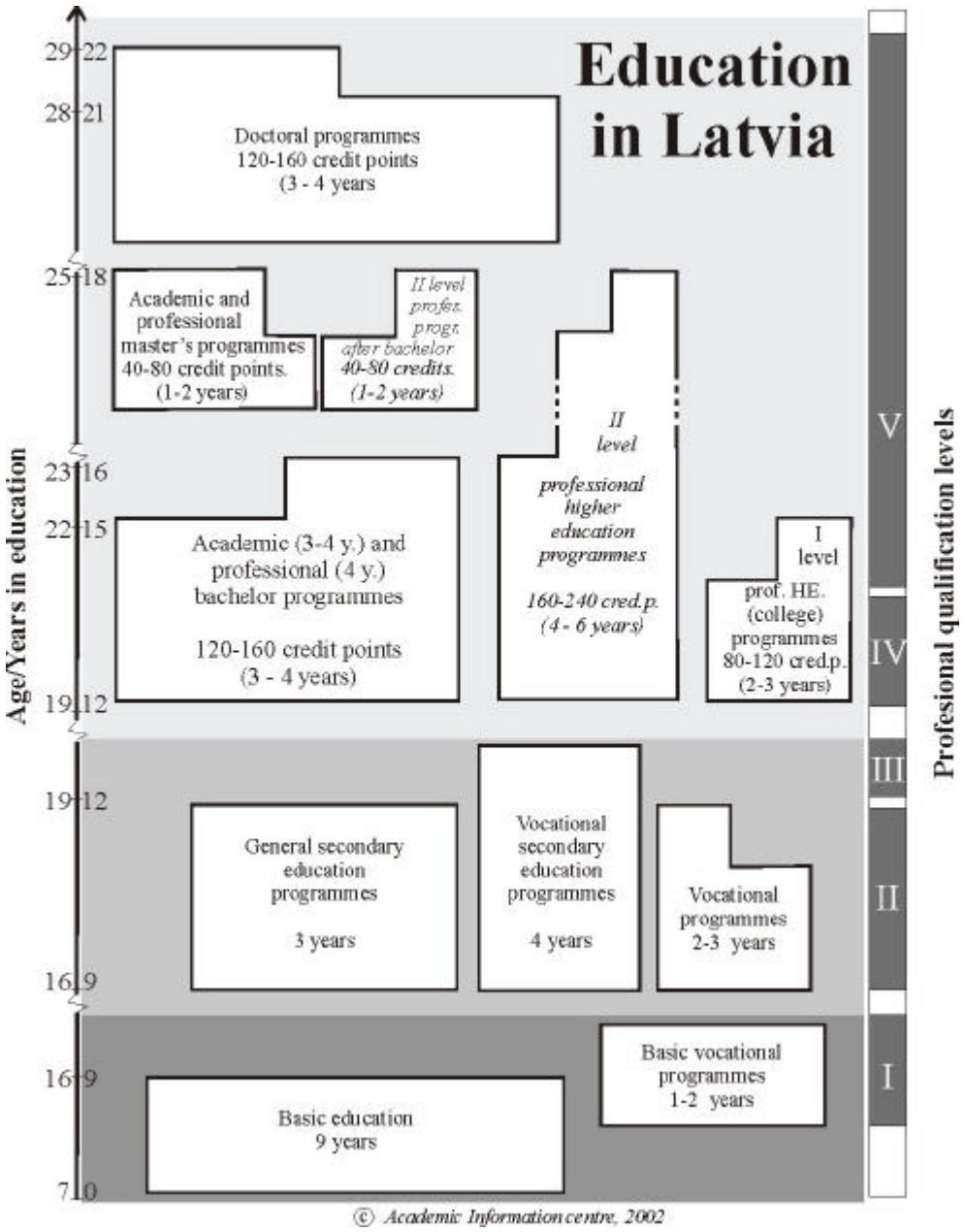
bachelor degree, the holders could be admitted to master studies, although a bachelor degree was not awarded.

Relatively short professional programmes provide professional training to holders of an academic bachelor degree and lead to a professional qualification (see scheme below).

After law amendments of year 2000

Not too much changes were made in the *academic* sector, except that the Standard for academic higher education was adopted which included aspects stimulating employability of graduates.

Figure 2: Diagram of the current degree structure in Latvia's higher education – professional bachelor and master degrees have already been introduced, but the non-degree Second-level professional higher education programmes still exist. The programmes marked with text in italic are supposed to be replaced by programmes leading ton professional bachelor and master degrees



In the professional sector, the Ist level professional qualifications remain as they were, but a structure of professional bachelor/master degrees is introduced[2] to replace the II-level professional HE qualifications. The duration of professional bachelor programmes is set to 4 years in order to allow for substantial practical placement periods.

Professional bachelors and masters are eligible for further studies at master and doctoral level accordingly.

Degree/qualification structure in Latvia at present. Since the new structure will not take over immediately, at present both degree types exist in parallel, see fig. 2.

The diagram in Figure 2 shows structure of degrees and qualifications in Latvia as it is at present. After a full transition to bachelor and master degrees in professional higher education the second-level professional higher education programmes (marked with text in italic on the diagram) should only remain in selected professional fields, in which there is a strong motivation to keep long one-tier programmes and in which such programmes are likely to be kept in a number of other European countries (e.g. medicine and dentistry).

2.4 Transition of students from HE to work

It is a complicated to describe the main employment sector an the labour-market acceptance of the graduates since in the last 10 years the labour market as such has undergone drastic changes. In the first half of 1990's – the first years after Latvia regaining independence a number of typical employment spheres drastically shrunk – the previous industries collapsed and it took several years before new types arose, big state and „collective" farms were transformed into smaller private ones which did not need so many high-level specialists etc. Thus, in the mid-1990s the service and trade sectors were blooming and the main request in the labour market was for highly qualified lawyers, economists and business administrators. That also changed minds of young people so less students were admitted to e.g. engineering, agricultural, medical studies and sciences. Situation radically changed in late 1990's and at present there is a high demand for engineers, programmers and computer specialists, request for agricultural specialists is felt anew and there are indications that country will soon need to prepare a greater number of physicians. This description should be evidence that the debate between higher education and labour market at different periods was strongly influenced by the tendencies of each particular period.

Attempts to improve labour market relevance of graduates are being carried out through introduction of professional higher education standard and evaluation of programmes against the professional standards of the professions these programmes are targeted at. The professional standards are developed by labour market representatives (usually in cooperation with educators) thus labour market gains ownership over study results.

AS regards „professional accreditation" and *effectus civilis* – professional bodies are in charge of issuing professional certificates in medicine, veterinary medicine, pharmacy, architecture, engineering and other regulated professions where the higher education credential (like in EU member states and many other countries) is usually a prerequisite but additional; specialist training is needed before one is issued a professional certificate for independent practice. Unemployment rate f academic or people having higher education in general is smallest among the groups of people with different levels of education.

2 Except medicine, dentistry and pharmacy were long one-tier programmes remain

2.5 Governance and steering of higher education

State steering over higher education is basically carried out through allocation of the (insufficient) state budget – attempts are made to allocate more funding (i. e. to create more state-financed study places) in the priority areas. Steering by the political parties *per se* is not possible – it can only be done through government or parliament. Others – private sector, employers, trade unions etc. carry out their steering through their representation in the Higher Education Council.

3. Accreditation/approval schemes in Latvia

As already mentioned above, accreditation scheme in Latvia scheme involves **both** programme accreditation and institutional accreditation. Now, when the accreditation scheme is fully implemented, both programme and institution should be accredited in order to award state-recognized degrees/diplomas.

Although there are certain differences in the institutional and programme accreditation, it seemed more feasible to describe these two together, since the ownership, stakeholders, as well as procedures and institutions involved are basically the same. The difference begins only when it comes to decision-making – according to Accreditation regulations[11], the decision upon accreditation of programmes is taken by the Accreditation commission, while the decision upon institutional accreditation – by the Higher Education Council.

The licensing scheme will be described separately, see below. It should only be note here that licensing of higher education institutions and programmes was introduced in the early 1990s together with legal provisions allowing to start private higher education institutions and programmes and was initially only applied to private sector. In short, *license* is the legal permission to start admission of students[3]. When a new institution is being established, it has to obtain a license as an institution and one for each programme to be opened. Opening a new programme in an existing institution also requires a license. Thus, license means „right to legally exist" while accreditation means recognition of degrees/qualifications within the national system.

3.1 Accreditation of higher education programmes and institutions

The Range

Types of institution, degree-types, programs, and others covered by accreditation scheme:

The accreditation scheme in Latvia is designed for the whole higher education system. Institutionally it means that the accreditation scheme applies to universities and all other higher education institutions including the relatively new type of institutions named *koledžas (colleges)* in Latvian legislation, which are only entitled to deliver short professionally oriented programmes referred to as „first-level higher professional education programmes" in the Latvian Law.

Geography:

The accreditation scheme involves all institutions country-wide.

3 But it is not a guarantee that the degrees conferred will be state-recognized – that only happens after accreditation.

Function:

The official documents do not specify teaching or research orientation of the accreditation system. However, at establishing the system the main aim was to ensure the quality behind the credentials awarded. Thus, the main emphasis of the process leading to accreditation, in principle, is on the teaching. At the same time, there are three aspects that engage evaluators into assessment of research issues, as well.

Firstly, assessment criteria include assessment of relevance of research carried out by staff and students to the programme in question.

Secondly, qualification of academic staff is one of the important elements to look at when accrediting programmes and institutions. It should also be noted in this regard that no staff positions (including full professors) are „lifetime positions". Thus, every six years staff members go through and an open contest to be (re-)elected. Thus, the staff research activities are assessed individually through the staff selection process.

Thirdly, accreditation scheme also includes doctoral programmes where the procedures inevitably include evaluation of research.

Subjects/disciplines:

All disciplines/subjects are covered by a single accreditation framework and similar procedures. Of course, selection of experts, as well as the criteria used depends on the subject/discipline to be assessed. It should also be noted, that the composition of AC is adaptable to the profile of programme: while most of the AC members are permanent, specialists of the particular professional/subject field are invited to participate in decision making at accreditation of the appropriate programmes.

3.2 The actors and institutions engaged in the creation of the respective scheme?

The accreditation scheme in Latvia was created jointly by the state and higher education institutions. Although not stated in the documents, the need to establish an accreditation scheme for HEIs and programmes arose in the mid-1990's and it had three main reasons. Firstly, major restructuring of higher education programmes that started in the whole higher education system in 1991 and lead to replacement of the former unitary one-tier higher education system with mainly five-year programmes, with a binary higher education system with academic and professional programmes and two-tier degree structure in the academic part of it. Inevitably, this major change raised a question: where have we arrived and are all the new programmes of a sufficient quality? While the higher education institutions themselves were generally convinced that what they had done in terms of reforms lead to good quality, the government and the society were willing to check the quality.

Secondly, the Education Law of 1991 opened possibilities for establishing private higher education institutions and they started mushrooming. While allowing private initiative in, higher education was generally considered as a progressive move, many stakeholders – state, society and also the State higher education institutions were sceptical about the new, usually small, business-oriented private higher education institutions. In fact, when allowing establishment of private HEIs, it was already stipulated in the law that no institution or programme can be opened without a license and that the degrees/diplomas awarded can not be state-recognized before accreditation.

Stakeholders and types of institutions engaged in the accreditation scheme

The main stakeholders of the accreditation scheme are the state (in the person of the MoES) and HEIs themselves (through their shares in HEQEC ownership and representation in HEQEC board, HEC and AC). Employers and trade unions are involved through their representation in HEC and TCCPE and elaboration of professional; standards, students – through their representation in HEC and AC.

MoES: Since accreditation leads to state recognition of degrees/qualifications conferred (and is required to use state Coat of arms on the documents) and since it is the Minister of Education and science who signs the Accreditation papers for programmes and institutions upon a successful accreditation, MoES is in the leading position in the administration of the accreditation scheme.

HEQEC is the body that organizes the whole process. It:

- receives the applications for accreditation of programmes and institutions and checks if the information provided is sufficient,
- consults the HEIs/programmes in compiling the self-assessment reports,
- searches for suitable candidates to act as experts in assessment of each institution/programme and later coordinates the work of experts,
- organizes expert evaluation and receives expert evaluation reports;
- prepares the document package for the decision-making bodies AC (upon programmes) and HEC (upon institutions),
- organizes publication of the accreditation outcomes (decisions, self-assessment and expert reports).

HEQEC is partly owned by the MoES and partly by the higher education institutions. According to a decision made by the Rectors' Council five higher education establishments represent the higher education institutions in HEQEC ownership: four state universities – University of Latvia, Riga Technical University, Latvian Academy of Medicine, Daugavpils Pedagogical University and one private institution – Turiba Business School. According to the statutes, HEQEC board consists of five members. One of them is appointed by the Ministry, one by the University of Latvia and one by Riga Technical University, while two others are elected by the meeting of the shareholders.

AC – Accreditation Commission of study programmes is the body, which takes decision upon the accreditation of programmes.

Accreditation Commission is approved by the minister of education and science. It comprises: three members from MoES; one member from each HEC, LRC, LSC, LSU; one representative of Professional Education Cooperation Council and two representatives from the Tripartite subcouncil on professional Education and Employment. In addition, at accreditation of a particular programme, one representative of the ministry supervising the particular professional field and, if necessary, experts from the professional field in question are added to the Accreditation Commission.

According to the Accreditation regulations[1], the Accreditation Commission:

- considers the application for accreditation of a programme,
- approves experts to be included in the evaluation commission of a particular programme and appoints chairman of the expert team,
- having considered the expert evaluation of the programme and analysis of the information submitted in the application for accreditation, take decisions upon programme accreditation.

HEC is a body, which, among other responsibilities in higher education, has the mandate to take decisions upon institutional accreditation. HEC membership comprises one member from each Latvian Academy of Sciences, Latvian Rectors' Council, Association of Art Higher Education Institutions, Council of College Directors, Latvian Student Association, Latvian Association of Education managers, Chamber of Trade and Industry, Latvian Employers' Confederation, Trade Union of Education and Science Employees, and a representative of higher education institutions established by local governments and other legal entities. Minister of Education is a member of HEC *ex officio.* Head of MoES Higher education and research department participates in all HEC meetings but doesn't have a voting right.

HEC has the following functions in the accreditation scheme:

- it may recommend experts for the evaluation team of a particular HEI,
- having considered the expert evaluation of a HEI and analyzed the information submitted in the application for accreditation, HEC takes decision upon accreditation of the HEI.

Evaluation commission: Evaluation commission is an ad-hoc expert team appointed for assessment of a higher education institution or a programme. Each evaluation team should consist of at least there experts. Only one of the experts can be from Latvia, the other two should be from abroad. Foreign experts are sought upon recommendation by the body responsible for higher education quality assurance in the respective foreign country. In practice, most evaluation teams comprise one expert from Latvia, one from Estonia or Lithuania and one from Western Europe or North America.

The functions of the Evaluation commission in the accreditation scheme are the following. Evaluation commission:

- considers the self-assessment report and other information submitted by the HEI/programme,
- visits the HEI/programme and analyzes the functioning of the HEI/programme in situ,
- prepares individual expert evaluation reports,
- formulates an overall opinion in the name of the expert team
- submits the opinion and the individual expert reports that are forwarded to AC (programme accreditation) or HEC (institutional accreditation).

Ownership, initiative control and review of the accreditation scheme

Introduction of the accreditation scheme in 1996 was initiated by the LHE adopted at the end of 1995 that, in turn, was a result of lengthy discussions and consultations between the state and higher education institutions. The scheme is owned jointly by state and HEI. While more decision making power still is on the state side, the ownership from HEI side is embodied through both shares in the capital and participation in the board of HEQEC and through participation in all decision making bodies upon accreditation.

Accreditation is embedded into the legislation as a planned process – after the first accreditation round completed in 2002, each programme and institution has to be accredited anew every 6 years. Initiating of accreditation is only possible in cases when there is a feeling that a programme or an institution does not perform according to standards and expectations. In these cases, according to AR, HEC has the right to propose an extraordinary accreditation and the minister of education and science then decides whether to initiate an extraordinary accreditation.

While the laws and regulations do not provide details on how the accreditation scheme should be controlled, the practice is the following. First of all, the Director of HEQEC regularly reports to the HEQEC board – (but that means – to representatives of ministry, HEC and HEI). Also,

the Higher Education Council and the Rectors' Council periodically invite HEQEC leadership to discuss the results and possibly constraints of the accreditation process.

Because of several reasons, the scheme has been intensively discussed throughout the end of 2002/beginning of 2003. The first accreditation round had been completed. On the one hand, the accumulated experience allows indicating, in which aspects amendments of the regulations should be feasible. It was also felt that the first accreditation round has helped HEIs to understand how they can better manage their own quality and this lead to establishing simplified procedures for the repeated accreditation. Finally, preparing for the Berlin ministerial in terms of Bologna process, Latvian higher education wanted to establish what it has reached in quality assurance and how to move forward. The above discussions lead to preparing of new Accreditation regulations in the end of 2001 and to new practical guidelines and recommendations for the experts approved in the beginning of 2003.

Customers and stakeholders

Indeed, apart from academia, the accreditation scheme also affects several other groups of stakeholders.

Students and (indirectly) *parents:* As the accreditation results are directly related to the state-recognition status of the degrees/qualifications conferred, they also have several other effects.

Financial effects. Only when a programme/institution is accredited, the students are entitled to receive state loans – the „study loan" for covering tuition fee (in these cases if it is charged), nor the „student loan" aimed at social needs of a student. The same goes for state scholarships (which are very little in Latvia).

Administrative effects: For male students the obligatory military service can be postponed while studying in accredited programmes (and they can be fully exempted of military service if awarded a recognized master's degree).

Employment effects: In these cases where employment requirements include posing of a higher education degree/diploma, the latter should come from an accredited institution/programme, otherwise it has no effect. In practice, even in non-regulated professions and even private employers more and more often wish to be sure that applicant pose a state-recognized.

Employers and trade unions: Introduction of the accreditation scheme has clarified the issue of „who is who" in higher education to the employers and trade unions allowing making distinction between trustworthy education providers and some others active on higher education market. Introduction of accreditation scheme has also given new tasks and responsibilities to both groups – according to the law, employers and trade unions (the latter at least through the TCCPEE) should actively engage in elaboration of professional standards that, in turn, are further used to draft educational standards and further to develop professional higher education curricula.

3.3 Rules and regulations

General regulations

According to the LHE (article 9), state-recognized degrees/diplomas can be awarded after accreditation of both the HEI and the programme in question. The law also states that accreditation is carried out according to Accreditation regulations[1], approved by the Cabinet of ministers and that it is organized by the MoES. HE programmes are to be accredited once in every six years.

Accreditation is certified by an Accreditation paper signed by the minister. At the and of each academic year a list of these higher education institutions, which are entitled to issue state-recognized HE credentials (indicating all the accredited programmes in each of these institutions) is published in the official government newspaper „Latvijas Vestnesis").

Legal regulations

The main document regulating the accreditation scheme of programmes and institutions is the „Regulations for accreditation of higher education institutions" – Cabinet regulation No 442 adopted October 16, 2001. This document sets rules and procedures for organization of both programme and institutional accreditation (please see detailed description in the Chapter 2.3.4. Formal stages of the procedure).

Accreditation regulations are accompanied by two other documents approved at lower level – the „Guidelines for the accreditation of higher education institutions and programmes" and the „Questionnaire for the evaluation experts".

The standards for HE programmes are laid down in two other Cabinet regulations – Standard for academic higher education[12] and standard for professional higher education[13].

Formal set-up of financing

According to pp 52-56 of AR, financing of accreditation scheme is organized in the following way.

Expenses for the assessment of HEIs and programmes are covered by HEIs themselves – state HEIs cover these expenses from the overall budget funds they receive from the state (no funds are earmarked for accreditation costs, though) while private HEIs cover accreditation costs from their income from tuition fess.

Methodology for calculation of accreditation costs as well as prices of services comprising the accreditation package is approved by the minister of education and science. Basically, the accreditation costs include costs of expert evaluation, maintenance costs of the HEQEC[4], as well as the costs for publication of accreditation results.

Breakdown of costs for each particular accreditation case is based upon the above methodology and prices and it is coordinated with the HEI/college in question. The costs should be paid by the HEI before the evaluation commission starts its work.

Formal stages of the procedure and their duration

Accreditation procedures include the following formal stages[5]:

- Preparation of application for accreditation. This phase includes preparation of all the information that has to be supplied together with the application form and drawing up self-assessment report. Timing of this phase depends solely on the HEI itself.

4 EQEC is a non-profit organization. It is funded only through the fees for accreditation, no state funds are directly allocated for its maintenance.

5 NB: A HEI can apply for accreditation as a whole when at least 50% of its programmes have been accredited. Steps of procedures are identical for programme accreditation and institutional accreditation except that the decision for institutional accreditation is taken by the HEC and not AC.

- Within 30 days after receipt of an application, HEQEC checks whether the information in the application complies with the requirements set in AR. Should some of the information listed in AR be missing, HEQEC requests to supply this information and the HEI should supply it within 1 week.

Once all the necessary information is supplied, the application is accepted for further stages of procedure.

The further procedure includes the following steps see details in chap. 2.4.1.):

- An expert team (called „evaluation commission" in the Latvian legal documents) is formed for the assessment of the programme/institution in question[6].
- Expert team studies the self-evaluation report and other information submitted.
- An expert visit is organized to the HEI/programme in question.
- Experts submit their individual assessments and compile an overall assessment report in the name of the EC.
- Assessment report is discussed at an open conference,
- After the conference the expert team finalizes the evaluation report and submits it to AC or HEC as appropriate.
- HEC or AC as appropriate takes decision upon accreditation of the HEI or programme as appropriate and submits its decision to the MoES.
- Minister of Education and Science issues an accreditation paper.

Formal duration of the stages of the processes

Checking whether the information regarding HEI and programme as such complies with the data available at the State Enterprises Register and other state institutions takes no more than 2 weeks. Checking the application for accreditation and whether all the necessary information is provided, takes no more than 30 days and it is done in parallel to the above checking of formal data on HEI.

According to p. 20 of the AR, decision upon accreditation should be taken within six months after receipt of the application the period for checking the compliance of information to the requirements of AR and for receiving the missing information from HEI is not included in the above six-month period).

In exceptional cases minister of education and science may issue a motivated ordinance to prolong the particular accreditation case, but not longer than for another six months.

Formal rules for objection regarding the procedures

There are no rules specified for objection against the procedures. In practice it means that, since all the bodies involved in the accreditation scheme are subordinated to the minister of Education and Science in one way or another, an appeal can be submitted to the minister. In practice, it will be the legal department of the MoES that will have the duty to verify whether the procedures have been carried out as laid down in the legal regulations. In case of further dissatisfaction with the results, the HEI can apply to court.

6 Except accreditation of first- level (short-cycle) professional higher education programmes and colleges entitled to provide these programmes only. In this case participation of foreign experts is not mandatory.

Formal rules for information distribution regarding the outcomes of the process

There are two formal regulations regarding the publishing of results:

- according to Art. 9 of the LHE at the and of each academic year a list of these higher education institutions, which are entitled to issue state-recognized HE credentials (indicating all the accredited programmes in each of these institutions) is published in the official government newspaper „Latvijas Vestnesis")
- in case if accreditation of a HEI or programme is annulated, according the p.45 of AR, the information about it is to be published in both the government newspaper and in the educational newspaper „Izglitiba un Kultura".

In practice, the information is published much wider, see below.

Formal links between accreditation and approval of other subsequent decision making processes

The main formal link is between accreditation and recognition of the degrees/qualifications awarded. In order to be entitled to award state-recognized degrees/qualifications both the programme and the HEI should be accredited. State-recognition (or, more precisely, non-recognition) brings more consequences. Only when a programme/institution is accredited, the students are entitled to receive both kinds of state loans – the „study loan" for covering tuition fee (in these cases if it is charged), nor the „student loan" aimed at social need s of a student. Male students are exempt from the obligatory military service while studying in accredited programmes. There are no formal links between the accreditation status of a programme in a state – sector HEI and the state-funding allocated for that programme. In practice, however, consequences could be expected.

3.4 How the formal rules actually implemented

Practical application of procedures

Preparation of application and self-assessment report usually takes 3-6 months. It is recommended that a Steering Committee (and, if need be, sub-committees) are established for the self-evaluation of HEI or programme.

At programme accreditation the self-evaluation report should reflect on the following main issues:

- description of the curriculum, courses, lectures, seminars and classes, practical placements, indicating which components are included in the compulsory, elective and optional parts of the programme, indication the workload; a comparison of the programme in question with at least two similar programmes of recognized HE institutions in EU member states;
- assessment of the programme vs.:
  - (as appropriate) Academic education standard[3] or to the Professional higher education standard[4] plus the professional standard of the targeted profession;
  - results of employers' surveys and
  - interests of the Latvian state and national economy.
- overall information on the programme: its aims and objectives, organisation of studies and recent changes in it; practical realization of the programme – teaching methodology, research activities of the staff and their effect upon teaching, involvement of students in re-

search projects; student assessment methodologies and their results; information on students, results of surveys among students and graduates, participation of students in improvement of studies; information on staff, its academic qualifications, involvement on projects, fields and results of research, staff selection, renewal, development and upgrading policies; funding sources and infrastructure; cooperation with: employers, similar programmes in Latvia and abroad, information regarding the staff international teaching and research activities and usage of foreign guest lecturers; international student exchange; development plans of institution/programme.

At institutional accreditation, in addition, information on governance structure and internal quality assurance mechanisms; student selection criteria should be provided.

Procedures after an application for accreditation is submitted:

- Within 30 days after receipt of an application, HEQEC checks whether the information in the application complies with the requirements set in AR. Should some of the information listed in AR be missing, HEQEC requests to supply this information and the HEI should supply it within 1 week.

Once all the necessary information is supplied, the application is accepted for further stages of procedure and the HEI is informed about that.

Further steps of procedure:

- An expert team is formed and approved by HEC (institutional accreditation) or AC (programme accreditation).
  The expert team includes *no less than 3 experts – one from Latvia, and the rest from abroad*[7]. Usually one of the foreign experts is chosen from an EU country or, more seldom, North America, and one from Estonia or Lithuania. Such a composition of expert team allows pursuing the following goals:
  - evaluation Latvian programmes and institutions in a broader European context (particularly the „western" expert),
  - looking at Latvian programmes/institutions from outside but with a good knowledge of Latvian system and having similar developments and problems at home (particularly the Baltic expert),
  - ensuring assessment against Latvian standards and regulations (the Latvian expert)
- Expert team studies the self-evaluation report and other information submitted.
- A 2-day expert evaluation visit is organized to the HEI/programme in question to give the experts possibility to assess the real situation at the HEI. In some cases AC or HEC can decide to include additional participants to the team visiting the institution approving each of them individually.
- Experts submit their individual assessments and compile an overall assessment report in the name of the evaluation commission[8].
- The overall assessment report is discussed at an open conference with representatives of the staff and students of the HEI in question, employers and representatives of MoES[9], AC and HEC, as well as other parties concerned.
- After the conference the expert team finalizes the evaluation report and submits it to AC or HEC as appropriate.

7 Except accreditation of first-level (short-cycle) professional higher education programmes and colleges entitled to provide these programmes only. In this case participation of foreign experts is not mandatory.

8 See chap. 2.4.2 for actual assessment criteria.

9 And line ministries, if necessary

- Upon considering the information submitted in the application and the report of evaluation commission and individual experts[10], HEC or AC takes decision upon accreditation of the HEI or programme as appropriate and submits its decision to the MoES.
- Minister of Education and Science issues an accreditation paper to the institution as a whole and one to each accredited programme.

Practical application of legal regulations

Part of the legal regulations – the steps of procedures, timing, composition of expert teams, etc. are not subject to interpretation or different practical application.

As regards the practical regulations for the expert evaluation, the criteria used in practice are the following[11]:

Criteria applied at assessment of programmes:

- clarity, attainability and provability of goals and objectives.
- compliance with the Latvian educational and professional standards EU requirements[12], international recommendations (where they exist).
- compliance with the principles formulated within the motion towards European higher education area, including a comparison with at least 2 programmes in EU member states,
- teaching staff professionalism and qualification,
- clear formulation of expected learning outcomes, problem solving, usage of contemporary teaching methodologies and techniques,
- student guidance, counselling, and motivation,
- knowledge, skills and attitudes assessment its objectivity and use of results in further development of study process,
- democratic principles in programme administration, clearly defined relations among administration, staff and students;
- cooperation with other HE and research institutions, staff and student exchange,
- methodological, informative and technical support,
- research activities of staff and students – their relevance in general and in relation to the programme in question;
- internal quality assurance – regularity of strengths and weaknesses analysis, functioning of an internal quality enhancement system,
- success of graduates in finding jobs relevant to programme acquired,
- possibilities to continue studies.

Criteria applied at assessment of institutions[13]:

- clarity, attainability and provability of goals and objectives of the HEI, their link to tasks of the HEI in national setting, research needs, aims and objectives of staff, interests and needs of students;
- admissions system that ensures equal conditions for all, social conditions of students, guidance and counselling, motivation, possibilities for extracurricular study activities,
- research activities of students as part of the study process, awards and special scholarships,

10 In principle, the decision making body – HEC or AC can visit the HEI to clarify additional issues in situ.
11 HEQEC recommendations to the evaluation experts
12 In case of regulated professions
13 Note that an institution can only apply for institutional accreditation once at least 50% of programmes are already accredited

- international cooperation, usage of exchange programmes and foreign guest lecturers, student and staff mobility, possibilities for student practical placements in Latvia and abroad,
- compliance of staff qualification with the requirements set in legislation,
- relevance of research directions, research coordination and cooperation with partners in Latvia and abroad, involvement of the research staff of the HEI in studies,
- functioning of autonomy and democratic principles, student involvement institutional governance and work organization, internal system for staff selection, renewal and qualification enhancement,
- presence of an information system relevant to realization of higher education, technical support and presence of qualified technical staff,
- presence of funding required for realization of the HEIs long-term development plans,
- functioning of a permanent internal quality enhancement system, development and discussion of long-term development plans,
- prospectives of the graduates in the labour market,
- possibilities for continuation of studies.

Constrains and handling of financial matters

Effects of using international experts: Having assessment by international experts has its benefits and its constraints.

The benefits of using international experts are evident (and they are the reason why Latvia decided to and is still ready to pay the costs and overcome difficulties): – „outside view", international credibility of Latvian accreditation, „European dimension", strong arguments for national debate with employers, parents, other stakeholders and society at large, finally, reducing „small country effects" where the higher education system is strongly interrelated and therefore finding for each field a competent yet independent expert free from pre-assumptions is quite an issue.

There are however some possible constraints as well. Although in majority of cases the experience has been positive, it might be interesting to other countries thinking of introducing evaluation by foreign experts, to see on Latvia's experience, what difficulties should be foreseen:

1. High costs – even if enthusiastic foreign colleagues are ready to work as experts receiving fees they consider symbolic, paying the travel and subsistence costs plus expert fees is a heavy burden to the HEIs – no difference, state or private ones. The costs for accreditation in the state institutions is funded from the state budget allocated to the institutions, however, in conditionals of an overall underfunding of HE system, there could be other ways of using the funding for quality enhancement. In case of private institutions, at the end, the costs of accreditation are anyway covered from tuition fees paid by the students.
2. Language issue. Due to usage of foreign experts, it is required that all the main documents submitted with the application for accreditation must also be translated in English – adding workload and costs to the institution. The need to speak in a foreign language during the assessment visit and at the conference following it adds difficulties – not all staff members are supposed to speak English even if they might be fluent in another foreign language. Quite clearly, usage of a foreign language when being assessed adds probability of having misunderstandings.
3. Knowledge of Latvian system. It is quite clear that in each country there is its own balance among educational, employment and administrative system which is based upon a long tradition and where the labour market and education system know each others peculiarities quite well and have (more or less) adapted to each other. It is not easy for a foreigner to

immediately grasp the features even of a different education system alone but still, misunderstandings happen every now and then. It has to be admitted that there is a lot of positive experience when the same experts have been invited repeatedly.

4. Measuring against national standards and legal regulations. This issue is partly related to the previous one. It is essential that the expert team has t have a good knowledge regarding the requirements laid down in Latvian legislation and educational standards – something that is again not easy if coming for the first time. In practice it sometimes means that the Latvian expert on the team has to verify the compliance with Latvian standards and regulations alone. So far, so good, but unfortunately it can also lead either to diverging views inside the expert team or in extreme cases to disagreement between the expert evaluation report and the decision taken by the AC or HEC.
5. The last point is very subjective yet interesting to admit. In some individual cases the judgements of foreign experts can be over-forgiving or over-demanding, in both cases lead by their good will. The former option has been observed more frequently and needs comment. It basically is a concept that „the programme/HEI is on the right way, let's accredit it" – ignoring that it does not yet comply with the requirements and standards. In these cases sometimes the final decision made by AC has been opposite to the

Balance between international and national assessment: It is important to admit at this point, that, particularly because of the international composition of the expert teams which is so important and relevant in many aspects, the decision – making bodies often have to verify the compliance of the AC and HEC have to be sure that

An in-depth analysis of the goals, gains, expenses and procedures of accreditation is also needed. The requirement that a professional programme can only be started if a standard is in place for the profession in question should be revised. Taking into account that a professional standard is elaborated and approved outside higher education sector, its absence should not prevent starting a study programme, at least not one funded by the study fees of students.

Problem of standards at accreditation of professional programmes: Since 2000 the Latvian legislation requires that at accreditation of professional HE programmes, their compliance to the professional standards is sought. The professional standards, in turn, have to be elaborated by the labour market side (in cooperation with educationalists). The problem is that the labour market is slow in developing these standards. As a result, if a HEI wants to present a professional HE programme targeted at a particular profession for accreditation, but there is no professional standard approved yet, in fact the HEIs themselves have to take initiative, organize working parties, and help labour market representatives elaborating the professional standard. It is self-evident, that such situation I an additional burden to HEIs and that it also causes delays in accreditation.

Actual shortcuts and prolongings of the stages of the procedures

Shortcuts:

Faster recurrent programme accreditation possibilities: In Latvia, a successful accreditation means accreditation for 6 years. After the first accreditation round was completed, it has been decided that the recurrent accreditation can be simplified, provided that there are no substantial changes[14] in the programme and that a self-assessment report has been submitted each year. The simplified procedure includes analysis of the self assessment reports and site visit by one expert, after which the AC takes a decision.

14 The substantial changes are defined flexibly enough to allow for further development of the programme

Delays:

Problem of standards at accreditation of professional programmes: Since 2000 the Latvian legislation requires that at accreditation of professional HE programmes, their compliance to the professional standards is sought. The professional standards, in turn, have to be elaborated by the labour market side (in cooperation with educationalists). The problem is that the labour market is slow in developing these standards. As a result, if a HEI wants to present a professional HE programme targeted at a particular profession for accreditation, but there is no professional standard approved yet, in fact the HEIs themselves have to take initiative, organize working parties, and help labour market representatives elaborating the professional standard. It is self-evident, that such situation I an additional burden to HEIs and that it also causes delays in accreditation.

Technical delays because of expert evaluation. Technically, there have been delays in some cases when foreign experts left the country without preparing their assessment reports – and then it has taken a long time before the reports were actually received. This has led to a practice that experts are always urged to prepare their reports at the end of in-site visit.

Actual time frames for the procedures

The actual time frames for the procedures do not differ much from the official timeframe. There is one exception to it – in practice, there have been delays in case of professional programmes because of lacking professional standards – see previous chapter. Legally, however these are not seen as delays – it formally is just time before a missing document is submitted. In practice, of course, this has been an unpleasant experience for HEIs.

Actual handling of rejection of procedures

In practice, all procedural problems are usually solved without formal applications to the minister. Issues are settled in discussions between the programme/institution concerned, HEQEC (which actually is the body that should help HEIs settling organizational problems of accreditation), sometimes representatives of MoES or HEC

Actual information distribution of outcomes of process

Actual information distribution takes place in the following ways.

1. The compulsory actions foreseen in legislation
   - Publication of lists of accredited programmes yearly before the beginning of admission to HEIs in
     a) the official government newspaper „Latvijas Vestnesis”,
     b) educational newspaper „Izglitiba un kultura”.
   - In case if accreditation of a programme or institution is annulated – publication in the official government newspaper within 2 weeks.

2. Additional information distribution
   - Publication of both the programme and institutional evaluation reports and decisions by AC and HEC in the educational newspaper,
   - Publication and regular updating of all the above information in the HEQEC homepage http://www.aiknc.lv

3.5 Licensing of HE programmes

In Latvian HE system licensing of a programme means granting a right to start student admission with no guarantee that the qualification awarded at the end will be state-recognized.

The Range

Types of institution, degree-types, programs that are part of the licensing scheme
License is required to start a new programme in the whole HE system regardless the institution type or its ownership (state or private).

Geography:
Licensing covers programmes countrywide.

Functions:
Basically licensing is oriented to teaching and resources for it. However, checking of the qualification of academic staff includes looking at their research biographies.

Subjects/disciplines:
All disciplines/subjects are covered.

The Actors engaged in the creation of licensing:
Licensing was introduced by the state.

Stakeholders and types of institutions engaged in licensing:
The stakeholders of the licensing scheme are the state (in the person of the MoES) and HEIs themselves (through delegating representatives to the licensing commission).
MoES: Organizes work of the licensing commission and issues licenses.

Ownership, initiative control and review of the licensing:
The scheme was initiated and is own by the state. It was initiated in the Education law of 1991 simultaneously with allowing for establishment of private HEIs. Society felt a need to have an initial check whether the new programmes established by the mushrooming private institutions have sufficient background for providing a relevant higher education. In the LHE of 1995 licensing was foreseen also for newly established programmes in state institutions – in order to prevent doubling and to ensure better utilization of state funding. To ensure that state and HEIs share control over the scheme, licensing commission is composed of 2 members from MoES and one from each HEC, RC and Association of private HEIs.

Customers and stakeholders:
Students and parents get the knowledge which programmes are legitimate, but also – if a programme has a license alone, that before accreditation there is still a risk that the qualification awarded at the end may not be recognized.

3.6 Rules and regulations

Legal regulations:

The main document regulating the licensing is the „Regulations for licensing programmes delivered by higher education institutions" – Cabinet regulation No 3 adopted January 3, 2002[15]. This document sets rules and procedures for organization of licensing. Accreditation regulations are accompanied by two other documents approved at lower level – the „Guidelines for the accreditation of higher education institutions and programmes" and the „Questionnaire for the evaluation experts". The standards for HE programmes are laid down in two other Cabinet regulations – Standard for academic higher education[14] and standard for professional higher education15.

Formal set-up of financing:

None

Formal stages of the procedure and their duration:

Licensing procedures include the following formal stages:

- Preparation of application for accreditation. This phase includes preparation of all the information that has to be supplied together with the application form and drawing up self-assessment report. Timing of this phase depends solely on the HEI itself.
- Decision should be taken within 30 days after receipt of an application together with all the documents required.

Formal rules for objection regarding the procedures:

Same as for accreditation – no formal rules, appeal can be submitted to the Minister and an answer should be received within 2 weeks. In case of further dissatisfaction with the results, the HEI can apply to court.

Formal rules for information distribution regarding the outcomes of the process:

No formal regulations regarding the publishing of results. In practice, list of licensed programmes is published I the educational newspaper before admissions period to HEIs begin and it is also available from the webpage of HEQEC http://www.aiknc.lv.

Formal links between licensing and approval of other subsequent decision making processes:

Upon obtaining a license HEIs are allowed to start student admission.

3.7 How are the formal rules for licensing actually implemented

Practical application of procedures

Preparation of application and self-assessment report, in fact, follow the same scheme as later for accreditation. The difference is that at licensing it is required to demonstrate that the HEI/programme is capable to reach the achievements/indicators that become mandatory at accreditation.

Thus the self-evaluation report for licensing should also reflect on the following main issues:

15 And replacing the previous regulations of 1995.

- description of the curriculum, courses, lectures, seminars and classes, practical placements, indicating which components are included in the compulsory, elective and optional parts of the programme, indication the workload; a comparison of the programme in question with at least two similar programmes of recognized HE institutions in EU member states;
- assessment of the programme vs.:
  - (as appropriate) Academic education standard[3] or to the Professional higher education standard[4] plus the professional standard of the targeted profession;

Procedures after an application for accreditation is submitted:

- Within 30 days after receipt of an application MoES checks whether the information in the application complies with the requirements set in AR. Should some of the information listed in AR be missing, MoES requests to supply this information and the HEI should supply it within 1 week (the time while missing information is supplied doesn't count).
- Upon considering the information submitted in the application LC takes decision.
- MoES issues a license to the programme.

Practical application of legal regulations

In the following cases LC can refuse a license:

- documents submitted do not comply with requirements of legal acts and regulations,
- staff qualification requirements are not met,
- technical and informative support is not sufficient,
- the content and delivery mechanism of the programme is not elaborated sufficiently.

Constrains and handling of financial matters

Difficulties to quantitatively prove disadvantages and meeting or not meeting criteria at the situation when the potential to fulfil requirements rather than their actual fulfilling is required. This often leads to difficult discussions with license seekers. At the same time it is a clear requirement from students, parents and society at large not to allow functioning of programmes that do not lead to decent qualifications.

Actual shortcuts and prolongings of the stages of the procedures

Shortcuts:

None

Delays:

Same as for accreditation – problem of profession standards at licensing professional programmes. Since 2000 the Latvian legislation requires that at licensing of professional HE programmes, it is sought if the programmes can satisfy requirements of the standard of the profession it is targeted at. The professional standards, in turn, should be elaborated by the labour market side. The problem is that the labour market is slow in developing these standards. As a result, if a HEI wants obtain license for a programme leading to a profession that lacks an approved profession standard, the HEI practically can do nothing else but organize elaboration and adoption of the standard – that is time and resources consuming.

Actual time frames for the procedures

The actual time frames for the procedures do not differ much from the official timeframe.

Actual handling of rejection of procedures

Most procedural problems are solved through discussions between applicants and LC without formal applications to the minister. In some cases however the ministerial procedure has been used.

Actual information distribution of outcomes of process

Actual information distribution takes place in the following ways.

- Publication of lists of licensed programmes yearly before the beginning of admission to HEIs in educational newspaper „Izglitiba un kultura"
- Publication and regular updating of the above information in the HEQEC homepage http://www.aiknc.lv

4. Driving forces for decision making

International and national credibility of the qualifications should come first, followed by customer protection and a guarantee that there is quality behind the credentials, introducing continuous improvements inside the HEIs, labour market relevance, but also competition for students.

4.1 Political or social issues to be solved by the accreditation/licensing scheme

International credibility of awards is probably the most important point that allowed reaching a consensus between HEIs, state and other stakeholders upon establishing QA in Latvia. After opening up for European and wider cooperation in early 1990s plus switch to bachelor-master system and the curricular reform following the 1991 Education law, all Latvian stakeholders were in favour of any measures that would support the international credibility of the not-so-well-known Latvia credentials abroad, and, first of all, in Europe. The argument of international credibility was the main reason why the HEIs who initially considered introduction of a QA scheme as limiting their autonomy, rather easily agreed upon establishment of accreditation scheme with involvement of foreign experts in each evaluation team. In this sense the introduction of the scheme has been successful. Now, when, all the state-recognized programs have been assessed by the international expert teams, Latvia certainly has grounds for discussion of mutual recognition of accreditation results through ENQA.

Credibility in the eyes of potential students and their parents and customer protection is equally important. Taken that in the period between 1991 and 1995, on the one hand, establishing of private higher education institutions was allowed and, on the other hand, that the whole HE system had undergone a curricular reform due to the switch to bachelor/master structure replacing traditional

long one-tier programmes, there was a need felt to 1) check whether the newly established private institutions delivered higher education of sufficient quality and 2) to make an inventory of the whole system.

In this respect the introduction of the two-stage licensing/accreditation scheme has been a success. Licensing allows filtering off such cases when the institution willing to open a programme is, in fact, not capable to bring it up to the standards and requirements within the period before accreditation.

Accounting before society: Assessment by international peers with a following accreditation is, on the one hand, the way how the state can monitor the usage of the state funding allocated to the state institutions, and how the students paying tuition fees[16] (or their parents) can monitor usage of the money they pay for their studies.

Labour market relevance of qualifications: It is self-evident that assessment of professional HE programmes against Professional HE standard and the professional standard of the profession in question ensures labour-market relevance of professional HE programmes. At the same time, presence of employers' representatives in AC, HEC and bodies carrying out control over the QA system ensures a feedback from the labour market side to the HEI.

Involvement of labour market representatives in standard-setting: At accreditation, HE programmes and especially the ones targeted at a particular profession are evaluated against professional standards, which, in turn, should be elaborated by the employers and professionals of the profession in question and approved by the Cabinet. This should ensure full relevance of the graduates to the requirements of the particular profession. Even if in practice the labour market side is slow in development of professional standards and therefore the HEIs willing to accredit their programmes have to take the initiative themselves (see chap.2.4.3), the above legal requirement stimulates cooperation between labour market and HE and at the end leads to better labour-market acceptance of graduates.

Relationships between accreditation schemes and evaluation schemes

At the moment there are no evaluation schemes distinct from accreditation scheme in Latvia. However, as HEIs admitted in their answers to the EUA questionnaire for the Trends III report, in the course of the first accreditation round the HEIs have better realized the possibilities of the internal quality mechanisms and are ready to carry out a permanent internal evaluation and improvement.

It is not likely that Latvia is going to give up accreditation in a foreseeable future, but possibilities for using accreditation as an external approval of the internal quality assurance procedures is foreseen it the new accreditation regulations of 2002.

Relationship between accreditation and licensing

A license is „green light" for student admission to a programme. It is needed to demonstrate that the HEI is capable to bring the programme up to accreditation standards within two years. Thus, having a license is a prerequisite for accreditation and also a trial for accreditation procedures – yet not to a full scale.

16 Note that tuition fees are paid also by part of the students at state institutions. Apart from the study places financed by the state (for admission to which there is a competition), state institutions may admit more qualified candidates paying tuition fees.

Relationships of the different accreditation schemes

There is one accreditation scheme in Latvia.

4.2 Consequences of the set-up of the accreditation scheme for the higher education institutes, departments and scholars

As regards new or private programmes, for the staff accreditation is a guarantee that the programme has been approved and fully gained „the right to exist" which means stability for future.

For all staff it, of course, means more work. Compared to the situation before accreditation scheme was introduced, it has brought a much deeper staff involvement in quality monitoring, feeling of responsibility and ownership regarding programme as a whole (compared to own field only), deeper insight into overall curriculum development, a comparative approach (the required comparison with similar programmes in the EU countries), better understanding of the HE-labour market links and labour market requirements, and possibly more. According to the answers of Latvian HEIs to the Trends III questionnaire, introduction of accreditation has strengthened the move towards internal quality culture and continuous improvements. Since professional programmes are assessed against profession standards (developed by or in cooperation with labour market), it provides arguments for the never ending and often bitter debate with the employers regarding the labour market relevance of graduates. Existence of the professional standards are of a great importance to this regard, as professional standard is a document where the employers have formulated their requirements. Assessment procedures prior to accreditation have stimulated the debate about priority of learning outcomes over the input characteristics of programmes.

4.3 Consequences of the set-up of the accreditation scheme for students

Students and (indirectly) *parents:* First of all, for students accreditation is a programme quality guarantee. Involvement of employers in accreditation also gives a safer feeling regarding the futire employment prospectives. As the accreditation results are directly related to the state-recognition status of the degrees/qualifications conferred, they also have several other effects.

Financial effects: Only when a programme/institution is accredited, the students are entitled to receive state loans – the „study loan" for covering tuition fee (in these cases if it is charged), nor the „student loan" aimed at social need s of a student. The same goes for state scholarships (which are very little in Latvia).

Administrative effects: For male students the obligatory military service can be postponed while studying in accredited programmes (and they can be fully exempted of military service if awarded a recognized master's degree).

Employment effects: In these cases where employment requirements include posing of a higher education degree/diploma, the latter should come from an accredited institution/programme, otherwise it has no effect. In practice, even in non-regulated professions and even private employers more and more often wish to be sure that applicant pose a state-recognized.

Yes, students will be better served – the accreditation scheme helps reorientation from educator's driven development of programmes towards development of the programmes with a view of the professional field, comparability to similar programmes in other European countries and

meeting standards set for academic and professional HE programmes. This also means a switch to output oriented curriculum development.

Finally, self-assessment phase of the accreditation scheme inevitably initiates a move towards continuous improvement inside the HEIs.

4.4 Consequences of the set-up of the accreditation system for other stakeholders/ the general public/society

Employers and trade unions: Introduction of the accreditation scheme has clarified the issue of „who is who" in higher education to the employers and trade unions allowing making distinction between trustworthy education providers and some others active on higher education market. Introduction of accreditation scheme has also given new tasks and responsibilities to both groups – according to the law, employers and trade unions (the latter at least through the TCCPEE) should actively engage in elaboration of professional standards that, in turn, are further used to draft educational standards and further to develop professional higher education curricula.

5. Latvian quality assurance in relation to Bologna process and previous European experiences

5.1 Relation to Bologna process

QA system in Latvia was not created by or because of Bologna process: in 1999, when Bologna declaration was signed, it already functioned and had gained momentum in Latvia and first round of accreditation was completed at the end of 2001.

Asked how they see the further cooperation in QA in Europe[17], Latvian key players in higher education have unanimous view – European cooperation in quality assurance should take place as cooperation of National higher education quality agencies through ENQA and not through establishing a European accreditation body.

There is also a clear view of Latvian stakeholders that using ENQA as a platform for exchange of information and experiences will help establish mutual trust among the higher education quality assurance systems of different countries and it will thus promote mutual recognition of qualifications.

5.2 Usage of European models

Starting point and Baltic cooperation: The starting point in the establishing of higher education quality assurance system in Latvia is the international seminar on higher education quality assurance, organized by the Council of Europe in Riga October 24-25, 1994. Well-known European quality assurance experts were chosen as speakers at this seminar and participants were selected from the leadership of higher education institutions and high-ranking ministry officials from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

17 Answers of Latvian HEI, RC and MoES to questionnaire for the Trends III report, November 2002

The need to establish quality assurance system was widely discussed and it was agreed that Baltic states should cooperate in establishment of the quality assurance systems with a view to establish comparable criteria and procedures in all the three countries and to further use each other's experts in the evaluation teams.

At the end of the seminar Ministers of all the three states arrived and they signed a protocol on Baltic cooperation in higher education quality assurance. For further coordination of actions in establishing of quality assurance systems and recognition of foreign qualifications, the ministers also decided to establish Baltic Higher Education Coordination Committee (BHECC). BHECC included representatives from Rectors' conferences, ministry representatives responsible for establishing the quality assurance systems, and heads of the recognition centres (ENIC/NARIC). Cooperation through the BHECC helped establishing comparable higher education quality assurance systems in the Baltic States using each other's experts in the evaluation teams visiting higher education institutions and programmes. As well, BHECC drafted a Baltic recognition agreement to complement the Lisbon Convention. To speed up implementation, it was first signed in 1999 as a protocol between heads of recognition centres, but in 2000 it was signed by Heads of States as an agreement between states.

Looking at European models: At the initial stages of establishing QA system in Latvia, three European quality assurance systems were widely studied British, Dutch and Danish. With the assistance of the British council (years 1994-1996), several Latvian key players had possibilities to visit British HE Quality Council and Funding Council to study the British system of quality assurance, and at a later stage a project was carried out where British representatives provided training to the Latvian future exerts for evaluation of study programmes and institutions. A TEMPUS CME[18] project was carried out (1995-96) where representatives of Latvian Ministry, Rectors' Council and newly appointed management of the HEQEC studied the Dutch quality assurance system and Dutch experts gave several seminars to a wider group of Latvian HE leadership, government representatives and invited delegations from Estonia and Lithuania. Another TEMPUS CME in 1996-97 was used to train HEQEC staff and HE leadership in drawing up self-evaluation reports.

The PHARE Multi-country project (1997-98) in Higher education which covered 11 Central and Eastern European countries, in a way came late for Latvia – the accreditation scheme was already up and running and the basic principles were already clear. Still, of course, it was useful as it helped training a wider group of HE stakeholders and the quality assurance manual produced in the project could serve as a good reference.

Was Latvian scheme derived from European models? It is a good question – in fact, in mid- 1990's when Western European experts advised to introduce accreditation in Central and Eastern European countries, most Western European countries themselves used schemes other than accreditation. So the answer is – *yes and no*:

- yes, the ideas brought by Western European experts were appreciated and used,
- yes, the sequence self-assessment-peer assessment-decision-publication was adopted,
- no, there was no exact model picked up from a Western European country and directly applied in Latvia.

18 CME = Compact Measures Project

6. Customary QA activities

6.1 Internal approval of programmes and courses inside HEIs

A number of institutions, especially the bigger and multi-faculty ones have internal mechanisms of approval of programmes and individual courses (mainly new ones). The practical realization of these mechanisms differs from institution to institution. An example could be that to start a programme the department has to draw up a detailed description similar to self-assessment reports used at accreditation and to present it to the university senate which takes decision regarding approval of the programme. At an even smaller scale, each new subject course has to be submitted for approval at institutional (or faculty) level.

6.2 Staff performance assessment at election/re-election

In Latvia, staff positions are not lifetime appointments. Each staff member is subject to (re)election every six years. At that point, the previous teaching and research activities are assessed using as indicators: types and intensity of teaching activities, participation/leadership of research projects, number and level of scientific and other publications, international activities such as guest lecturing, participation in international research or HE development projects; participation in curriculum development, writing textbooks and developing teaching aids, organisational activities at institutional, state and international level etc.

Country Report Lithuania

Birute Victoria Mockiene

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Acronyms

DSHE – Department of Science and Higher Education of the Ministry of Education and Science
HEI – Higher Education Institutions
HE – Higher Education
PSEI – Post-secondary Education Institutions
The Centre – Lithuanian Centre for Quality Evaluation in Higher Education
The Unit – Unit of Study and Teaching Quality Evaluation of the Methodological Centre for Vocational Education and Training
The Ministry – Ministry of Education and Science
VET – Vocational Education and Training

1. Higher Education System

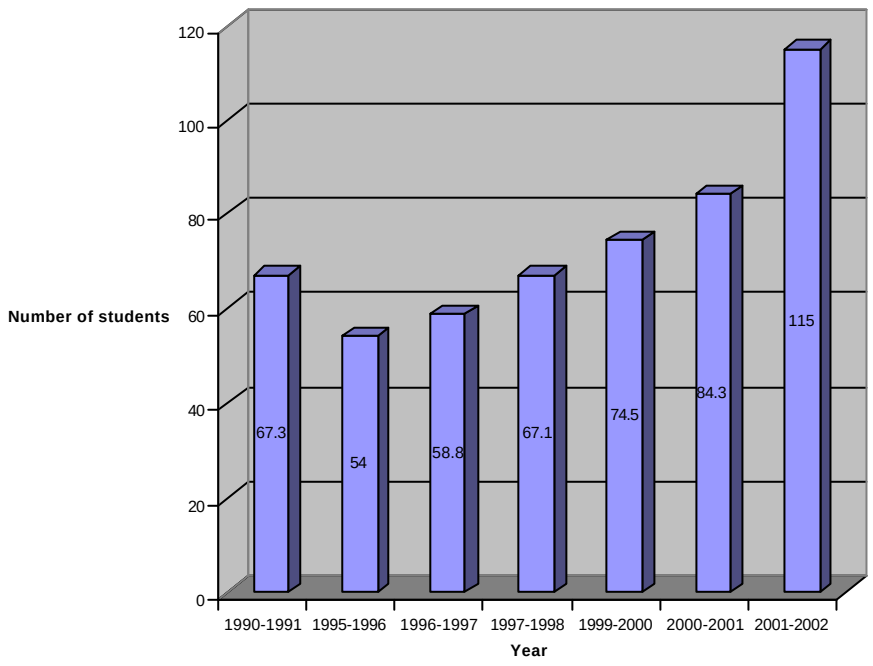
Since 1999-2000 the system of higher education (HE) in Lithuania is being diversified. In September 2002 Lithuanian system of higher education consisted of 43 establishments. The system embraced two types of institutions: 19 university type – Academies, Colleges, Seminaries, and Universities – and 24 non-university type, which are called *colleges* (kolegijos).

HE establishments may be State owned and private (or not belonging to the State). Currently, there are four private university type and nine private colleges. Thus, the remaining thirty (15+15) establishments are public or state owned.

During years of Independent Lithuania student enrolment was fluctuating (Picture 1). There were more than 63,000 students in 13 institutions in 1990-1991. The numbers dropped in 1995-1996: students' community consisted of 54,000 persons. Starting from 1996 an incremental growth was observed (Education and Culture, 2001). In 2001 overall enrolment reached 115, 000 students. A major part, some 105,000 of students (except of doctoral), were enrolled in university type institutions. In addition, 10,000 students were enrolled in colleges.

Statistical data illustrates that in recent 5 years the overall admission to universities and post-secondary education institutions (PSEI; aukštesnioji mokykla) was growing. In 1996 more than 20 thousand students were admitted to university type institutions, and more than 11 thousand to PSEI. In 2000 universities admitted more than 34 thousand students; however, admission to PSEI dropped to 10 thousand (Lietuvos švietimas. 2000). This change is accounted for the restructuring the system of HE, when a number of PSEI became colleges. Therefore, we may draw a conclusion that with reorganization of PSEIs to colleges, numbers of student admission significantly improved.

1 Picture. Dynamics of Student Enrollment



Furthermore, the enrolment in undergraduate programs grew substantially from 14.8 thousand in 1996 to 22.7 thousand in 2000. This growth is explainable by two factors: the additional student admission in colleges (3.4 thousand) and growing access to education because of new entrants that pay tuition fees. Since in 2000 there were less than 37 thousand secondary schools graduates, who passed their maturity exams, almost all of them had a possibility to be admitted to either higher education institution or to PSEI.

By making strategic a decision to allow commercial studies (costs covered by student), Lithuanian authorities improved access to higher education. Moreover, in summer 2002 The Seimas (The Parliament) approved two amendments of the Law of Higher Education that introduced a symbolic obligatory tuition, 500 Litas (Approximately 120 EURO) for newly admitted students. In 2000 universities admitted 13179 students to undergraduate places financed by state, and 9517 to places with tuition costs to be borne by student. At the same time more than 30% of graduate students paid for their studies (Lietuvos Švietimas, 2000, p. 59). In the future Government plans admission of almost 43 thousand new HE students supported fully or partially by the state; 25.600 undergraduates, 9355 graduates, and 683 post-graduates at universities, and 6325 at colleges. The remaining stream of students will be admitted to commercial programs that require students to cover costs of tuition and fees (Decision of the Government, 2002). Additional revenue should help universities improve quality of studies by providing more funds to human resources and by renovating material resources.

Lithuanian higher education institutions provide the following types of programs: consequtive and non-consequtive university programs, and consequtive non-university programs. Universities organize sequential studies in three stages: undergradauate, graduate and post-graduate (doctoral).

1. Undergraduate studies (first stage studies leading to bakalauras (bachelor's) degree and (or) to obtaining of professional qualification. An undergraduate study programme at university level in Lithuania comprises 140-180 credit points (one credit corresponds to 40 relative hours of student's work (in classes, independently, etc.) or his relative working week (system of credits used in Lithuania corresponds to 1,5 ECTS credits) and lasts between 3 and 5 years. Two thirds of the subjects have to be studied at the same higher education institution. There are three blocks of subjects: comprehensive humanitarian and social studies, at least 30% of all credits; fundamentals of the branch of studies, at least 30% of all credits; and specialised subjects, at least 30% of all credits. Graduates at this level are awarded a *bakalauras* (Bachelor's degree) and (or) *profesine kvalifikacija* (a diploma of vocational qualification and the certificate of graduation from a higher education institution). At the non-university level study programmes consist of at least 120 till 160 credits and last at least 3–4 years. The professional qualification and diploma of higher education is being obtained after successful completion of studies.
2. Graduates with undergraduate degrees may apply for a second stage studies – *Magistrantura* (Master's) or *Specialiosios profesines* (Specialized professional) studies. Graduate studies (second stage studies) lead to Magistras (Master's) degree and (or) professional qualification. Students, admitted to the second stage program may pursue specialised vocational studies (lasting 1-2 years and comprising of 40-80 credit points) or studies leading to a Master's degree (lasting 1,5-2 years and comprising 60-80 credit points). Master's graduates have to defend a thesis or a diploma project. Upon obtaining this degree, the recipient can start doctoral studies or practical activity. After completion of a professional, specialised professional programme, students obtain a professional (e.g. teacher, engineer, economist, etc.) qualification.

   Another type of programs, so called integrated studies, may be organized in Lithuanian university type institutions. The duration of integrated studies are no longer than 6 study years (240 credits) and no less than 4,5-5 study years (200 credits). Studies of the first four years (160 credits) are attributed to the first stage of undergraduate studies, and studies of the remaining 1-2 years (40-80 credits) are attributed to the second stage of sequential studies. After successful completion of such studies the professional qualification and (or) Master's degree is awarded. In addition, vocational post-graduate study programmes of 1-2 years

duration may be organized. These programmes are very popular and are becoming even more so in the field of engineering.

3. After completing graduate studies students may apply for the third stage or post-graduate studies leading to *Daktaras* (Doctor) reasearch degree or *Rezidentura* (Residency, specific form of training for medical doctors) or *Meno Aspirantura* (highest training level of artists or postgraduate art studies). The doctoral studies last at least 3 years for those with Master's degree and up to 4 years for those who have completed either specialised professional or integrated (continuous) university level studies. The doctoral courses comprise up to five subjects and final examinations, each subject comprising at least 45 hours. Upon completion of the doctoral courses, a doctoral thesis must be prepared and defended publicly to qualify the candidate for the doctorate. Doctoral studies may be jointly organized by higher education and research institutions. *Meno aspirantura* studies are designed for the preparation of lectures of higher education institutions in the field of arts and for specialisation of artists or defence and preparation of some art project. After the successful completion of studies the qualification of *Meno Licenciatas* (licentiate in arts) can be obtained. *Rezidentûra* (Residency) studies are organized to train medical doctors after completion of medical studies. After the completion of residency certificate of professional qualification is awarded.

The number of graduates from HEI was steadily growing in recent decade. There were 9472 graduates from university type institutions in 1990. After growth in 1995 (12,366 graduates) a slight decline occurred in 1996 (12280) and in 1997 (11690). Later, number of university graduates increased: 13,142 in 1998, and 14, 889 in 1999 (Švietimas ir kultura, 2001.)

Market absorbs almost all graduates that have been granted higher education or college education. Unemployment rates among HE graduates are relatively low. Highly educated persons are gaining jobs in variety of services, commerce, industries. In recent years, oversupply of medical doctors forced medical schools to reduce admission. Moreover, HEI produced more engineers than market could absorb.

One of the priorities of the Government policy is to steer the system of HE toward balanced supply of the labour market with the highly qualified graduates. These priorities are imbedded in the legal documents. For example, Article 4 of the Regulations on Programs of Consecutive Studies (October 26, 2000) provides:

„A higher education institution organising or striving to organise a study programme has to ensure the content and structure, teachers' qualification, material facilities and methodical framework necessary for studies regulated by these Regulations, and other conditions for the acquisition of higher education and professional qualification in conformity with the demand of the *labor market*."

Lithuanian Ministry of Education and Science regularly conducts research on the market for HE graduates. Results of this research help ministry define priorities of the appropriations to HEI. Market demand for specialists with higher education degree became on of the most important indicators in reshaping the structure of higher education programs.

In recent years higher education community experience a significant shift from self-regulation toward central control by the government. The Ministry of Education and Science, specifically its Department for Science and Higher Education is in charge of the policy implementation in the field of higher education and research.

Public HE institutions are established by the Parliament (Seimas); private HE institutions are licenced by the Government. The Government, which in 2002 formed by coalition of the left-wing parties prepared the proposal of funding higher education. The Parliament approves budget appropriations for HE system annualy. The Science Council of the Republic of Lithuania is the

main expert in the field: it launches discusions and prepares recommendations to the Parliament and the Government on all major issues in higher education and research. Most important interest groups, that influence strategic policy and lobbying in HE are the following: *Lithuanian Universities Rectors' Conference, The Directors' Conference of Lithuanian Colleges, The Conference of the Chairmen of the Senates (Councils) of Institutions of Higher Education and Science of Lithuania, State Research Institute Director's Conference*.

Lithuanian Universities Rectors' Conference is a public organization, members of which are rectors of higher education institutions promoting the development of Lithuanian science, culture and economy, analyzing various draft decrees prepared by the Department of Science and Higher Education. Lithuanian Universities Rectors' Conference also makes recommendations concerning registration of new higher education institutions providing Master's and Doctoral study programmes. The Conference organizes preparation of various scientific and study projects and programmes; co-operates with analogous international organizations.

The Directors' Conference of Lithuanian Colleges is a public organization uniting all the directors of Lithuanian colleges. The main objectives are as follows: the development of higher non-university education, sharing the best experience within the non-university sector, representation of Lithuanian colleges in national and international organizations, boards and committees, co-ordination of efforts for quality assurance in the colleges, integration of Lithuanian colleges into common European Higher Education Space, promotion of European dimension in higher education.

The Conference of the Chairmen of the Senates (Councils) of Institutions of Higher Education and Science of Lithuania is an independent public organization formed by a majority of the chairmen of the Senates (Councils) of institutions of higher education and science of Lithuania.

State Research Institute Director's Conference determines the development of fundamental and applied science, evaluates scientific programmes and helps scientists to develop international relations. The Conference is a scientific expert on new technology and projects. (Links to above mentioned associations available on http://www.mokslas.lt)

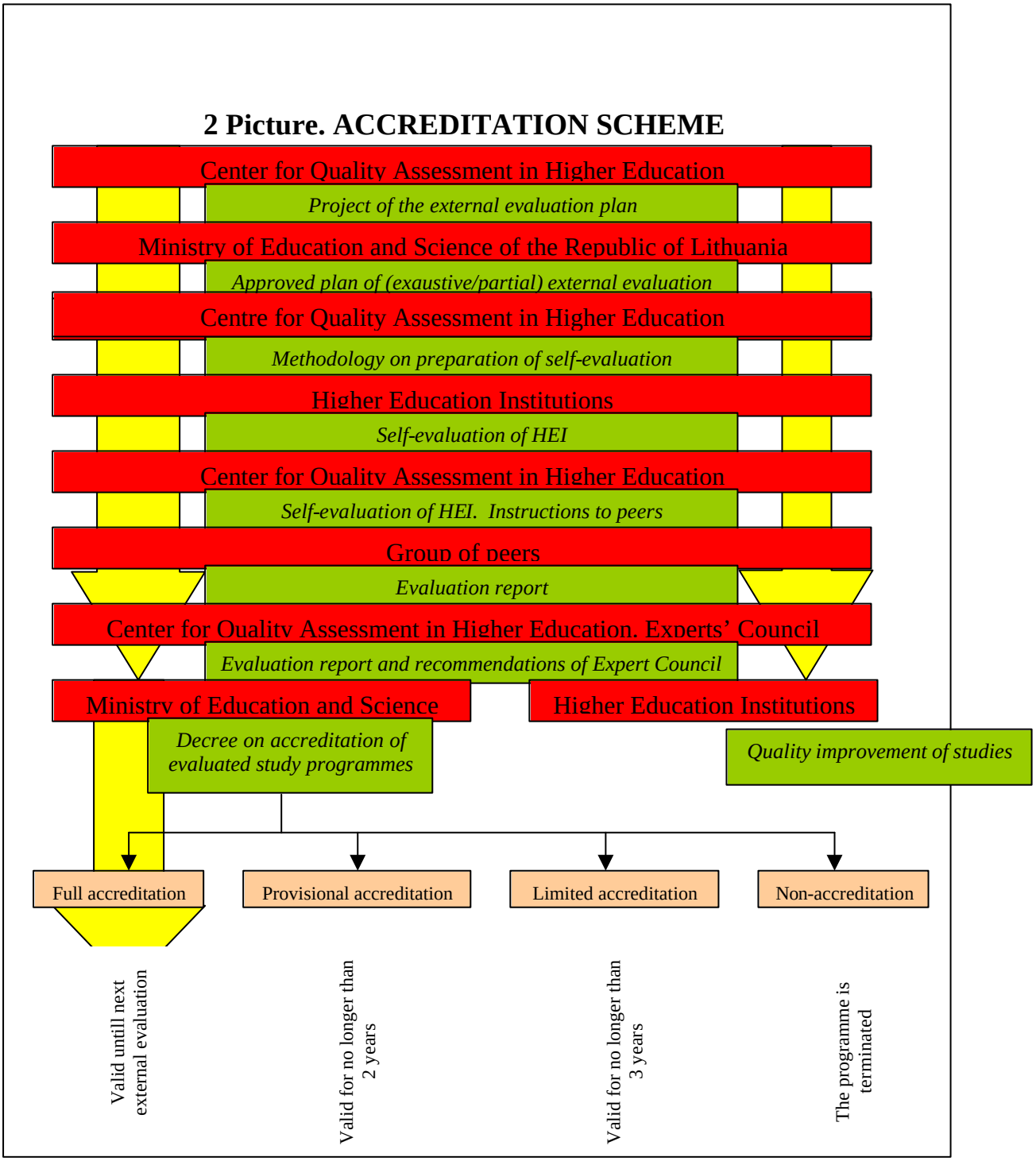
Lithunanian Students Association plays a signitficant role in higher education reform. Students discuss not only national quality asurance policies but also invite international friends to highlight developments in the field. In 2000 the forum of the Euroepean students associations (ESIB) was held in Vilnius; this event focused on quality of higher education.

2. Accreditation schemes

2.1 Accreditation

The two types of accreditation should be extablished in Lithuanian higher education: accreditation of programs and institutions. Meanwhile, only accreditation of study programs is institutionalized. The Center for Quality Assessment in Higher Education is currently deliberating plans on accreditation of universities and colleges. Institutional accreditation will be a part of quality improvement and monitoring system in education, which in the future will embrace all levels of education.

Formal accreditation of programs emerged in Spring 2002 when the first Ministerial order was issed on accreditation of registered and earlier evaluated 220 university type programmes and two programs of Alytus College (Del aukštojo mokslo studiju programu akreditavimo, April 30,2002).



The accreditation of those programmes is valid through the next exhaustive external evalaution, i. e. for approximately 7-8 years, if other legal acts do not define otherwise. 45 study programmes were accredited provisionaly (for period of 2 years). and 4 study programmes received a limited accreditation. Students' admission to these programmes is forbiden. In 2003 these programmes will be evaluated once again. If experts will find that the quality of the programmes is improved, student admission will be allowed. If quality will not be improved, these programmes will be terminated.

Accreditation scheme, as depicted in picture 2, includes processes organized by the Center and the Ministry. The Center prepares a project of the external evaluation plan, conducts the evaluation, ensures that peers prepare report on the quality of program, and, finally, submits the report together with recommendations to the Experts' Council. The Experts' Council examines the final reports and presents recommendations on accreditation to the Ministry of Science and Education. Based on these recommendations, the minister issues a decree on the following types of accreditation of evaluated study programs:

- Full accreditation: valid until next external exhaustive evaluation;
- Provisional accreditation: Valid for no longer than 2 years;
- Limited accreditation: Valid for no longer than 3 years;
- Non-accreditation: Programme is terminated.

A regular program evaluation for the purposes of accreditation was initiated by the Centre in 1999. The first recommendation on accreditation was issued by the Experts' Council on February 14, 2000; it included programs in construction engineering.

The Law on Higher Education of the Republic of Lithuania does not prescribe procedures of accreditation or evaluation. The evaluation procedures are prescribed in „Rules of assessment for institutions of research and higher education" approved by the Minister of Education and Science 29 December 2000. The Ministerial decree of March 18, 2002 on decisions regarding evaluated programs set up the legal grounds for accreditation.

2.2 Approval

In terms of approval we distinquish two processes established for 1) programs, 2) institutions. The Center conducts evaluation for a new program approval. The Ministry carries out examination of documents submitted for approval of institutions.

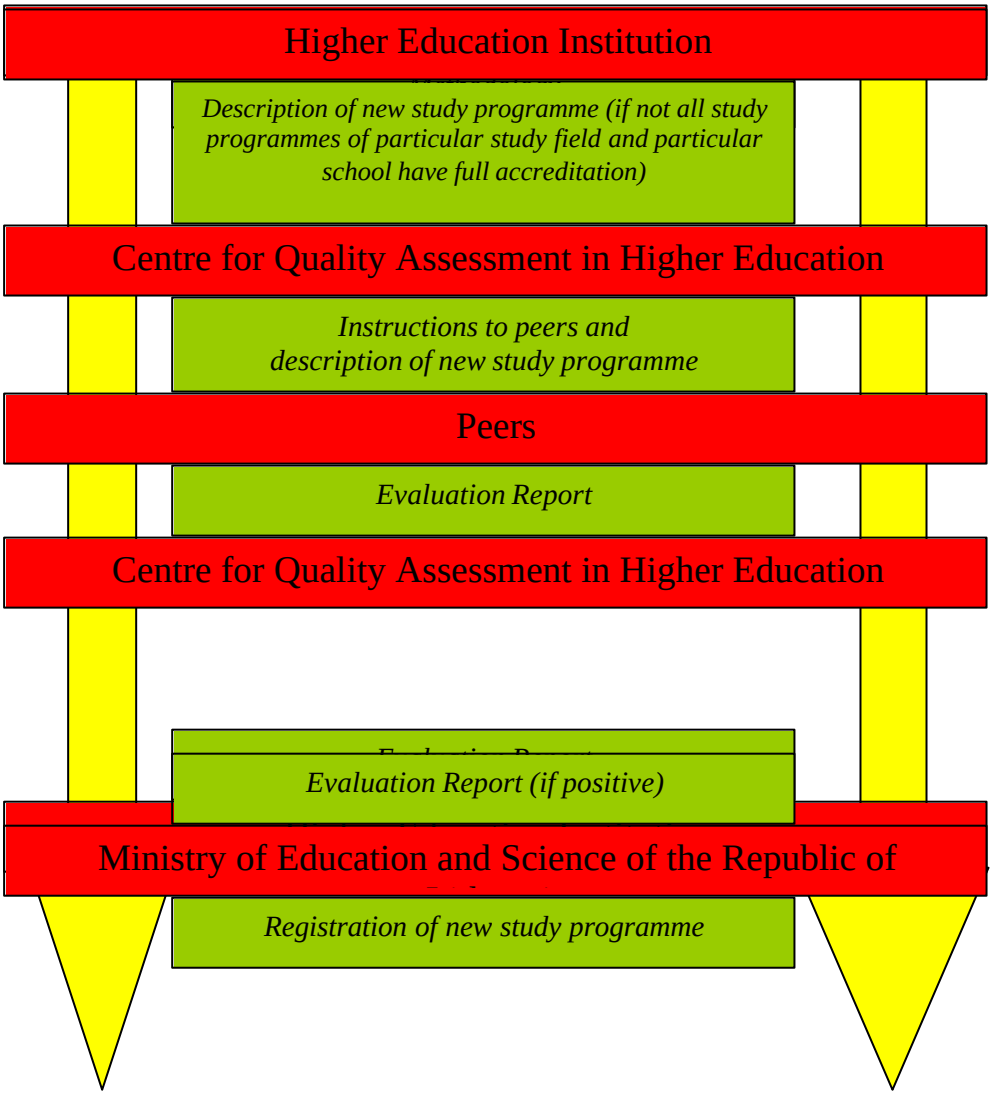
Picture 3 illustrates approval processes of a new program. Furthermore, evaluation for approval can be carried out when documents for the establishment of a new institution are presented. The difference between evaluation for approval and evaluation of existing programs lies in the focus of evaluation. In the case of approval, experts look at the input and environmental indicators. They search for evidence whether the initiators of a new program or institution have sufficient capacity to organize higher education studies. Moreover, experts want to see the proof of market demand for a specific program or institution. Finally, they draw attention to competitive environment; a new initiative may duplicate already existent programs and fail to create added value to a current competitive environment in higher education market.

New program approval process, held by the Centre, leads to a formal recognition of the program by the Ministry of Education and Science. The Ministry includes positively evaluated programs in the Register of the Study and Training Programs, which is maintained as a data-base, accessible to the general public, potential students and other stakeholders. (Studiju ir mokymo programu registravimo tvarka, 1999). In fall 2002 the Register maintained data about 970 university type programs and 200 non-university type programs; 412 of those are undergraduate, 421 graduate, and 126 specialized professional (Studiju ir mokymo programu suvestine, 2002).

Approval of a new programme is less complex than evaluation, and the result is different than the evaluation of existing program. Experts usually familiarize themselves with the written documentation about new initiative. Following the instructions established by the Centre, they prepare the report, which is presented to the Centre and after some examination handed to the ini-

tiator. In case of a positive evaluation, the Centre recommends the Ministry to approve and register a new program.

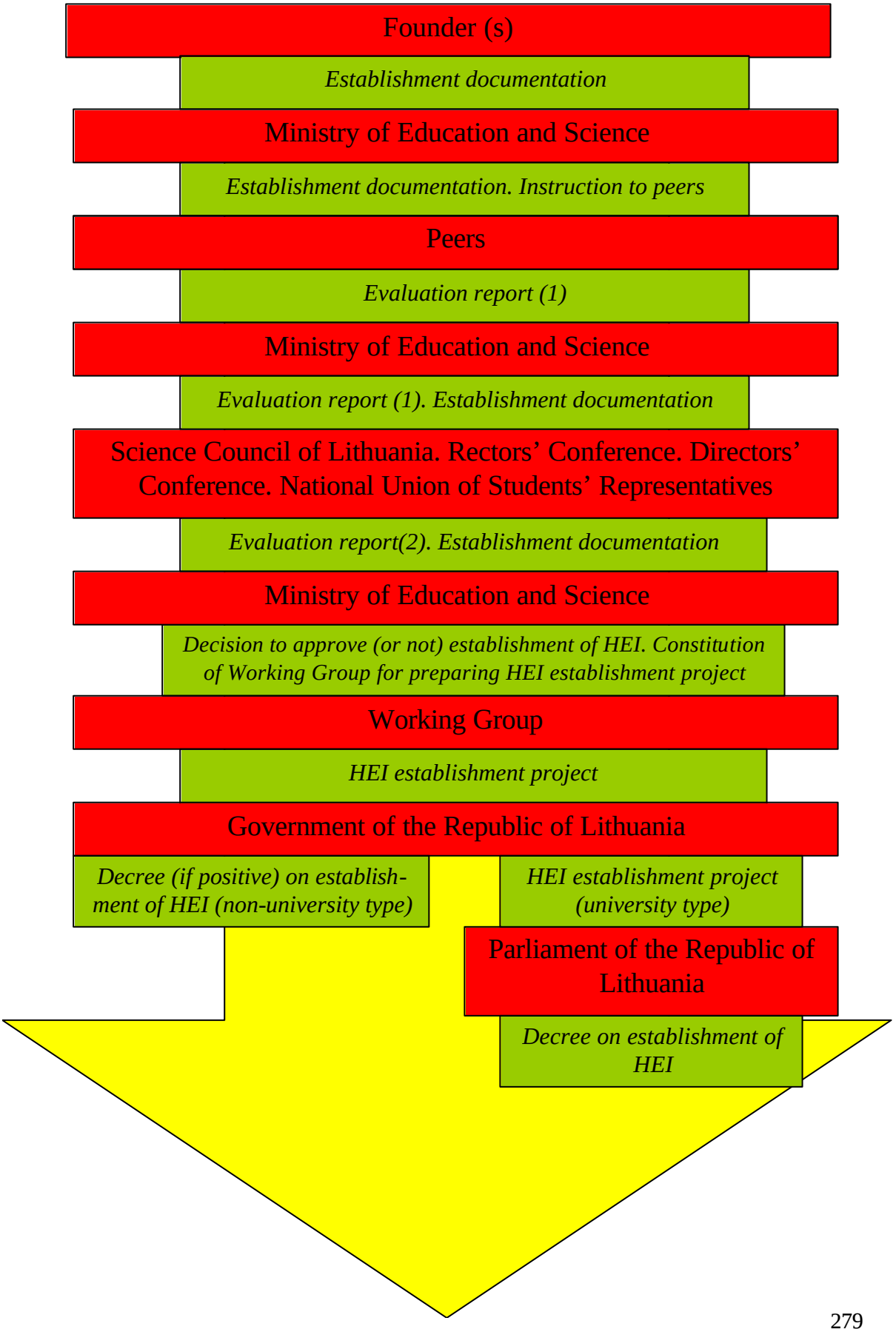
Picture 3: Approval of new study programmes scheme



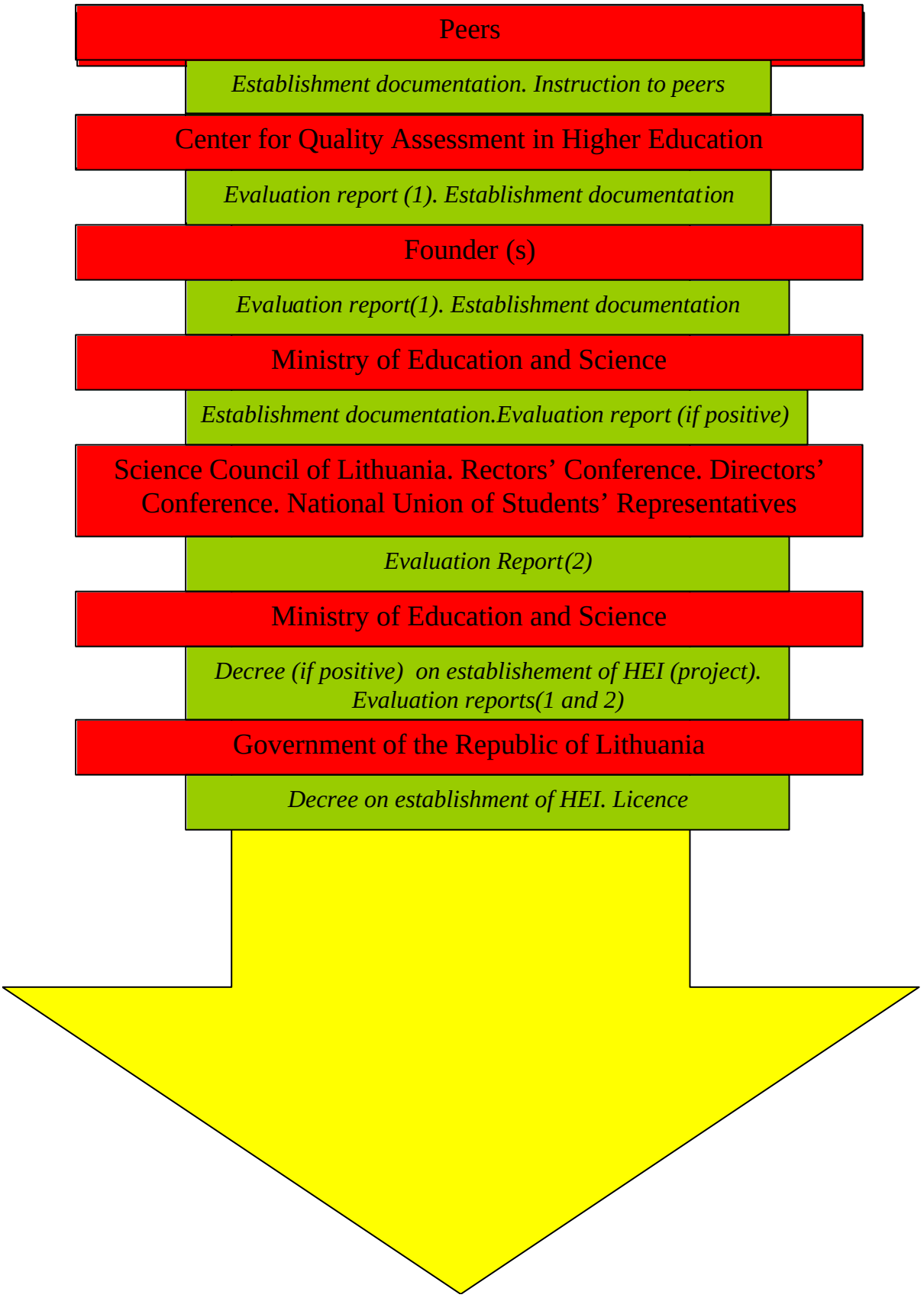
A study programme of a new trend or another level may be submitted for registration only after higher education institution is evaluated as defined by the order of the Ministry in the following areas: its potential to introduce studies of a new trend or another level; the quality of these studies is assured; the permission is granted to a higher education institution for a new trend of studies or another level of the trend of studies is provided.

Pictures 4 and 5 illustrate differences in approval schemes for the establishment of HEI. The Parliament approves the statutes of public HEI, the Government issues a decree on establishment of private HEI and gives a licence to operate.

Picture 4: Approval of new state HEI scheme



Picture 5: Approval of new private HEI scheme



2.3 Evaluation

Lithuania's first step in establishing evalaution practices in higher education and research was gaining experience in evaluating research institutes in 1994-1997. First of all, Norwegian Research Council with Lithuanian Center for Quality Assessment in Higher Education conducted a large scale programme that targeted at country's scientific potential. The idea to invite Scandinavian colleages to evaluate Lithuanian science was born in the Governmental Agency for Higher Education, Research and Development in early nineties. The Agency initiated many reforms in science and higher education and felt that Lithuanian science needed to be intergated into world's scientific community. The evaluation of institutions was considered one of the „window openning" and facilitating cooperation among Lithuanian and foreign scholars. This initiative was enthusiastically supported by the Nordic Council of Ministers. Consequently, the Norwegian Research Council agreed to examine Lithuanian science. Norwegian teams worked closely with Lithuanian peers in evaluating all research institutes and HEI. Although these institutional evaluations challenged academic community, revealed strenghts and weaknesses of the research system in Lithuania, they did not lead to accreditation (Evaluation of Research in Lithuania, 1996).

Evaluation of existing programs (or institutions) pursues formative evaluation for the purpose of improvement and innovation. The greatest attention is paid to whether the foreseen goals of the study programme are achieved. Thus, student's outcomes (examinations, final papers) and other output data are examined by the peers. The Rules of Quality Assessment for Institutions of Research and Higher Education provide: „The major purpose of the quality evaluation is to stimulate institutions of higher education and research, their subdivisions and all the scientists too seek clear perception of the need of Lithuania, the mission, objectives and tasks of the institution, to help institution reveal its weaknesses and strengths, and to facilitate its effectiveness" (Rules, Article 3).

The Article 44 Registration and Evaluation of study programmes of the Law on Higher Education provides that the Ministry may take into account results of evaluated programs for the funding decision making. (Law on Higher Education, 2000). The funding decision is defined by the contract between the HEI and the Ministry.

The evaluation scheme, which was used from 1996 through 2002, involved similar processes as currently established accreditation scheme. Previously all formally recognized higher education institutions were a part of the quality evaluation scheme, i. e. the element of accreditation at the end of the scheme was not included. HEI had to participate in the evaluation process by presenting self-evaluation report on those programs that are included in the list of programs belonging to a particular study field or subject.

2.4 The Range of Application of the Schemes

Lithuania is a small country and administratively higher education institutions are not divided into regions. However, while seeking efficiency, in order to save time and resources, the Centre can split the team of experts into two-three groups. For example, since Law programs were evaluated in Vilnius, Kaunas and Utena, two groups of experts (including international peers) divided their tasks. All group focused on programs at university type institutions. For the site visits to non-university type institutions the group was split into two smaller groups. But the final report is always being prepared and signed by all expert group members even if they didn't visit the institution.

An integration of research and teaching is a keystone of the Lithuanian higher education. The university type institutions – as the Law for Science and Higher Education (1991) provides that these two functions are inseparable. Therefore, institutions have to address issues of integration of research and teaching in their self-evaluation reports. For example, they have to specify, how research results of the academic staff (faculty) are integrated into the study process; and they have to indicate whether students' research projects are related to research areas of the department.

As mentioned in the Chapter 1, research institutes are involved in post-graduate studies, but their main mission is to produce results in research and development. A separate methodology is applied for assessing those institutes. Starting form 1994, research capacity was evaluated in all 29 state research institutes. Moreover, from 1995 through 1997 experts of the Centre looked at productivity of the research institutes. One of the aims of those evaluations was to identify most advanced areas of science in Lithuania and to provide suggestions of integration of scientific achievement into Lithuania's market and industries. Another aspect of evaluation was identification of achievements in the field of cooperation between research institutes and universities, both in research and studies areas. Although in some areas, such as physics, chemistry, philosophy, cultural studies, linguistics and Lithuanian literature, the cooperation was very fruitful, in other areas there was no integration. The tension between research institutes and universities has its roots in former soviet system that split science and studies. In spite many political attempts the interaction between those two sectors remains insufficient. In recent years, following the recommendations of quality evaluation teams and suggestions by the governmental officials, new strategy of scientific development has been adopted that set up foundations for further integration of research and studies. A model of a research institute within university has been proposed. This model already attracted several research institutions which decided to integrate their activities in university life.

HE institutions are responsible for the quality evaluation of individual subjects or disciplines. They set up procedures of the development and approval of the curricula that includes evaluation of the syllabi of individual courses. Many universities and colleges encourage introduction of interdisciplinary courses.

Furthermore, all institutions develop internal student evaluation of instructors. Department heads and deans discuss regularly the results of those evaluations, which may have an impact of employers' relationships to instructor.

Thus, none of the buffer organization, evaluating quality of programs and institutions, is involved in evaluation of individual subjects and disciplines. However, while evaluating programs, the Centre's peers are looking at documental evidence of existing internal institutional quality mechanisms that should include evaluation of syllabi and improvement of instructional processes. For example, the Vytautas Magnus University regulations of studies provide the following: „Studies in each subject should be evaluated at the end. A questionnaire, which is approved by Rector's office, is used. Departments and deans conduct the analysis. Councils of faculties and rector's office staff analyze the results". (Vytautas Magnus University. 2002).

2.5 Organizations

Two buffer organizations, the Centre for Quality Evaluation in Higher Education (the Centre) and the Quality Evaluation Unit of Methodological Centre for Vocational Education and Training (the Unit), are engaged in implementing schemes of the accreditation, evaluation of quality

and approval of new programs and institutions. There is a division of functions between the Center and the Unit.

The Center:

- Evaluates new programs of university type institutions; this evaluation leads to registration.
- Organizes exhaustive evaluation of university-type and college-type programs; this evaluation leads to accreditation. Alternatively, evaluation can be carried out to assess the situation or to address the issue of higher education;
- Evaluates applications for establishment of new higher education institutions;
- Evaluates research institutions.

The Unit:

- Evaluates new programs of colleges; this evaluation leads to registration (in near future this function will be transferred to the Centre).
- Institutional evaluation of colleges for institutional accreditation purposes (anticipated to start in 2004).

The Centre was established in 1995 with the purpose to maintain a high level of higher education in Lithuania. The Centre carries out expertise of new study programmes; analyses data received after self-evaluation of institutions, if necessary; analyzes the situation in some particular institution; makes proposals for the Ministry of Education and Science on the accreditation and approval of study programs; consults citizens on recognition of higher education (except for Doctoral degrees). Recently, in September 2002 the Centre assumed a new function: According to Article 8 of the Governmental Decision it will evaluate applications of new private (probably and state) higher education institutions. (Aukštuju mokyklu steigimo tvarka, 2002.09.13).

The basic goals of the Centre are as follows:

- To co-ordinate and methodically guide the regular self-analysis process of scientific and pedagogical activity of the State and Non-state institutions of research and higher education,
- to organize the expert evaluation of that activity,
- to accumulate and publish information about the quality of that activity,
- to offer suggestions about the improvement of that activity;

In the field of evaluation of research and higher education institutions the Centre is involved in the following activities:

- Makes plans for evaluation of research and higher education institutions referring to the Law of Research and Higher Education of the Republic of Lithuania, the Law of Higher Education of the Republic of Lithuania, other provisions regulating research and studies, and other information concerning the research and higher education in the country;
- Organizes quality expertise of realization of university, non-university programmes of the basic and second level studies as well as integral studies and the realization of these programmes entered in the State registry;
- Co-ordinates the regular self-analysis process of the activity of research and higher education institutions, prepares its united methods;
- Organizes the quality expertise (peer review) of the activity of research and higher education institutions and their subunits, combining it with the self-analysis process of the institutions;
- Accumulates, summarizes and publishes the information concerning the conclusions of the self-analysis and peer review of the institutions, the quality of the study programmes;

- Formulates and co-ordinates with different institutions the suggestions about the quality improvement of scientific and pedagogical activity of research and higher education institutions, and offers these suggestions to the Ministry.

The Center fulfils a function of the secretariat of the Expert Council of the Quality Assessment of Research and Higher Education Institutions (Expert Council), which started its activities in 2000. Furthermore, the Centre co-ordinates its programme of quality evaluation with the Department of Science and Higher Education of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania In fulfilling its tasks, the Centre co-operates with the Science Council of Lithuania, the Lithuanian Academy of Science, conferences of heads of research and higher education institutions, vocational and employment associations and other public institutions. *Some of those non-profit institutions or interest groups contribute in monitoring quality in higher education and research. For example,* Lithuanian Universities Rectors' Conference makes recommendations concerning registration of new higher education institutions providing Master's and Doctoral study programmes. *The Directors' Conference of Lithuanian Colleges* co-ordinates of efforts for quality assurance in the colleges. The *State Research Institute Director's Conference* evaluates scientific programmes and helps scientists develop international relations. The Conference is a scientific expert on new technology and projects.

The Unit of Study and Teaching Quality Evaluation was established in 1999 while implementing EU technical and financial support programme „Institutional Building in Education Reform". Since 2000 the Unit continues its activity in the structure of Methodological Centre for VET. The aim of the unit is to implement the evaluation of quality of study/training programmes and audit of schools' activity quality, to analyse and inform society about results of evaluation.

The Unit's functions are as follows:

- Fulfil functions of the Secretariat for the Council and the Commission. The Council of vocational education and training quality evaluation is an expert institution. Its members are appointed lecturers/teachers of higher schools, social partners and representatives of other institutions. The Commission is the central vocational education and training expert. It acts under the rule of the Methodological Centre for Vocational education and training.
- Create the bank of expert data and organize experts' training;
- Organize the work of external evaluation expert groups;
- Consult Schools on issues of quality evaluation, assist them in teaching personnel to evaluate internal quality effectively;
- Implement the initial evaluation of vocational training programmes' correspondence to Governmental and Ministerial documents, which regulate vocational education and training;
- Coordinate the preparation of vocational schools' external evaluation reports and organize their pronouncement.

The Ministry of Education and Science approves regulations of the Centre and the Unit, and provides basic budget funding for their operations. Their leadership is financially accountable to the Ministry. The Ministry, based on conclusions of evaluations, conducted by the Centre and by the Unit, makes decisions on accreditation or approval of programs.

For any external evaluation the Centre forms an expert group or several groups taking experts proposed specially for that evaluation. An expert group for whole research and higher education area evaluation consists of not less than 3 individuals and for general qualitative evaluation of institutions of research and higher education not less than 5 individuals are required. One member of the Expert Group is appointed as a leader of the group by the Centre. The leader distributes the work functions among the experts, organizes the evaluation process, determines the scale of

work to be performed by the experts, and is responsible for a proper presentation of the evaluation report and recommendations in time.

The Centre contracts local experts and foreign experts. The policy of the Centre in forming groups is flexible: foreign experts can work together with the Lithuanian experts or form separate groups. In 2001 the first international peer's team (including one local expert) assessed Law study programs in six HEI's. The involvement of international peers largely depends on availability of financial resources. Experts are proposed to the Centre by the following organizations: a) the institutions of research and higher education, the Science Council of Lithuania, the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences; b) boards or councils of professional societies (e.g. doctors' unions, engineers' unions, scientists' unions, students' unions of research and higher education institutions), creative organizations; c) ministries or other state institutions concerned with higher education or research; d) scientists and other experts with experience of evaluation; e) foreign quality assurance agencies.

The experts, proposed to the Centre, should satisfy the following requirements: a) research and pedagogical activity of proposed experts has to be active and efficient during last five years, i. e. they have to be published sufficient number (minimal qualitative requirements for lecturers and scientists) of scientific articles in research publications that are on the list of Institute of Scientific Information, and a list, approved by the Department; b) other proposed experts are to be familiar with the problems of higher education and research of Lithuania and with the foreign experience in respective subject areas. The recommendation of experts is based not only on their professional competence, the expert work experience, but also on such personal qualities as adherence to principle, goodwill, fairness and ability to make impartial evaluations, readiness to realize progressive ideas. Scientists from other subject areas than an evaluating subject area (field) can be involved in expert groups.

The relationship between the expert's interests and the unit to be evaluated is determined as definitely as possible, seeking elimination or reduction of a probable conflict between the interests of the experts and those of the expertise. The leader of the Expert Group must be impartial. Institutions of research and higher education to be assessed can propose to the Centre their candidates to an expert Group beforehand, arguing their suitability. The Centre informs all the institutions to be evaluated with the planned composition of an expert Group. Institutions have the right to pay the Center's attention to the fact that for some grounded reasons some planned experts are unacceptable. Institutions can propose to eliminate some experts from Expert Group arguing his/her unacceptability.

The Centre organizes workshops during which the experts and the officials of institutions, concerned with the internal evaluation of institutions of research and higher education, get acquainted with the aims, tasks and procedures of the evaluation as well as with the practice of other countries.

The Centre was established as a non-profit organization, but later changed its formal status to budget institution. This status implies that the Centre's employees are considered public servants. The Unit is a budget institution. All public institutions in Lithuania have to comply with the formal rules of provision of information to the public, which suggests that activities in quality evaluation should be transparent. However, access to information for the general public is available only after final conclusions of the external evaluation are agreed.

The Centre organizes its activities in compliance with the Regulations. Furthermore, the Centre prepares rules to institutions and to experts. Institutional rules consist of two parts: 1) Self-evaluation of scientific activity; 2) self-evaluation of programmes. Documents for programme evaluation provide recommendations on the structure of a new study program or guidelines of

evaluation of existing programs (for each separate evaluation project). Furthermore, institutions are encouraged to prepare an electronic version of self-evaluation; they may familiarize themselves with instructions on on-line submission of institution's documentation. The Centre prepares guidelines to experts that evaluate new programs and to experts that are involved in external exhaustive evaluation of existing programs. These guidelines are regularly revised and tailored to a specific evaluation project. (These guidelines are available on: www.skvc.lt).

Legal documents provide that an accredited program is the approved program, in the order established by the Ministry, as satisfying the requirements set by legal acts. The legal acts that define requirements are the following:

- Law on Higher Education of the Republic of Lithuania (2000). Official Gazette. No 27-715, March 21, 2000 Vilnius. [Law No VIII-1586].
- Law on Education, No VIII-854, July 7, 1998.
- Regulations on the programmes of consecutive studies: Order No 1326 of October 26, 2000/Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania.
- Decision of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania No. 999. Concerning the Procedure of Establishment of Higher Education Institutions. August 3, 2000.
- Order of the Minister of Education and Science No. 1281 Concerning the Procedure of Evaluation of Readiness of Institutions to Implement Non-University Studies. October 18, 2000. (Amended by order No 1373, November 8, 2000.

Both the Centre's and the Unit's formal rules in quality evaluation are legal documents, approved by the Ministry.

Rules of quality evaluation for institutions of research and higher education, approved by order No 1055 of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania on June 28, 2001 include the following parts:

- General part (purposes and general structure);
- Formation of Expert Groups;
- Evaluation of study programmes;
- General qualitative evaluation of institutions of research and higher education;
- Quality evaluation report.
- Appendices:
  - Topics (issues) to be analyzed during partial study programme evaluation;
  - Topics (issues) to be analyzed during exhaustive study programme evaluation;
  - Topics (issues) to be analyzed at new programme submission
  - Research productivity indicators
  - Indicators of effectiveness of development
  - Additional indicators concerned with research and qualification.

The Regulations on the programmes of consecutive studies approved by the Order No 1326 of October 26, 2000 of the Minister of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania serve as a key document for evaluation of studies.

The budget allocations for the Centre's operations and evaluation projects come from the financial resources that are called „appropriations for the general needs of higher education". The Department of Science and Higher Education, after discussions with the Lithuanian Science Council and the Lithuanian Rector's Conference drafts a proposal to the Government that includes appropriations to HEI and to the general needs. The amount of money allocated for „the general needs" is divided to support international cooperation programs of the republic of Lithuania (such as Socrates, bilateral agreements of academic mobility, EUREKA, others), Lithuanian Fund of Science and Studies, and the Lithuanian Centre for Quality Assessment in

Higher Education. Thus, academic community reaches a consensus in the allocation of general funds for improvements of the higher education system.

In addition, The Centre receives charitable funds from supporters, such as the British Council, Open Society Fund (Soros Foundation). These funds are used for partial coverage of costs of peers during their stay in Lithuania and to organize conferences. Finally, being involved in a number of European Commission's projects on quality assurance and higher education reform, the Centre received support from the PHARE grants.

The Unit receives budget allocations from the Ministry. In addition, being involved in long-term European Unions' project „Framework of Qualifications Standards" (2001-2004), the Unit receives PHARE funds.

Experts' work is paid by the Centre according to the concluded agreements from certain state budgetary allocations assigned for this purpose, and from other resources.

Formal stages of the evaluation procedure are described in the scheme. In short, the quality evaluation consists of two parts: 1) an internal quality evaluation (a self-study) of an institution of research and higher education, and 2) external quality evaluation (peer review) performed by expert groups. Self-study is the basic part of any evaluation. An institution evaluating its own activities formulates its objectives and tasks, analyses its activities applying different approaches, reveals its activity problems and foresees the ways of resolving them. A self-study is regulated by the senate (council or academic council) of an institution of research and higher education. A head (or senate) of an institution appoints officials that are constantly responsible for the institution's activity quality and its evaluation. An institution of research and higher education performs its self-evaluation at regular intervals of time established by the senate (council or academic council). A self-study is to be carried out before each external quality evaluation. External quality evaluation is organized by the Centre according long term (a few-year) and annual external evaluation plans. Long-term plans establish which subject areas of research and higher education are to be evaluated in respective years, while annual plans are intended to schedule the evaluation of study programmes, institutions and their subdivisions (indicating the year quarter). The Centre in co-ordination with the Rectors' Conference of Lithuanian Universities, Directors' Conference of Lithuanian College's, the State Research Institutes Directors' Conference and the Science Council of Lithuania prepares the draft plans. Long – term and annual external evaluation plans are to be approved by the Minister of Education and Science (hereinafter – the Minister).

HEI are given three months to prepare a self-study report. The duration of actual evaluation of a programme depends on the number of programs included in the project and the specificity of the project (national, international). The contract with the expert defines the duration of the evaluation. Experts are given at least 2 months to familiarize themselves with the self – evaluation reports submitted by HEI. Then experts' group conducts a site visit to HEI (one institution usually is visited in one day). After the site visits the experts makes a project of final report and sends it to HEI. Within 10 days the HE Institution may indicate in written form the experts' mistakes found in the project of the final report and make an argued suggestion to change certain conclusions and recommendations of the assessment. On receiving these remarks from the assessed institution of research and higher education, the experts prepare the final external assessment report and submit it to the Centre. The Center makes arrangements for the successful completion of evaluation projects based on common sense.

The Rules allow HEI to provide grounded arguments on the composition of the expert team; Moreover, institutions have rights to comment on the conclusions of peers. These comments should be received by the Center in ten days after receiving the final report.

The summary of the final conclusion of evaluation, after the leaders of institution review it, is being published by the Center. If leaders of the institution have special comments for the summary, those comments are published as well.

Seven days are given for institution by the Minister to respond to a draft decision regarding accreditation. These comments are expected when the decision is provisional or limited accreditation of programme.

2.6 The Implementation of Rules

The process of implementation of accreditation schemes is robust. All procedures foreseen in the rules are followed. Some flexibility is allowed in determining schedules and time frames of evaluation. However, there are no specific rules for self-study of HEI in terms of the duration of preparation. Since quality improvement idea is imbedded in schemes, it is expected that institutions produce information for their self-study on a regular basis while implementing their internal quality assurance procedures.

Approval of new study programmes is organized in cycles defined by the plan issued by the Ministry. The Center has to conduct evaluation of new programs in 2.5 months. However, often it takes longer for the institution to meet all requirements of the Center. Often new program documentation needs improvement. Hence, the evaluation might take 3.5 months. After all programmes listed in the plan are evaluated, the Center receives conclusions of the Expert Council and sends final recommendations (the summary issued by the Council) to the Ministry.

3. Analysis of accreditation and evaluation schemes

Seeking to respond to majority of voices that supported non-intrusive way of quality control Lithuania chose a relatively original model of quality assurance in higher education. These voices represented state higher education institutions that wanted to implement dominant ideas of university autonomy and academic freedom. Private higher education establishments sprouted only by the end of the 20th century. While neighbours in Latvia and Estonia, forced by mushrooming private sector, established accreditation schemes, Lithuania's policy had an elements of caution and resistance to speeding-up development of the private higher education. In case of the established public sector, accreditation schemes seemed not appropriate. Institutions received a legitimate right to operate and they conveyed the promise to implement quality assurance mechanisms. A collegial external evaluation process, involving activities of a buffer organization Lithuanian Centre for Quality Assurance in Higher Education was acceptable for all public institutions.

Two alternatives – quality assurance for improvement purposes versus accreditation for accountability purposes – have been on the table since debates on higher education quality started. In 1995 teams of higher education experts proposed to implement the first approach. Four teams involving experts from universities created rules for quality evaluation.

In addition, a strong sense of securing quality, and a firm notion of maintaining some sort of control in higher education is imbedded in the culture of the Lithuanian society. The legacy of a high presige of educated people in the country is linked to rigid requirements of higher education. Moreover, the legacy of soviet control mechanism often plays a positive role in a continuous accountability process; it features bureaucratic routines that many in the academe are familiar

with. However, borroving models from outside was an unacceptable practice. The academe looked for schemes that fit most to its identity and to the needs of the reform in higher education.

Two tensions may be distinguished that are related to evaluation not based on accreditation:

- Tension emerging with standardization of programs
- Tensions driven by dissatisfaction that traditional forms of academic authority failed.

The Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania and the Law on Science and Higher Education (1991) provided legal foundation of autonomy and academic freedom for universities. This legal foundation was recently challenged by the standardisation of study trends. The minister approves the regulations of a study trend. Universities, while designing their curricula, have to comply with structural norms and requirements prescribed for programs. These regulations will be used in approval quality evaluation and accreditation schemes. Although the standardization is aimed more clarity and transparency of the programs, it will force universities to apply more bureaucratic procedures in curricular design. Moreover, standardisation may invoke passive compliance among academics and result in less creativity in study process. Working groups that are currently involved in this process should secure values of academic freedom and provide sufficient room for innovation in program design.

External quality evaluation of institutions and programs was suggested by academics themselves. In the transitional post-soviet period innovators understood that traditional forms of academic authority failed. Universities suffered from slow speed of reforms and corruption. Innovative new leaders proclaimed openness and transparency policies by introducing evaluation of institutions and programs. External evaluations enabled institutions to look at the mirror, to understand their weaknesses and to get rid of old traditions that hampered change.

Both accreditation and evaluation schemes use similar conceptual framework which is improvement oriented. Moreover, the sequence of evaluation procedures is similar. All schemes that are applied for university type HEI are implemented by the same buffer organization.

Although there is no direct legal link between accreditation schemes and approval schemes, both processes include element of control, recognition and accountability. Basically, the Ministry has the authority to approve or terminate the program, based on the evaluation. Therefore, the centralized decision making makes accreditation schemes and program approval schemes similar.

Universities experienced several positive consequences of the accreditation schemes. First of all, self-analysis helped establishing a regular collection of information about institution's inputs and outputs of the research and study process. Institutions started inventorying their inputs, and after that collected information on the outputs. Furthermore, external evaluation proved successful because it facilitated clean-up of curriculum and reshaping of old courses. In many cases internal critique did not have as much impact as external view. Academics, wishing „to save the face" and seeking to be innovative, in most cases agreed with recommendations of the reviewers. This process of a positive change enabled universities to start cooperation with foreign partners. Some of the partnering institutions in Europe look at accreditation label as a sign of good quality. For example, some universities obtained more trust by foreign collaborators in the field of student mobility after their programs were accredited.

Lithuanian policy emphasizes a widening access to students and preparing those students for jobs available in the market. Non-university sector widened access of secondary schools graduates to tertiary education. A formal decision on accreditation is indirectly linked recognition of education by the market and by other educational establishments (both in the country and abroad). The rights of students for recognition are secured if they graduated from officially recognized program (or institution).

Another important consequence derives from the system of student loans. Only students, enrolled in recognised, registered programs, are entitled to apply for a loan from the State Fund for Studies and Research (the Fund). While public funds for loans are limited it is likely that in the future the Fund will support students that are enrolled in accredited programs.

The policy talk around higher education accreditation draws attention of the general public. Citizens are concerned about the value of higher education credential. In case, when accreditation of a popular Law program at Vilnius University was questioned, general public and the media reacted actively. However, since the accreditation, as a formal procedure, was established only for a couple of years, there was no tension between established schemes and the society yet. In fact, society needs more information about the benefits of evaluation and the value of accreditation.

Changes in the scheme in relation to costs and benefits of accreditation can be anticipated. First of all, the vocational sector will establish the accreditation scheme for colleges by 2004. Second, similar developments, involving evaluation and audit of institutions, are legitimized in secondary education sector. Costs of accreditation will grow because all sectors of education will be included in the process. The question emerges about efficiency and effectiveness of accreditation. The Government is interested in cost-saving innovations. Private institutions are concerned about their spending for formal approval and accreditation. Investments in the system of quality monitoring can be costly; therefore, the effect of those schemes should be visible and the benefits should overweight the costs. Thus, cost-benefit analysis is needed to provide some feedback. Research is needed on benefits of accreditation. Focus groups and survey techniques could be used to identify key issues of accreditation in higher education.

4. External Influences

The Bologna process did not play a significant role in the establishment of accreditation schemes in the country. The process of setting up schemes of quality evaluation in higher education took place in Lithuania for almost five years. By the time Bologna meeting was held, Lithuanian higher education institutions have established their procedures of quality evaluation. Conversely, the developments in Eastern European countries, especially in the Baltic States in the field of quality assurance were exemplary and they influenced innovations in the region.

Politically Bologna process made a step forward in bringing Western Europe and Eastern Europe to a closer dialog on higher education. A couple of aspects in favour of the Bologna process can be mentioned. First, since the ministers of education from 29 countries have been invited to sign the Bologna declaration in June 1999, they were exposed to importance of internationalization in the field of higher education. A notion of internationalization included the following areas: academic mobility, recognition of qualifications, introduction of the Diploma Supplement, and quality assurance. Having signed the declaration, ministers committed themselves to supporting developments in the above mentioned areas in respective countries. Second, representatives of Eastern European countries gained more visibility vis-à-vis Western European partners. This exposure was useful for further developments of the enlargement of the European Union. All steps toward cooperation count, including steps taken toward assuring quality in higher education.

Although the Bologna process did not impact directly the quality evaluation developments in Lithuania, the Declaration definitely facilitated the diversification of higher education system. In-

stitutions of non-university higher education were legitimized; thus the system of higher education became binary. Furthermore, different interests groups came to a compromise in allowing shorter higher education programs, duration of at lest three years, which were registered as non-university type higher education programs. Consequently, students have a wider choice of options for their studies. However, the articulation between non-university sector and university sector needs to be achieved. For those students who will seek admission from one sector to the other, there might still barriers of transferability of studies and recognition of credentials.

In 2001 Lithuania joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) signed the General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS). The country committed itself to free service provisions in all sectors of trade. Higher education, as one of those sectors, is included in the Chapter 5C of GATS. None of the restrictions have been established in the market access and national treatment provisions (Articles 1, 2, and 3). However, Lithuania did not make specific commitments regarding provision of services of physical persons (Article 4). This implies that national authorities have the right to set up restrictions for the market access to persons and to impose national regulations for the services of physical persons.

What that means for higher education system? Although the country allows establishing foreign or trans-national higher education institutions and ensures non-discrimination of those establishments, it has the right to exclude from GATS all persons that work without a formal contract. By signing GATS and opening the higher education market to foreign providers, Lithuania entered a phase of globalization. Although the consequences of this competitive process on higher education will be seen in the future, the quality standards will be an issue. We might anticipate that nation's higher education institutions will have to improve quality in order to compete successfully for students. Otherwise, a stream of students may drift to colleges and universities established by foreign providers.

Another possible development, as a consequence of globalization, may occur in the accreditation field. If bodies of trans-national higher education accreditation will be established, alternative policies might be debated in the field of quality evaluation. Will it be national accreditation or trans-national accreditation? So far, international teams started evaluating law, medicine, and education programs. This experience shows that Lithuanian quality assurance scheme includes globalization aspect. The recommendations of the international peers' team result in national legislation when decisions about accreditation are made. The inclusion of international peers attempts to gain more trust by international audience and to demonstrate willingness to cooperate globally in quality evaluation undertakings.

Many ideas and concepts of establishment a quality assurance system and accreditation schemes have been taken from existing Western models. The applicability of those models has been widely and explicitly discussed in Lithuania. At least five external influences can be distinguished in the development of quality assurance and accreditation schemes in the country:

- Integration into supra-national governmental organizations, such as UNESCO, Council of Europe, European Commission, and OECD;
- Growing international academic mobility and, as a consequence, the need for comparison of degrees and qualification in higher education:
- Participation in networks of quality assurance agencies, such as International Network of Quality Assurance agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE);
- Cooperation with international specialized organizations of higher education, such as association of engineering schools;

UNESCO: In the early nineties UNESCO-CEPES (Center for Higher Education, Budapest) organized series of events and published a number of papers (reference) that reflected considera-

tions on quality assurance in higher education. Experts from the United States and Western Europe shared their ideas representatives from the estern Europe on strenghts and weaknesses of the accreditation model. Professor Algirdas Cizas, who later became the first director of the Center for Quality Evaluation in Higher Education, was a very active participant in those events, and he published a number of articles about ideosyncracies of quality assurance system in a small country like Lithuania (see list of publications at www.skvc.lt)

Council of Europe: In mid-nineties the Council of Europe launched a new program to support innovations in higher education in the new member-states. The issue of setting up quality asurance systems became one of the central themes of the „Legislative Reform Program". The Council of Europe tried to provide expert advice based on the needs of individual countries and the problems emerging in a specific region, e.g. three Baltic countries. Therefore, series of workshops on the topic were organized in Riga, Tallinn, and Vilnius. These activities resulted in creation of the Baltic Higher Education Coordinaiton Committee (BHECC), which primarily focused on cooperation in quality assurance and recognition of credentials.

UNESCO and Council of Europe: The Lisbon Convention included provisions on quality assurance. Lithuania was among the first five countires that ratified this convention.

European Commission: Two significant PHARE investments contributed to the development of the quality assurance system in Lithuania. First, one of the four components of the „Multi-country program in higher education" launched activities in quality assurance. Second, national PHARE project „Higher Education Reform" helped to restructure the higher education system and to establish quality evaluation schemes for non-university type institutions. TEMPUS helped universities to set up quality assurance mechanisms and to prepare some of the institutions for a large-scale cooperation in SOCRATES exchanges. PHARE program also facilitates developments in quality evaluation in vocational, post-secondary sectors.

OECD: Several initiatives of the IMHE (Institutional Management in Higher Educaiton) involved Lithuanian experts from Vilnius University, Kaunas University of technology and the Vilnius Gediminas Technical University. Events were held in Vilnius; publications of the OECD/IMHE on quality assurnace were importnat sources for institutional improvements.

INQAAHE: Lithuanian experts joined the network in 1993 when concept of quality evaluation in higher education was adopted by the Science Council. (Mockiene B. 1993). Participation in the network opened ways of communication worldwide on issues of accreditation.

International associations of specialized higher education schools in engineering, arts, education, business and other fields helped redesign curricula and reshape study process in technical and engineering education. For example, in the early nineties, Kaunas University of Technology initiated an international evalaution of engineering programs. This pioneering effort facilitated the reform of higher education in engineering toward a more holistic approach.

5. Other customary quality evaluation activities

Each higher education institution has to comply with the provisions for full-time academic staff recruitment and remuneration. These provisions are defined in several laws: Law on Employment and Law on Higher Education.

In 2000, the Government introduced audit requirements for all public institutions. The audit includes examination of institutional goals, efficient utilization of financial and human resources as well as general effectiveness of the operation of a public organization.

Moreover, institutions pursue strategic development policies that include aspects of quality of teaching and research. For example, in the early 90s Kaunas University of Technology established *program committees* in charge or curriculum redesign according to the best practices in Europe and the world (Kaunas Technology University) Vilnius University also created special groups of leadership that set up internal policies of quality evaluation and improvement as a significant component of the overall strategic management. For example, in 2002 Interfaculty (interschool) committees of study programs and University's Academic Commission held the responsibility for quality assurance at this institution. These activities are related to growing participation in the academic mobility within SOCRATES program. Any institution willing to participate in mutual academic mobility has to comply with the requirements set by the EU program. Consequently, the participation in the SOCRATES exchanges can be used as an indicator of quality of program. While evaluating quality for accreditation purposes experts look at institution's successful international policies.

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Country Report The Netherlands

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1. The National System of Higher Education in the Netherlands

1.1 Place in the System of Education

The Dutch education system includes the following levels: primary education for children between the ages of four and twelve, secondary education as a continuation of primary education for pupils between twelve and (sixteen to) eighteen years old, higher education for students aged eighteen and above, adult and vocational education and certified education (from sixteen onwards). At the end of comprehensive primary education, pupils are assigned to general pre-vocational secondary education, senior secondary education or pre-university education. The general pre-vocational education (VMBO) lasts for four years and gives access to the senior vocational secondary education (MBO) and the apprenticeship system (LLW), which are both part of vocational and adult education. A third type of secondary education is the five-year senior general secondary education (HAVO), which can be directly accessed after primary education or after completing the VMBO. HAVO graduates can attend MBO or pre-university education (VWO). Pre-university education gives access to the university (WO), higher professional education (HBO) and to distance learning courses in higher education (Open University).

1.2 Size and Structure of Higher Education

The Dutch higher education system is a binary system and consists of 13 universities (including Wageningen Agricultural University, which is financed by the ministry of agriculture) and 56 institutions offering higher vocational education. The latter, the HBO-institutions, are somewhat comparable to the German *Fachhochschulen* or the British (former) polytechnics, although the official length of their study programmes is longer: four, instead of three years (full-time). Besides the 13 traditional public research universities, there is a limited number of small ‘designated institutions’: a university for business administration, four institutes for theological training and a humanistic uni-

versity, as well as several international education institutes. The total number of these designated institutes is 61. They fall under the Higher Education and Research Act but do not receive government funding, and the students receive no financial aid.[1] However, the degrees they issue are recognized. These institutions are often not included in the official statistics.

In addition to these two major sectors, higher education in the Netherlands is also provided through the Open University, located in Heerlen with a number of support centres around the country. The Open University offers a wide range of courses, leading to both formal university and higher vocational education degrees. (In statistics, it is often included in the public university sector.)

There are no other formal sectors of post-secondary education in the Netherlands. In addition, the 'designated' institutes and organisations offer a large number of recognised certificates, diplomas and degrees in various professional fields such as accountancy, business administration, etc. These are usually structured as `external studies' in the sense of distance learning courses with limited face-to-face interaction.

1.3 Types of Degrees

The distinction between vocational education and university education still remains under the newly introduced bachelor-master system. For the universities, the bachelor-master structure is now becoming the norm. This means that the programmes are split in two parts:

- A bachelor's part consisting of 180 credits (in ECTS-equivalents);
- A master's part consisting of (as a rule) 60 credits.

For the higher vocational institutions, the existing fist degree courses continue to be considered as a bachelor's course of 240 credits. The higher vocational institutions can also offer (professional) Master's courses. The courses offered at the moment will only be officially recognized if they obtain accreditation from the Netherlands Accreditation Organisation (NAO).

Access to master's programmes is based on the entrance requirements determined by the institutions. In general, students are admitted on the basis of their having completed a relevant bachelor's programme. The law specifies that every academic bachelor programme should give entrance to at least one academic master's programme. In those cases where the master's programme does not correspond to the bachelor's programme, admission may be selective. A master's degree will be required for entrance to doctoral programmes.

1.4 Types of Programmes

Government-funded higher professional education courses cover the following seven areas: education, economics, behaviour and society, language and culture, engineering and technology, agriculture and natural environment, and health care. Most HBO-institutions offer courses in several of these fields.

Of the 13 universities, nine carry out teaching and research in a broad range of disciplines spanning seven sectors: Economics, Health, Behaviour and Society, Law, Engineering and Technology, and Language and Culture. Three focus on engineering and technology. The Agricultural

1 The new accreditation scheme will change this arrangement; any accredited programme, regardless of the institution's funding, will entitle students to receive financial aid.

University in Wageningen provides courses in the field of agriculture and the natural environment.

In both higher education sectors, there are full-time and part-time courses. Dual courses combining learning and work were introduced on an experimental basis in 1998/1999.

The total number of programme types listed in the Central Register of Higher Education Study Programmes (*CROHO*) is 117. Within these programmes, students are to some extent free to combine their own programmes. Equally, with the approval of the relevant examining board students may establish their own degree studies by selecting from different programmes.

1.5 Transition from Higher Education to Work

Close contacts between HBO institutions and the labour market are extremely important. They occur at both national and individual course level. Each year a national survey of HBO-graduates, known as the HBO-Monitor, is carried out on behalf of the HBO-Council.

Universities prepare students for research training and for occupations in which it is useful to have an academic background. Only a small proportion of graduates (around 10%) are eventually employed in research. Like the HBO institutions, the universities monitor the position of their graduates on the labour market by means of an annual survey, which began in 1998.

1.6 Governance and Steering of Higher Education

The Dutch education system combines a unified education system, regulated by central laws, with decentralized administration and management of schools. Overall responsibility for the public-private education system lies with the State, represented by the Minister of Education, Culture and Science, and the legislative power of the Dutch Parliament.

The Ministry lays down the conditions, especially in primary and secondary education, relating to the types of schools that can exist, the length of courses, compulsory and optional school subjects, the minimum and maximum number of lessons to be given and their length, the norms for class division, the examination syllabus and national examinations, and standards of competence, salaries, status and teaching hours of teaching staff. The Ministry does not set up schools, but does determine the norms for their establishment. This applies to both public and private education.

The government establishes a framework within which HBO institutions have to operate, but it is the responsibility of the competent authority to expand on the Government framework concerning the teaching and examination regulations. In their education and examination regulations, HBO institutions are required to specify the teaching programme, the main subjects and the content and form of the different examinations.

The same legal framework applies for the universities. Their daily management is in the hands of the Executive board and the University Council. The Executive Board, which comprises three members, including the rector, is accountable to the Minister of Education, Culture and Science and to the University Council. The University Council comprises up to thirty representatives of the academic staff, students and the support and administrative staff.

The Information Management Group (*IBG*) is a semi-independent part of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science that implements the Student Finance Act (*WSF*) and the study costs and allowance schemes. Its other duties include the collection of school and course fees, the

provision of administrative support for examinations, the placement and registration of prospective students, the evaluation of diplomas and the implementation of benefit schemes for education personnel.

The Central Funding of Institutions Agency (*CFI*) is the executive agency responsible for funding the education system on the basis of legislation and regulations and in accordance with the established financial frameworks. Its duties also include providing information for policy-making and funding purposes. The CFI is responsible for the proper and efficient funding of institutions. Since 1 January 1996, when the CFI acquired agency status, it has formed an autonomous part of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

There are several advisory and consultative bodies in the Netherlands that are entitled to make recommendations on educational policy. The Educational Council (*Onderwijsraad – OR*) is a permanent advisory board which was established in 1919. Its task is to ensure continuing equal financial treatment for public and private education, the coherence of educational policy and legislation and the freedom of education. The Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences (*KNAW*) and the Advisory Council on Science and Technology Policy (*Adviesraad voor wetenschaps- en Technologiebeleid – AWT*) advise on science and science policy respectively. Advisory bodies that offer advice on other matters in addition to education are the Socio-economic-Council (*SER*) and the Advisory Council on Government Policy – *Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid – WRR*).

With regard to higher education policy, the Minister also consults the Higher Education Consultative Committee, which includes the associations of HBO colleges, universities and teaching hospitals and the national teaching organisations. Consultation takes place within the Student Consultative Committee between the Minister and representatives of the national student organisation.

Negotiations with the trade unions on conditions of service and the staff's legal status take place at various levels within the education sector, but in the higher education sector, they are between the collective universities, respectively the collective HBO-institutions, and the relevant trade unions, since the higher education institutions have become (partially) autonomous in this respect too.

1.7 Higher Education and Research Act 1993

The Higher Education and Research Act (WHW) came into force on 1 August 1993. It regulates higher education (i.e. HBO-institutions, universities, the Open University and the 'designated institutions'), teaching hospitals and academic research. This Act replaced the University Act, the Higher Professional Education Act and numerous other regulations governing higher education and research (from over 2,000 to around 300 regulations).

The administrative relationship between the government and institutions of higher education and research, as defined in the Act, is based on the following principles:

- the government should only intervene to prevent undesirable developments when self-management by the institutions is likely to have unacceptable results;
- government intervention should primarily take the form of remedying imperfections in the system *ex post*;
- the instruments at the government's disposal should be characterised by a minimum of detailed regulation;
- the institutions must lay down norms to ensure legal certainty and proper administration.

The Act grants the institutions considerable freedom in matters of programmes. They are responsible in the first instance for maintaining quality, providing an adequate range of teaching

and research programmes and ensuring access to education. Quality control is exercised by the institutions themselves, by external experts and, on behalf of the government, by the Inspectorate for Higher Education. In principle, the government assesses on an *ex post* basis only whether funds have been allocated efficiently and whether the intended results have been achieved. If major shortcomings are identified, the institutions will be informed accordingly. If discrepancies between ideal and reality persist, notably in the field of quality, the government has the option – with due regard to the proper procedures – of using coercive powers backed up by sanctions.

2. Accreditation and Evaluation Schemes in the Netherlands

The year 2003 marks the transition for the quality assurance systems of higher education in the Netherlands. A new accreditation system is being introduced. It will build upon (and in part replace) the existing national systems of quality assurance.

First, we will briefly describe briefly the previous quality assurance system and the system used until now to introduce new programmes. Then, we shall describe the design and outcomes of a pilot accreditation carried out by the Dutch HBO Council, prior to the introduction of the new accreditation system. Finally, we shall describe the new accreditation system as it has been developed so far.

2.1 The Quality Assurance System in the Netherlands

The Netherlands was among the first European countries to develop a formal system to assess the quality of teaching and research (van Vught & Westerheijden, 1993). In the 1980s a new steering philosophy replaced the detailed control of all kinds of input; the government would only check afterwards whether the *self-regulation* of the higher education system led to outputs in an acceptable range. In other words, the higher education institutions would be given more institutional autonomy if they proved that they 'delivered' quality education. True to a historical process, this 'new steering philosophy' was implemented before it was formulated. That happened in a policy initiative launched in the Dutch universities in 1983 concerning research, the 'Conditional Funding' (CF) policy.

This policy was intended to 'promote both quality and systematic discussion of priorities and the use of resources' in research in Dutch universities – accountability regarding government funding can be seen as an ulterior goal. The Conditional Funding policy was the first effort to assess how governmental funding for higher education was being used, changing the funding of fundamental university research from a 'give away model', included in the general grant to universities, to an 'exchange model'. A successful and satisfying exchange presupposes that the receiving party can assess whether it is getting 'value for money'.

The procedure chosen for the CF model was to have external committees of peers assess the research submitted by the universities and to guarantee the funding of the research group that was carrying it out for the next five years if the research was assessed positively. The information about research aims, activities and outputs (mainly publications) was to be supplied to the peers by the faculties. The external committees were appointed by the Royal Academy of Arts & Sciences, the most distinguished academic body in the country, which covered all areas of science. By using the principle of peer review, which is well-known in academia, and through the in-

volvement of the Royal Academy, legitimacy of the procedure in the eyes of the academics was sought.

The research funding was allocated to the universities, not to the faculties or research programmes. It was up to the universities, therefore, to re-allocate funds from 'unprotected' to 'protected' research as they saw fit. However, there were very few re-allocations. The universities' decision-makers did not use the outcomes of the CF assessments for re-allocations, mostly because the assessments were very uniformly distributed. Very few research programmes were judged 'insufficient', and the peers declined to indicate 'excellent' research. The CF failed as a policy instrument for the re-allocation of funding.

What proved to be a much more influential aspect of the CF was that all research submitted for assessment was grouped into *research programmes*. Grouping together the research activities of several individuals started to become the main policy level in higher education research policy. The 'CF research programmes' became a lasting characteristic of research in the universities in the Netherlands, covering, at first, a significant percentage of all their fundamental research, and later practically all university-based fundamental research. Even when after two five-year rounds the CF faded away at the national level, most universities kept these research groupings for their internal administration, and they were at the basis of other research policies developed by the Ministry of Education & Science.

One of the main national policy initiatives that should be mentioned here is the training of post-graduate research assistants. Networks of researchers, often at an inter-university or even national level, were developed for that purpose. Later, these networks were institutionalised into 'research schools'. To have a research school recognised (for a five-year period) by the Royal Academy of Arts & Sciences is considered to be prestigious by universities. The CF research programmes may not always be recognisable in the themes of these research schools anymore, but for university decision-makers across all disciplines the CF procedure popularised the idea that research could be managed at a collective level.

2.2 Introduction of Quality Assessment of Teaching

A policy paper 'Higher Education: Autonomy and Quality' (HOAK) was published two years after the introduction of the CF. The idea of quality assessment was to be extended from research only to all major primary activities of higher education institutions – meaning, in fact, that quality assessment of teaching had to be developed.

In their negotiations about the implementation of HOAK in 1986, the Minister of Education & Science and the umbrella bodies of the universities, the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU) and the Association of *hogescholen* (HBO Council), reached the compromise that the umbrella bodies would co-ordinate the procedures to assure the government that they 'produced' quality teaching without too much waste of students and time, i.e. accountability with a special emphasis on dropout ratios and time to degree. In a spirit of self-regulation, the government would not use the outcomes of the quality assessments to further change funding of higher education after the cut-backs of the period before 1985. However, if a study programme was shown to be of low quality, and there were no improvements over a number of years (after a ministerial warning popularly called 'yellow card'), the government reserved the right to strike this study programme off the official register ('red card'), meaning that its diploma would no longer be recognised officially and that it would no longer be funded by the government, nor would students have a right to the study grant every student of a recognised programme is given.

In the hands of the umbrella bodies, the governmental goals of accountability and quality improvement changed to quality improvement and accountability – the change in order indicates a small but significant difference in emphasis.

2.3 The Principles, and their Implementation in Universities

For the design of the quality assessment procedure, the VSNU borrowed from the CF assessment procedure and from the decades-long US experience with programme review and specialised accreditation. Accordingly, the entity to be evaluated through the new procedure is the *programme*, i.e. the collection of courses leading to a specific *doctorandus* degree. Ad hoc *visiting committees* of external peers judge all programmes of study in an area of knowledge in the country, basing themselves on the information contained in the faculties' *self-evaluation reports* and on their own observations during two-day *site visits* to each of these faculties. At the end of each visit, preliminary comments and judgements about the study programme are given by the chair of the visiting committee. The final version of this text, following comments by the study programme, is included in the national, public *report of the visiting committee*.

The requirements for the self-evaluation report structure the self-evaluation process in the faculty. The VSNU guidelines for the report specify which topics should be addressed, e.g. programme aims, programme structure and content, student and staff information, data on graduates, issues of internationalisation and internal quality management. The structure of the report and the data to be used are prescribed in detail to ensure comparability across the country, but the faculty can emphasise issues it considers to be important.

The self-evaluation reports are also the cornerstone of quality improvement: through the self-evaluation process, faculties ought to become aware of their strengths and weaknesses and begin to ameliorate the weaknesses, even if no external committee were involved – this is of course a normative, perhaps even idealistic picture, as sketched by proponents of self-evaluation processes.

The peer committee's judgements are collected in a national, public report, which includes the committee's frame of reference for judging the faculties, a chapter on the general state of affairs of teaching in the discipline in the country, and chapters on each of the programmes of study, with its strengths and weaknesses and the committee's recommendations for improvement. The visiting committees do emphatically not give a single, summary judgement of a study programme's quality. To do so would be contradictory to the multi-dimensional nature of the concept of quality.

This procedure has been in operation since the academic year 1987–1988, the first year as a pilot project. Every year the VSNU appoints a number of ad hoc visiting committees to evaluate all programmes of study in their respective disciplines, thus covering all[2] programmes of study in a six-year cycle.

2.4 The Same Principles Implemented Slightly Differently in HBO Institutions

The HBO Council, the umbrella organisation of the HBO institutions, started assessing programmes of study in 1990, and because of the larger number of programmes it operates on an

2 With very few exceptions, mostly consisting of programmes that are unique in the country. Tailor-made solutions are developed for these 'orchid programmes'.

eight-year cycle to cover all areas of knowledge. In some areas with very many study programmes, two or more sub-committees visit them. Also, as a rule, the visits last no more than one day per study programme.

The most important differences with the VSNU procedure stem from the fact that the HBO study programmes are intended to be more 'practice oriented' than the academic programmes in universities. Applicability and job orientation therefore have higher priority. This influences the character of the quality judgements, and therefore also the ways of forming those judgements. Thus, the HBO Council issues its own guidelines for self-evaluation, which differ in some respects from the guidelines used by the VSNU; also, the HBO sector still being in the first round of evaluations, these guidelines are in some ways less prescriptive than those of the VSNU. And this can be seen in the composition of the visiting committees: whereas the VSNU mainly uses academic peers, the HBO Council visiting committees consist mainly of practitioners in the area of application of the study programme.

2.5 VSNU Quality Assessments of Research

After the demise of the CF procedure, the government wanted a new procedure for quality assessment of research in the universities. The procedure that the VSNU designed can briefly be characterised as an extension of experiences: of the CF experience on the one hand, and of the VSNU experience with quality assessment of teaching on the other.

From 1993 until 2003,[3] *external peer committees* judged fundamental university research according to four dimensions of quality: productivity, quality of output, relevance and long-term viability. *All* of a faculty's fundamental research was to be submitted, organised into *research programmes* as in the CF. The faculties provided the information again; bibliometric analyses of publication data were carried out by an independent bureau in a number of cases – this was new and not always part of the procedure. The committees might judge on the basis of this written information only, but they also could interview research programme leaders or visit the faculties and laboratories. National, public reports were the main output of this procedure. In contrast to the teaching assessments, the research evaluations were given in summary figures for each research programme on the four dimensions of research quality. Productivity, quality of (key) publications, relevance of the programme and long-term viability of the research group were judged separately on five-point scales ranging from (1) insufficient to (5) excellent. As with the quality assessment of teaching, there was no direct connection between quality judgements and the government's (funding) policy for higher education. How the universities and faculties used the outcomes of the quality assessment procedures is the subject of the next section.

2.6 Effects

There is no direct connection between the quality assessments and government higher education policy. Specifically, there are no financial rewards or sanctions for the faculties concerned. The most important, but still marginal, financial consequence would ensue if students 'voted with their feet' (taking their tuition fees with them) by evading study programmes that are judged to be

3 In 2003, all major research evaluation procedures were merged into a single one in co-operation of VSNU, KNAW and NWO.

weak in many respects – but there is as yet no empirical evidence that they do. To ensure that the considerable amount of effort that goes into the quality assessments is not a 'paper tiger', but that these assessments are serious and that recommendations are acted upon, the government, through the Inspectorate for Higher Education, closely follows the visiting committees' reports and the follow-up by the universities. In the jargon of Dutch politics, this is called 'meta-evaluation'.

Since 1993 when the institutional arrangement concerning follow up was re-negotiated between the government and the higher education institutions, the Inspectorate has checked whether the universities react adequately to the visiting committee's observations (Scheele, Maassen, & Westerheijden, 1998). Note that the Inspectorate did not prescribe a certain method of follow-up. To decide on its own method of follow-up was part of the university's autonomy. The Inspectorate only required that some follow-up was planned and was put in writing in an 'Action Plan'. If no adequate Action Plan ensued, the Minister of Education issued a 'yellow card', i.e. a warning that unless thorough improvements were made quickly, the programme would be stricken off the register (CROHO) the following year. Such warnings were also given when study programmes were judged to be very weak in crucial aspects. If the Inspectorate discovered such 'worrisome cases', the Minister of Education asked the university to make rapid improvements. Warnings were issued in a small minority of cases – fewer in the university sector than in the HBO sector. This threat of sanctions has always been sufficient to induce improvements. Finally, the Inspectorate checked the follow-up in a mid-term review, three years after a visiting committee report is published. This was to ensure that quality improvement plans were implemented and did not remain paper plans until the next visiting committee six or seven years later.

The proof of the pudding was, of course, in what happened with these evaluations. They were not 'ritual dances' – the Inspectorate for Higher Education made sure of that. It has been established independently that non-utilisation by the higher education institution (usually, the faculty) was a relatively rare (Frederiks, 1996; Frederiks, Westerheijden, & Weusthof, 1994; Weusthof, 1994). This did not mean that all faculties slavishly followed all recommendations of the visiting committees. Frederiks (1996) estimated that about half of the visiting committees' recommendations were followed up. This was confirmed in 1999; it was found that virtually all recommendations endorsed by the visited programmes were followed up in the short or long term (Jeliazkova & Westerheijden, 2000). Even more important, there is no doubt that the visitation system has become part of mainstream university and higher professional education (Westerheijden, 1997).

2.7 The Programme Registration System

According to the 1993 Law on Higher Education and Academic Research (WHW), the following procedure was employed for the regulation of new programmes in higher education. The reason for introducing the system was Parliament's concern that there was too great a proliferation of study programmes in the second half of the 1980s. The outcome was the establishing of the Advisory Committee for Educational Programmes (ACO). Five of its members were appointed by the minister. Its task was to assess the plans for new educational programmes submitted by the institutions. Also, when changes were proposed in the educational and examination plans, the committee decided whether these were significant enough to represent a new programme. This kind of change mainly occured in different types of specializations within one programme. The conclusions of ACO were presented as an advice to the institution's management. The institution then decided whether to establish the new programme and to ask the minister to register it in the Central Registry of Higher Education Programmes (CROHO). Registration in CROHO meant that

the institute might receive regular financing and that the students enrolled in the programme were eligible for student financing. If the minister decided not to follow ACO's advice, he notified Parliament. In assessing the new programmes, the ACO took into consideration the needs for higher education in terms of total number of programmes available and of national distribution ('macro efficiency').

This description left leeway for interpretation. However, the ACO informed the institutions regularly by detailed on the specific procedures and the information to be submitted. For example, in the 2002 round, the institution had to demonstrate that it was indeed a new programme and that it did not diminish the transparency of the choice of programmes; that the programme met the quality requirements of the respective comparable programmes and that it was appropriate in terms of availability and geographical distribution of similar programmes.

In the first four years of the existence of the ACO, almost three-quarters of the programme proposals in the HBO-sector were rejected.

With the introduction of the accreditation scheme in 2003, the task of checking and approving new programmes is the responsibility of the NAO. This takes place on the institution's demand. The institution submits a profile description, a financial overview and a staff description of the programme. The submitted documents also indicate whether the programme is totally new or whether it already exists in other Dutch institutions. In making a decision, the NAO takes into account not only the quality of the programme, but also some financial aspects. Programmes that are totally new are in principle tested in more detail. The NAO recruits experts when necessary.

2.8 The Pilot Accreditation in the HBO-Sector

Already before the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science officially published the 'HOOP 2000' policy planning paper, the discussion around the Bologna process incited the HBO Council to explore accreditation, not only as an addition to the existing visitation model, but also as a possible substitute for it. An important issue for the HBO Council was whether it was possible to arrive at a more objective judgement of higher education quality. The HBO Council was mainly concerned with overcoming what it saw as the greatest shortcoming of the existing visitation system – that it produces a list of remarks and recommendations rather than an integrated overall assessment. The HBO Council took the initiative to carry out a pilot accreditation, which was to serve as the basis for a future discussion on the feasibility of introducing an accreditation system in the Netherlands. However, in practice, the pilot accreditation became one of several inputs to the discussion: not whether accreditation was feasible, but what were the right methods to perform it.

19 programmes in Social Work and 22 programmes in Commercial Economics took part in the pilot accreditation. A protocol was created, with a detailed description of the actors' tasks and of the rules for evaluation and accreditation decisions (*Protocol Proefaccreditering; Richtlijnen voor het accrediteringsproces*, 1999). The procedure was designed as follows:

First, a programme would carry out a self-evaluation study. Sufficient information was to be presented as well as an assessment based upon it concerning two distinct aspects: a) according to the guidelines for quality assessment of the programme according to the HBO standard requirements and b) according to the guidelines for assessment of management capacity.

Based on this self-study, the programme writes a three-part self-evaluation report. In the first part, general information on the institution and the programme is presented. The second part is an assessment of the programme according to the framework of the Accreditation Protocol. The

framework consists of 6 standard criteria, further split into subcriteria. Each of these is operationalized in a total of 80 verification points. The programme applies special calculation rules to reach an overall score of 'good', 'sufficient', 'average' and 'insufficient'. In the third part of the report, 'additional' information is presented which is to be used for a side letter with recommendations by the external visiting panel. This information is organized around 50 diagnostic questions. For each question, the programme also gives itself a score, without calculation rules.

An accreditation committee is in charge of setting up external review panels. The candidates undergo special training. After a two-day visit, the external panel writes an assessment report and gives an overall advice: positive, negative or conditional. Also, a confidential side letter with recommendations for improvement is presented to the programme after the final accreditation decision.

The pilot accreditation was monitored and evaluated by CHEPS at the request of the HBO Council (Goedegebuure, Jeliazkova, Pothof, & Weusthof, 2002). The independent monitoring and evaluation of the pilot accreditation led to two main conclusions: first, there seemed to be a general acceptance of an instrument that would demonstrate the quality of programmes in a more 'objective' way than the visitation system. On the other hand, however, the pilot accreditation exposed the problems created by too much detail and prescription of rules. It clearly showed that the balance between objectivity, legitimacy, and efficiency was not easy to find.

2.9 The New Accreditation Scheme

After Bologna, there was a serious discussion about the need to introduce accreditation in the Netherlands. The debate had already started around 1998. New dynamics and accountability, international transparency in Europe and beyond by positive statement of proven quality, openness of the higher education system, and the emergence of non-traditional suppliers were the key words behind the reform in the Netherlands. It became clear that the introduction of a bachelor-master system would mean adjustment of the binary system and therefore of the two-fold, though very similar, system of quality assurance. In addition, it was necessary to ensure the transparency of Dutch higher education for the international community, thereby improving its competitive position in the European knowledge market.

The Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science, after consulting the major stakeholders – the Association of Dutch Universities (VSNU) and the HBO Council, as well as the student organisations, decided to implement the Bologna decisions rapidly. In November 2000, the minister appointed a 'trailblazer' group to prepare the introduction of accreditation in the Netherlands and to develop the assessment frameworks for the new bachelor and master programmes. The committee developed recommendations on the basis of a study of international experience and intensive consultations with all the major stakeholders (Committee Accreditation of Dutch Higher Education, 2001). It was recommended to establish an independent Netherlands Accreditation Organisation (NAO). The new accreditation system began to be introduced as from late 2002. The current schedule foresees that the first accreditations will take place in 2003. Thus, after introducing external quality assurance in the 1980s, the Netherlands was once again amongst the first in Europe to introduce a national accreditation system for all higher education programmes, both in the university and the higher professional education sectors.

All universities and higher professional schools are subject to the scheme, whether they are public or private, if they want to award bachelor's or master's degrees. The basic unit of the new accreditation scheme is the programme. There is a distinction between two types of programmes

– academically oriented and professionally oriented. Both types may be offered by universities or higher vocational institutions (HBO) alike. Master's programmes and bachelor's programmes are accredited separately. Unlike the existing practice with visitations, similar programmes do not need to be visited at the same time and evaluated in clusters, although institutions may choose to do so.

The academically oriented bachelor's programmes are broader and are orientated towards a general background in science and acquiring basic research skills. The academically oriented master's programmes are of two types – for professional researchers with a sufficient specialization and for academic professionals (doctors, lawyers, engineers, etc.). The professionally oriented bachelor's programmes target a particular profession, including practical experience. The professional master's programmes seek to build upon these programmes in two directions – in more depth with specific competences, or in broader types of multidisciplinary programmes.

Under the newly introduced accreditation system, an independent accreditation body, the Netherlands Accreditation Organisation (NAO) is established by law (www.nao-ho.nl). The NAO has independent members with expertise in the fields of higher education, professional practice and quality assessment. They are appointed by the minister. The accreditation system is based on the same principles of self-evaluation and peer review as the existing quality assessment system. The external assessment is carried out by quality agencies, in Dutch called Visiting and Assessing Bodies (VBI) and the accreditation is given by NAO. The formal consequences of (non-)accreditation are (loss of) study grants for students, funding of the programme (in public higher education institutions only) and awarding degrees with a legal status. Accreditation is granted for a period of six years, and new programmes need to be pre-tested. A programme is accredited either as academic or professional. Bachelor and master programmes are accredited separately. The law specifies that accreditation must take into account the following aspects of quality: level of the programme, content of the programme, educational process, returns of education, sufficient facilities and an adequate quality assessment method.

In addition to accrediting existing programmes and licensing new programmes, the tasks of the NAO are: to check existing programmes for specific quality features on their demand, to strengthen the European and international dimension of Dutch accreditation and to maintain contacts in this area.

The development of the accreditation frameworks for existing and new programmes was one of the immediate tasks of the NAO. NAO discussed the new system intensively with the institutions, experts, trade unions, students and professional organizations. The accreditation frameworks were submitted for approval to the Minister of Education, Culture and Science. The accreditation framework was officially published in early 2003.

The accreditation framework for existing programmes consists of:

- An assessment framework, including aspects, facets and criteria,
- Rules for decision-making,
- Criteria to assess the procedure and the quality of the report produced by the quality agency,
- A description of the way existing programmes will be evaluated.

The following six *aspects* are subject to assessment: goals of the programme, contents of the programme, staff, facilities, internal quality assessment, outcomes. The different facets of these topics are to be assessed with the respective criteria.

Facets of the topic 'programme goals' are subject-specific requirements, level, orientation (professional or academic). Facets of the topic 'programme content' are orientation (professional or academic), relationship between programme goals and programme contents, coherence of the

programme, student workload, entrance qualifications, duration, matching of form and contents, assessment and testing. Facets of 'staff' are professional or academic qualifications, adequate quantity, adequate quality of staff. Facets of the 'facilities' are adequacy, student supervision. Facets of the 'internal quality assessment' are evaluation of results, measures for improvement, involvement of staff, students, alumni and professional organisations. Facets of 'results' are level achieved, returns of education.

The institution can ask the external reviewers to assess *exceptional quality features* of the programme, which will be noted in the report, but will not influence the accreditation decision.

The assessment implies the use of a four-point scale (excellent, good, sufficient and insufficient) and decision-making rules based on specific weights of the criteria. The rules imply that, in order to obtain accreditation, a programme must score at least sufficient on each aspect. The score per aspect is a weighed sum of the facet scores.

One of the system's proclaimed aims is to preserve the diversity and the specific character of existing programmes. Hence, it was defined as broadly as possible. According to the NAO, it has consciously chosen a broader, flexible approach. This allows for input by the institutions and leaves room for the professional insight of the external reviewers.

Higher professional schools and universities take the initiative for accreditation. They invite a quality agency to assess the quality of a programme. The quality agencies are independent bodies that are registered with the NAO; the VSNU and HBO Council will lose their virtual monopoly. This does not mean that the quality agencies are certified by the NAO. The NAO produces an annual list of quality agencies that satisfy the requirements of expertise and quality. Therefore, the NAO does not assess itself, but gives the quality seal to programmes after reviewing the quality agency's conclusions. The aspects that should be looked at by the quality agency in order to qualify for accreditation are determined by the NAO. The NAO expects the quality agency to specify discipline-relevant criteria and requirements. The quality of work and the quality of the report produced by the quality agency are tested by the NAO. Quality agencies that produce weak reports may be deleted from the list of approved organisations.

2.10 Formal Stages of the Procedure

1. The institution applies for external assessment at a quality agency. This assessment covers the topics, facets and criteria presented in the accreditation framework.
2. The institution conducts a self-evaluation and produces a report.
3. The institution asks the quality agency to assess the quality of the programme based on the self-evaluation report. The quality agency visits the programmes and verifies the conclusions of the self-evaluation report, In addition, the quality agency assesses the quality of the self-evaluation. The quality agency establishes whether the programme satisfies the minimum requirements and formulates a conclusion which is presented in the report and supported by evidence.
4. The institution applies to the NAO for accreditation and submits a quality agency report, which should not be older than one year at the moment of submission.
5. The NAO assesses the quality agency report and may ask for additional information. The accreditation decision is taken within three months. In case of a positive decision, the programme receives accreditation for 6 years. If the quality agency information is not sufficient, the NAO postpones the decision.
6. The institution may appeal.

7. The decision is made public.

The accreditation decision is seen by the NAO as the logical conclusion of a system of self-evaluations and peer review that functions well. The institutions produce a self-study report, which is verified by the visiting organisation, the NAO validates it and comes out with a clear 'yes' or 'no'. No conditional accreditation is allowed. However, this would not be the Netherlands if there were no room for ambiguity. One possibility for a second chance is the scenario in which the NAO, after requesting additional information and/or a second opinion, may just withhold a decision if not satisfied. The other possibility is the period of two years given to the programme to improve after receiving a negative decision. Given the serious consequences for students (no right to governmental support, no recognised diploma), this is a necessary condition to prevent damage caused by an abrupt closure of the programmes.

Since the new system is not functioning yet, only some parallels can be drawn with the existing visitation system. Since the accreditation scheme builds upon the existing routine of self-evaluations and visitation, it is logical to ask to what extent they are fit for accreditation.

What are the main differences? In the first place, the clear 'yes' or 'no' decision about the programme's minimum quality standard. This requires a more explicit definition of the reference framework and fewer ad hoc comparisons of the programmes during the assessment. The emphasis moves inevitably from process to output. Whether this new frame of assessment will lead to more differentiated judgements on the quality of Dutch programmes remains to be seen.

It is certain, however, that there will be consequences for the traditional separation between the academic and professional sector. Until now, any university programme was automatically considered academic. Under the new system, this is no longer the case. To what extent will this lead to a shift in the type and character of programmes offered by universities and professional schools? At master's or also at bachelor's level? These are questions awaiting an answer.

The choice for quality agencies is inspired by the idea to promote diversity in the system and to make it more open to international actors. However, given the scale of Dutch higher education, only the future will show how realistic this expectation has been.

2.11 Other Accreditation Bodies in the Netherlands

Dutch Validation Council. In the early 1990s, a proposal was made to establish a validation system for separate Master's programmes. The independent Dutch Validation Council (DVC) was established in 1997 at the request of the HBO Council. The HBO Council, universities and a number of employers' organisations are part of its Board. The task of the DVC is to promote national and international recognition of post-initial higher education programmes. This is done by establishing the quality and the required master's level. The council is concerned with recognizing civil effect to positively validated programmes.

The Dutch Validation Council executes validation at request of the programme by means of a specific system. Independent expert panels establish the level and quality of the programme through specially developed procedures and instruments. If the result is positive, the Dutch Validation Council grants the programme the right to confer master's titles for a maximum period of four years. In future, DVC's activities will be integrated in the NAO system.

Certiked. (Stichting Certificatie Kennisintensieve Dienstverlening). This organization is specialized in quality management for knowledge-intensive service-oriented organizations and institutions. It issues certificates for covering international recognised standards such as ISO-9000, or other mod-

els such as EFQM, as well as specific professional requirements. Certiked is one of the candidates for a quality agency.

3. System Dynamics

3.1 Driving Forces and Social Problems

There have been some continuous themes behind decision-making in Dutch higher education regarding quality. One has been the balance between accountability and autonomy: reduction of ex ante regulation if higher education institutions showed they made good use of their greater autonomy. This has been part of government rhetoric since the early 1980s and a prime driver for the introduction of quality assessment.

This was accompanied by some doubt as to the suitability of higher education graduates (especially from universities) for the labour market. This is also linked to the efforts of the government to tighten the links between universities and their (economic) environment. In these efforts, quality assessment has been only one of the policy instruments next to funding for projects, incubators, etc. For the HBO colleges, this linking has been part of their mission from the outset.

Another major underlying driver for quality-related policies in the Netherlands – although in contrast with the previous element – has been what we would like to call a 'small country complex'. By that, we mean the conviction on the part of decision-makers that the high quality of Dutch higher education was not sufficiently recognised abroad because of our 'minority' language and our degree structure, which was not easily comparable with the degrees of other countries. This led to the readiness of the Dutch government to adopt innovative policy instruments that could show the Dutch quality standards to the outside world, and more especially its readiness to engage in international projects. It was the Dutch government, when it presided over the European Union in 1992, that introduced the issue of quality assurance on the European agenda. And it has been a pioneer in initiating or joining European projects ever since, including the recent 'Joint Quality Initiative', together with the Flemish government. Yet the major example of this driver is, of course, the way in which the Netherlands responded to the Bologna Declaration: it was among the first countries to restructure its degree and its well-established quality assurance systems.

The 'bottom-line' of policy is of course the costs of higher education. Cost containment has been a major concern for Dutch governments since 1977, when it was a major issue in the national elections. In relation to higher education, major budget cuts were made *before* quality assessment was introduced, as mentioned above. There was a conscious attempt in the mid-1980s to disassociate quality judgements and budget cuts, unlike the developments in the UK at the time. Nevertheless, continuous 'rationalisations' and per student budget reductions (taking inflation and the growing number of students into account) have created a threatening environment for Dutch higher education over the last two decades. Because of this financial context and stimuli from the ministry of education to engage in entrepreneurial activities, international trade in higher education (i.e. attracting foreign, non-EU students) has become one of the ways in which higher education institutions have tried to supplement their budget. Better international recognition was therefore of interest to the entrepreneurial higher education institutions as well: accreditation and well-known degree names could mean USPs (Unique Selling Points) for them.

3.2 Relationships among Schemes

The policy instrument 'landscape' in the Netherlands is becoming very simple: all major evaluation and approval schemes are now integrated under the NAO.

Consequences for the Higher Education System

We shall have to wait to see the consequences of moving to an accreditation system; yet it is clear that in the transition period there is much uncertainty at all levels. Who will be accredited, who will not? There has been talk during the preparation of NAO that 5 to 10% of the requests must lead to non-accreditation to show that the danger was real: will this – if it comes true – affect the private sector only, or also public higher education institutions? What will the Minister of Education do if programmes that are vital for other policy goals are not accredited? (For instance: there is a severe shortage of teachers; would non-accredited teacher training programmes really be closed down?) Furthermore, how will the general standards framework of NAO be elaborated into quality agencies' checklists? Will the quality agencies be able to pay some attention to quality improvement – as promised in all policy statements – faced with the consequences of non-accreditation?

Students too are uncertain. In their talks with the NAO, they stressed control, especially control of quality of delivery. For them, as mentioned before, consequences will include eligibility for government student support. Students' options will be enlarged by the new accreditation system, as private higher education providers will be included in it on an equal footing, giving the same rights to government support. Whether this will lead to more quality-related choice of study programmes for students entering the higher education system (or re-entering it, e.g., at the master's level) is another issue worth studying in years to come.

For external stakeholders, the change to an accreditation system promises greater transparency of quality judgements, which until now were written for an audience of insiders – hence the market for magazines ranking the higher education institutions. In fact, employers' demands for more transparency were one of the drivers behind the HBO Council's pilot accreditation project.

Quite a different matter – which will have to be discovered in practice too – is whether the system of accrediting each programme separately will be sustainable. There are already some signs that reduction of effort is aimed at, e.g., some aspects common to a number of programmes in a single higher education institution could be checked through a 'lighter' mechanism.

4. Influence of Bologna and European Models

As mentioned in the previous section, the Bologna process has been taken up in the Netherlands as a major driver for higher education system change. The Bologna aims of international transparency and mobility within Europe and across the world were welcomed by Dutch policy-makers. The former has been mentioned as a first main driver of quality policy in the last two decades in the Netherlands. The latter was also mentioned, not so much in the 'friendly', 'co-operative' conception of student mobility or even graduate mobility in the European labour market, but more especially in the 'competitive' framework of attracting foreign, fee-paying students.

With respect to European models, the Netherlands has played the role of a model for other countries since the late 1980s through conscious 'promotional' activities by representatives of the

Dutch quality assessment agencies. With the change to accreditation, the German case was used as a model for the development of the NAO (the example certainly was not followed slavishly, but discussions took place between representatives of NAO and the German Accreditation Council bureau).

The example of NAO and other elements of Dutch conceptions of quality (such as the preference for output quality, i.e. competences of graduates) were used in the wider European debate to set examples for other European countries, e.g., in the Joint Quality Initiative (JQI).

5. Individual Level Assessments

With the deregulation and privatisation movement of the 1980s and 1990s, the higher education institutions became independent employers in some respects (for more information see the parallel Enders & De Weert report). For the academic staff, this implied a move away from prescribed amounts of teaching or research hours per year, but also a move away from the seniority principle, i.e. automatic annual salary increases. Instead, individual performance was given some importance in higher education institutions' human research management (although that term was not used until recently). A main element here was the 'individual functioning talks' in the framework of staff appraisal schemes, which were to take place annually between teaching staff and their immediate superiors: in universities, lower-level teachers with their professor, professors with their dean, etc. These talks were not only meant to influence salary increases, but also to introduce career development into the higher education institutions, e.g. through teaching and research portfolios. However, these changes are still in their infancy; as De Weert reported in the parallel project report just referred to, committees have been at work and proposals have been made, but the old rules and regulations still apply. But with a new round of central negotiations coming up, the situation may change soon.

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The Emerging System of Accreditation in Norway Need-Driven or Solution-Driven Change? Country Report Norway

Bjørn Stensaker

1. Introduction

Norwegian higher education has expanded significantly in student numbers during the last ten to fifteen years. In the late 1980s about 105,000 students were registered in higher education, while a decade later approximately 180,000 students were undertaking various forms of higher education (NFR 2001, p. 95). The growth is complex. Universities experienced a decrease in the number of students after 1996, while the college sector increased the intake of new students. Some disciplinary differences are also noticeable. At universities, law and humanities seem less attractive to students in the late 1990s, while numbers have been fairly constant in pedagogy, social science and in the sciences. At colleges especially within health and social work an increase in student numbers is most visible (NFR 2001, p. 96).

In Norway, the higher education system is divided into a university sector and a college sector. There are four universities. Established in 1811, and with over 30,000 students, the University of Oslo is the oldest and largest of the four. The other three, in Bergen, Trondheim and Tromsø, were all established at a much later stage. Six specialised university colleges in e.g. physical education, music, agriculture, also belong to the university sector, but with a much smaller number of students. The college sector comprises of 26 state colleges. This sector was reorganised in 1994, reducing the number of institutions from over 100 to the current number. The two sectors are approximately of equal size when it comes to the number of students – with the college sector on top, which implies that Norway has a larger college sector than many other European countries (Kyvik 2002). There are also a substantial number of private higher education institutions in the country, but with the exception of the Norwegian School of Management (BI) with more than 10,000 students, most of the private institutions are quite small (in total there are approximately 21,000 students in the private higher education sector). In addition, over 20,000 students study abroad, while only around 4,000 foreign students study at Norwegian higher education institutions.

Traditionally, university degree types have been inspired by the continental university model, with a four-year first degree (cand.mag.), and a two-year second degree (cand.polit etc.) to follow. Professional degrees in medicine, business administration, civic engineering etc., differ from this structure, even if the time frame for the studies often is set to four or six years. In the college sector, the first degree has traditionally varied between two and four years. Normally, a second degree has not been offered in the college sector. During the last decade, however, a few colleges have been granted the right to offer second-degree programmes and even doctorate studies in given subjects. Due to a major reform initiative in 2001, the degree system in Norway changed from the first of January 2003, introducing the Anglo-American bachelor–master system in higher education and the ECTS credit transfer system (St.Meld.Nr. 27, 2000-2001). This means that in the university and college sector, the first degree will be scheduled for three years (bachelor), while the second degree will be scheduled for two years (master). On top, a Ph.D. is introduced, scheduled for three years. During the introduction of the new degree system, some of the professional degrees have been adjusted to fit into the new system. Exceptions can be found in Theology, Psychology, Medicine and Veterinary studies. Teacher training will also keep its four-year time-schedule. However, as before, it will be possible for students to switch between studying at university and college, building their degree from various combinations at different levels of the two sectors.

If one looks at the programmes offered in Norwegian higher education, science, technical studies and social science programmes dominate, as these fields produce almost two thirds of the degrees given annually in Norway (NFR, 2001, p. 100). A look at the number of doctorate degrees shows that most degrees are produced in the sciences (26 percent), in medicine (21 percent), technology (19 percent) and social science (18 percent) (NFR, 2001, p. 103). As in many other countries, higher education in Norway has also become a more important arena for women. At present, almost 60 percent of the students in higher education are women (NFR, 2001, p. 101), and the number of female doctoral students has increased during the 1990s.

The labour market for graduates of higher education has been fairly good during the 1990s. On average, only between two and three percent of graduates with a university degree have experienced unemployment during the decade. However, some disciplinary differences do occur. In 2000, six months after leaving higher education, out of the candidates from the social sciences, humanities, law and the sciences, between five and seven percent have not been able to get a job. For candidates in psychology, business studies, health the unemployment ratio is only between one and two percent (NFR, 2001, p. 106). This picture is not very surprising. A high unemployment ratio for social science graduates could be explained, e.g., by the sheer number of candidates from these disciplines. Candidates with a university degree have normally found their job in the public sector, but this is gradually changing due to public sector cutbacks and the growing number of graduates from universities. Thus, the private sector will most likely become more important for graduates in the coming years.

As indicated earlier, most of the Norwegian higher education system is public with only one private higher education provider of some size. In 2000, the state-owned higher education institutions in the country accommodated 92 percent of the total student population, and received 98 percent of the public expenditure on higher education (Hämäläinen, 2001, p. 26). No student fees are paid to study in a public higher education institution. This situation indicates that the state is an important actor for the whole system, both as the resource provider and as the actor that regulates and steers the system. Traditionally the higher education system could be said to belong to the continental mode of steering with emphasis on input based factors (e.g. number of students) instead of output factors (number of graduates produced). However, during the 1990s the state

steering of the sector has changed. Signs of more autonomy for the institutions could be seen already in the early nineties with some authority being transferred from the state (Stensaker, 1997), culminating in recent changes affecting the principles of funding in the sector (St.Meld.Nr. 27, 2000-2001). In this latest white paper on higher education it is proposed that an increasing share of the funding should be related to output based factors (number of credits, number of graduates). For institutions, the change means that they will be more responsible for their own economy, making institutional leadership more important. The challenge for institutions could be related to the fact that institutional leadership in Norwegian higher education has been rather weak, and that much power is located in the basic units at universities and colleges. However, signs that the institutional leadership has been strengthened during the 1990s are becoming increasingly visible, along with more autonomous institutions (Stensaker, 1997, Bleiklie, 2000).

The changes in governmental steering until recently have not affected the procedures for approval of curricula, new study programmes or new higher education entities. Traditionally curricula in some areas (teacher training etc.) have been determined at the national level by the Ministry of Education. Approval of new study programmes and the establishment of new higher education entities have also been a responsibility of the Ministry of Education, but in a rather unsystematic way (Haakstad, 2001). This old system of 'authorisation' and 'recognition' changed the first of January 2003, when a system of accreditation of Norwegian higher education was introduced as a part of a major reform effort to change the degree structure in Norway and further stimulate to more autonomous institutions (St.Meld.Nr. 27, 2000-2001).

2. Accreditation and Evaluation Schemes in Norway

Traditionally, Norway has been a typical representative for countries that put limited resources into the authorisation of new institutions and higher education programmes. The authorisation process has usually been taken care of by the Ministry of Education, and could be characterised as an administrative procedure. Even if a small expert panel usually has been consulted about a given authorisation, no study visits and other more in-depth evaluations were conducted. During the 1990s, Norway has also been quite modest when it comes to implementing other national systems for quality assurance, even if various pilot projects in the field of evaluation were initiated (see Stensaker, 1997). Thus, the political attention for quality assurance of higher education must be characterised as limited. Recent political initiatives in Norway, however, may contribute to change this picture considerably.

First, a new independent accreditation body the *Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education* (*NOKUT*) was created in January 2003. This body was established by a separate Act with its activities rather clearly specified in the text (UFD, 2002). NOKUT replaced the former Network Norway Council. This latter body had rather close ties to the Ministry, i.e., it was instructed by the Ministry, and had multiple tasks, including giving the Ministry of Education advice on strategic issues and taking care of various evaluations in Norwegian higher education. By law, the new body is secured a more independent status. The Ministry of Education cannot instruct NOKUT nor influence its activities in other ways than by law. Still, the Ministry has a final say on certain issues (creating new universities, change the status of current institutions from college to university, etc.). NOKUT has a staff of around thirty, and is organised in three departments. One department for evaluation of institutional quality assurance systems, one department for accreditation of higher education institutions and programmes, and one department for recognition of

foreign education and for giving advice to institutions regarding international credit transfer (ENIC/NARIC).

Second, formal accreditation schemes have been introduced along with NOKUT: Accreditation of universities and colleges according to institutional status and of study programmes at different levels has been established. Since the degree structure changed at the same time as the new system of accreditation was introduced, a consequence is that many studies are in a rather urgent need for a formal accreditation.

Third, an important premise for the accreditation schemes, introduced at the same time, is the requirement that every higher education institution, public as well as private, should have a functioning quality assurance system covering all higher education programmes offered. Every Norwegian higher education institution is expected to have a system implemented before the end of 2003 (UFD, 2002). The consequence of not having such a system, or that the existing system is not covering the minimum standards set, is not that an institution will lose it institutional status, or the accreditation for established studies, but that the institution will not be allowed to establish new programmes of study. In other words, not having an institutional quality assurance system restricts the institution's possibilities to expand and move into new fields of study. However, formally the need for an institutional quality assurance system is not subject to an accreditation process. Thus, the evaluative criteria developed related to validate the quality assurance systems will be presented after a more detailed description of the new major accreditation schemes.

2.1 Major Accreditation Schemes in Norway

Two major accreditation schemes exists in Norway, one related to determining the institutional status of higher education institutions, and one relate to the accreditation of higher education programmes at various levels. In this section, each scheme will be presented separately.

Institutional accreditation

The Ministry of Education has specified by law that there are formally three types of higher education institutions in Norway; Universities, university colleges (specialised universities), and colleges (either public or private). The institutions can opt for the preferred status themselves, but must be accredited by NOKUT to be allowed to use the title in their name. Institutions can also apply for a change of status, e.g. to go from being a college to a university, but must again go through an accreditation procedure, and obtain final approval from the Ministry of Education before such a change of status can occur. The relationship between the Ministry and NOKUT is in these matters such that NOKUT must approve a change of status before the Ministry gives the permission. The Ministry of Education cannot change the status of a given institution without the institution being formally recognised as having the quality to do so by NOKUT. However, NOKUT may provide institutions with such a quality label without the Ministry accepting the decision. Thus, the Ministry may for economic reasons reject institutional status changes.

To be accredited as either a state college or a *private college*, the following main criteria have been developed by NOKUT (2003):

- The institution must have a recognised quality assurance system (see above).
- The primary purpose of the institution must be related to higher education and research.
- The institution must have the right to award a bachelor-degree in one subject/discipline, and must have graduated students for at least two years.

- The institution must have R&D activities in relation to the higher education programmes offered, mainly carried out by its own academic staff, and where the staff as a main rule must have R&D tasks as part of their regular work plan.
- The institution must have an academic staff with formal scientific and pedagogic qualifications related to every higher education programme offered.
- The institution must have a library with competent staff, a collection of literature in the areas where higher education programmes are offered, and be connected to an electronic system for literature exchange and copying.
- The institution must have a board where academic staff and students are represented.
- The institution must have an infrastructure supporting higher education and research. This includes facilities for a relevant management and organisational structure, social welfare for students, adequate conditions for the academic and the administrative staff, available ICT-equipment for students and staff, an adequate number of lecture rooms, space for self-studies, project work, etc.

To be accredited as a *university college (specialised university)*, the institution must fulfil all criteria necessary to obtain status as either a state college or a private college. In addition, the following criteria apply (NOKUT, 2003):

- The institution must have the right to award a Ph.D. degree in at least one area, and must have successfully graduated students from the Ph.D.-programme.
- The institution must demonstrate, in academic areas/disciplines where a Ph.D. degree is awarded, that accreditation standards specified by NOKUT for such degrees are met.
- The institutions must have the right to award a master's degree in minimally one academic area/discipline, and must have graduated students in at least two years.
- The institution must demonstrate, in academic areas/disciplines where a master's degree is awarded, that accreditation standards specified by NOKUT for such degrees are met.
- The institution must demonstrate, in other academic areas/disciplines, that it produces R&D of high quality and that it has a scientific staff with formal qualifications.
- The institution must have an infrastructure that is relevant for the research activities conducted, i.e. with an up-to-date research library that covers the Ph.D.-awarding areas of research, and with a sufficient collection of books and journals, with modern ICT-facilities, laboratories, with separate budget and plans for research, and with a management structure that ensures the quality of research activities.
- The institution must have a well established academic network both nationally and internationally.

To be accredited as a *university*, the institution must fulfil all criteria necessary to obtain status as either a state college or a private college and a university college. In addition, the following criteria apply (NOKUT, 2003):

- The institution must have the right to award master's degree programmes in at least five academic areas/disciplines, and must have bachelor's programmes in more academic areas/disciplines than those covered by the master's programmes.
- The institution must have the right to award Ph.D. degrees in at least four academic areas/disciplines, and where two of these must be related to regional needs and be of national importance. The institution must demonstrate a stable and continuing production of Ph.D.-graduates in at least two of the four areas.

As shown, the institutional accreditation scheme initiated in Norway intends to cover all higher education institutions in the country, both in the public and in the private sector. As illustrated by the criteria sets, the institutional accreditation is partly a result of a prior accreditation of

higher education programmes at various levels (see below). In other words, both teaching and research activities are included in the accreditation process.

NOKUT has a central position in this accreditation scheme in that all applications for obtaining a given status must be directed exclusively to this body. It is also NOKUT that receives all the data and the information needed in the accreditation process, and that organises the accreditation process, e.g. it appoints the external committee that is to analyse the application from the institution. It has been a tradition in Norway to appoint experts from other Nordic countries, representatives from business and society and students in external review committees (Stensaker, 1997). Most likely this practice will continue in the new accreditation schemes introduced. Accreditation reports produced by NOKUT are public documents, available for any interested stakeholder.

No detailed timeframe for an institutional accreditation up to the point where the external review process is finalised is provided by the Ministry of Education or NOKUT. However, it is expected that such a timeframe will be developed, not least due to earlier complaints from private higher education institutions that the procedures in former 'approval' system took too long. The procedures for what happens after the external report is produced are more formalised. After the external report is finalised, it is sent to the institution without a formalised decision whether a given institutional status is given. The institution then is given five weeks to respond. Based on the reply from the institution, the Board of NOKUT decides whether accreditation is given. If rejected, the institution has to wait two years before a new application can be sent NOKUT. If accepted, NOKUT informs the Ministry of Education of its decision. It is then the Ministry that has the final say whether the accredited status is given. Students of accredited institutions have the right to obtain financial support from the state-controlled student support system.

There are other institutional accreditation schemes than those handled by NOKUT in Norway. However, contrary to the NOKUT schemes, these are voluntary for institutions. In the late 1990s, two business education institutions in Norway have obtained an EQUIS accreditation offered by the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD). Institutions interested in this type of accreditation seem to have chosen EQUIS because of its international profile and recognition, and out of an interest to compete on the international student market, especially in the MBA-segment.

Accreditation of Higher Education Programmes

Along with the accreditation scheme for assigning institutional status, the Ministry of Education has also instructed NOKUT to develop standards and criteria for the accreditation of higher education programmes at all levels from introductory studies scheduled for 30 credits (ECTS) to Ph.D.-programmes. However, when accrediting higher education programmes, differences between the public and the private higher education sector becomes visible. At present, the two sectors are regulated by separate acts, where the universities and university colleges (they are all public) in the new accreditation scheme developed for higher education programmes automatically receive an accreditation for all existing higher education programmes that they have the right to offer according to the Universities and College Act. In this act, these institutions have the right to establish new higher education programmes at all levels, including Ph.D.-programmes (University colleges may not establish new Ph.D. programmes outside their 'core' academic area/discipline). For state colleges, the Universities and College Act provides the institutions with the right to establish new programmes up to the bachelor's degree level, and they can establish master's programmes in the academic areas/disciplines where they offer a Ph.D. degree.

For private higher education institutions, the situation is a bit different. The Private Colleges Act states that private higher education institutions must apply for accreditation of higher education programmes at all levels (bachelor, master and Ph.D.). As a transition arrangement, all existing programmes in private higher education institutions automatically receive an accreditation, but these institutions must apply for accreditation for any new programmes established. At present, political discussions is taking place with the intention to establish a common act for the public and private higher education sectors in Norway, which would erase the current differences in accreditation procedures. However, now already private higher education institutions can apply for an institutional accreditation either as a private college, a university college or a university, and may, if accredited as such, obtain the same right as public institutions have at present.

The main criteria developed by the NOKUT (2003) for accreditation of higher education programmes up to 30 credits (ECTS) are as follows:

- The institution offering the programme must have a managerial structure and follow the regulatory framework specified in the Private Colleges Act.
- In the curriculum, the name of the programme must be specified together with information on whether parallel programmes exist in the public higher education sector. The curriculum must also specify admission rules, objectives of the programme, skills required from students, teaching and learning methods, examination rules and regulations and syllabus.
- The academic staff must demonstrate scientific and pedagogic qualifications at the same level as for teaching in accredited institutions.
- The higher education programme must have an adequate infrastructure i.e., access to lecture rooms, sufficient level of ICT-support etc.

The main criteria developed by the NOKUT (2003) for accreditation of higher education programmes between 60 and 120 credits (ECTS) are as follows:

- All criteria specified for higher education programmes up to 30 credits must be fulfilled.
- The higher education programme must be characterised by academic progression, internal cohesion and societal relevance.

The main criteria developed by the NOKUT (2003) for accreditation of higher education programmes qualifying for a bachelor's degree (180 credits ECTS), are as follows:

- All criteria specified for higher education programmes up to 120 credits must be fulfilled.
- The programme must be based on a formal description of rights and obligations of students, staff and the institution.
- The curriculum must specify the academic areas/disciplines the programme builds upon, the work load of students, the scientific and pedagogic qualifications of the staff, and must ensure that the programme qualify as a basis for master's degree applications.
- The programme must be organised in a way that academic quality is secured and improved, i.e. the academic staff must be of a sufficient number and be stable, national and international relations must be documented and the academic staff must be actively involved in and have formal possibilities to be involved in R&D.

The main criteria developed by the NOKUT (2003) for accreditation of higher education programmes qualifying for the master's degree (300 credits ECTS), are as follows:

- The programme must be based on a formal description of rights and obligations of students, staff and the institution.
- The programme must have an adequate name and be specific on the master's degree awarded (Master of Arts, Master of Science, etc.).
- The curriculum must specify the academic areas/disciplines the programme builds upon, the work load of students, and the expected competences after graduation.

- The programme must provide students with experience of scientific work.
- The programme must have a sufficient infrastructure (ICT-support, library, laboratories, etc.).
- The programme must contain a thesis by students, either as an individual work or as teamwork. In discipline-based, vocational and experience-based master's degrees, the thesis must count for at 30 to 60 credits (ECTS).
- The programme must have a scientific and pedagogic qualified staff, with senior qualifications in the staff in core areas of the master's degree. The scientific qualifications of the staff must match the profile of the programme, and external examiners must document the same qualifications as the scientific staff.
- The scientific staff must have an active research profile, and must have formal arrangements that ensures time for research.

The main criteria developed by the NOKUT (2003) for accreditation of higher education programmes qualifying for the Ph.D. degree, are as follows:

- The programme must be based on a formal description of rights and obligations of students, staff and the institution.
- The programme must have an adequate name and be specific on the Ph.D. degree awarded.
- The programme must have a formal plan including a description of courses that secure students formal training in methodology and history of science.
- The institution awarding the Ph.D. degree must have a solid academic basis, including an active and stable research oriented staff. The research conducted must be relevant for the core areas of the Ph.D., and be both theoretically and empirically oriented. At least eight people with at least associate professor qualifications must have formal full-time positions in connection with the programme. Most of the teaching and tutoring must be done by the full-time staff.
- The programme must document the scientific qualifications of the staff through their international publications (in journals, etc.).
- The bachelor's and master's degree programmes supporting the programme must be of a quality and extension to function as a solid basis for a Ph.D. programme (e.g. graduate a sufficient number of candidates).
- The institution awarding the Ph.D. must document its national and international networks through participation in scientific conferences, research networks, exchange arrangements of students and staff, etc.
- The programme must have a sufficient infrastructure (ICT-support, libraries, laboratories, support staff, locations, lecture rooms, etc.).
- The programme must have formal routines for assuring the quality of teaching and tutoring, specifying how quality is improved over time.
- The institution must document the regional and national importance of the Ph.D.-programme.

As illustrated by the accreditation criteria for each programme, research activities, research qualifications held by the staff and research networks increase in importance as one moves from lower degree programmes to higher degree programmes. The described criteria sets also cover all disciplines and academic areas except for some professional programmes where specific criteria are not yet developed.

NOKUT is the main player also for the accreditation of academic programmes. It specifies when and how accreditation of a certain programme will take place. Thus, the body can itself decide on the reasons for initiating a re-accreditation process of programmes at any level. In addi-

tion, NOKUT decides on the methods used for accreditation. The standard method used will be a mix of self-evaluation and external review, with publication of a report afterwards. As with the institutional accreditation, reviewers will most likely be a mix of domestic and Nordic experts in various disciplines. Some student representatives and some societal and industry representatives will in most instances be selected to serve on the committees.

No time schedule for the accreditation process from application to completion of the external review process has been specified yet. However, after the external report is finalised, it is sent to the institution that then is given five weeks to respond to the claims and findings made. The board of NOKUT then decide whether accreditation is given, and the decision is sent to the Ministry for final approval. If the application is rejected by the board of NOKUT, the institution must wait up to two years before a new application may be sent (NOKUT may allow the institution to send a new application before that time if only minor details lack before accreditation can be given).

Concerning re-accreditation of programmes, no criteria are yet specified for this procedure. Due to an ambition of keeping 'bureaucratic' procedures to a minimum in NOKUT, there is at the moment some hesitation about adopting a cyclic model of re-accreditation. Thus, at present, there are no procedures concerning when re-accreditation is to take place, only for how it should be carried out. When going through a re-accreditation process, the institution have between three and six months to initiate actions if re-accreditation is not given. If accreditation is withdrawn, the decision is sent to the institution with a copy to the Ministry of Education. The institution must immediately close the programme, i.e., examination and graduation of students cannot take place, and new students are not allowed into the programme. The institution must also make sure that its students can take their exams at another higher education institution. Students of accredited programmes have the right to obtain financial support by the state-controlled student support system.

There are other programme accreditation schemes in Norway than those handled by NOKUT. However, these are voluntary systems, most often designed for vocational or professional programmes (e.g. engineering), research laboratories or for the accreditation of a single department. The ISO-standard is a typical representative of these systems, where the accreditation is conducted by organisations with a licence to perform such tasks from the ISO. Only a limited number of programmes have been accredited by such systems.

2.2 Complaints and Legal Handling of NOKUT's Accreditation Decisions

The Ministry of Education has appointed a special complaints committee consisting of five members to deal with institutional disagreements regarding NOKUT's possible negative decisions on institutional accreditation or accreditation of programmes. One of the committee's members is a student, and the chairman of the committee must fulfil the formal criteria to function as a judge in a civil court.

The committee has the right to make a formal decision when four out of five members are present. The decisions made by the committee cannot be taken further in the legal system.

3. Major Approval Schemes in Norway

Even if the new accreditation schemes developed could be interpreted as a shift from an informal 'approval' system to a more formalised system, this does not mean that approval schemes have lost their significance in Norwegian higher education. On the contrary, a new approval scheme has been introduced linking the control functions of the accreditation schemes with more improvement-oriented procedures (see below).

3.1 Evaluation of Institutional Quality Assurance Systems

Both institutional accreditation and accreditation of academic programmes rely on the existence of an institutional quality assurance system. By law, all Norwegian higher education institutions, public and private, are mandated to implement such a system by the end of 2003. These systems of quality assurance will be evaluated by NOKUT. Contrary to the accreditation schemes described above, this process is not labelled as an accreditation process, but as a process of approval. The consequence of not having an approved quality assurance system is that the right to establish new programmes is withdrawn. The institution loses neither the right to its institutional status (university, state college, etc.) nor its existing accreditation of programmes. It is in other words a limitation in the institutional autonomy that is proposed. Below are the ten criteria specified for the evaluation of the institutional quality assurance systems listed (NOKUT, 2003):

- How the quality system is linked to and is a part of the strategic ambitions and work of the institution.
- The specified objectives for the institutional work on quality.
- How the quality system is embedded in the leadership at all levels in the organisation.
- That the quality system is organised in such a way that it ensures extended participation in the organisation, with clearly specified responsibilities and duties.
- The collection and analysis aggregated to the institutional level of data and information from internal assessments that are necessary to establish a satisfactory overview of the quality of every programme.
- That analysis is conducted concerning how the defined objectives are met.
- How and in what way information and results from the quality system are used as a basis for decision-making and further improvement of the quality of the institution.
- Clarify how the quality system contributes to better management of financial, human and organisational resources.
- That students take an active part in the work to improve quality.
- That an annual report is delivered to the board of the institution, in which an overview and an assessment of quality of the institutions are given, along with an inventory of measures and processes initiated to further improve the quality of programmes.

In the criteria developed by NOKUT, it is emphasised that the quality assurance system is the responsibility of the board and the leadership of the institution. No formal requests concerning how an institutional quality assurance system should look like are specified by NOKUT. The size, objectives and profile of the individual institution must, according to NOKUT, be allowed to influence on what a quality assurance system should look like. Also when it comes to documentation (quantitative) the institutions are given much discretion. No such quantitative information is required to be reported to NOKUT even if NOKUT may demand certain information when a quality assurance system is evaluated.

The Ministry of Education (UFD, 2002) has ordered that an evaluation of the institutional quality assurance system must take place at least every sixth year, but that the prime objective with the evaluation of the quality assurance systems is not control but to develop well-functioning systems where dialogue and frequent communication between the external experts and the institution is considered to be a vital characteristic. The external experts must specify in what area the system is adequate and where the system needs improvement. The Ministry has also made it clear that it is expected of the institutions to establish routines that secure continuous improvements of the quality system (UFD, 2002).

3.2 Recognition of Internationally Obtained Education and Credits

NOKUT has a special section that deals with recognition of international obtained education and credits. This is the Norwegian ENIC/NARIC equivalent, which also includes the Lisbon Recognition Convention unit. Normally, recognition is provided by the individual institution in Norway after individual application, but NOKUT has been mandated to develop general recognition criteria, i.e., a framework that Norwegian institutions may use when dealing with individual applications. In this way, it is hoped that students will experience equal treatment from different institutions. To be recognised as higher education in Norway, a given programme or a course must be recognised as belonging to the category higher education also in the 'exporting' country. Both private and public higher education institutions may handle applications for recognition within areas in which they have the accredited rights to do so.

4. Other Supra-Institutional Evaluation Schemes

The Research Council of Norway (NFR) has the responsibility to conduct research assessments, and NOKUT and NFR have been ordered to try to co-ordinate their evaluation activities to minimise the administrative burden and the work-load of the institutions. Traditionally such co-ordination was rare, something that has triggered institutional complaints. Research assessments are conducted regularly by the NFR, and the signals are that this activity will increase in scale and scope in the coming years (NFR, 2001, p. 11).

A typical research assessment in Norway is built up in much the same way as the accreditation process. A self-evaluation is followed by an external peer review, which subsequently produces a public report on its findings and recommendations. Normally, external peer review committees consist of international experts in the field. Contrary to many evaluation activities in education, research assessments usually bring in experts also from outside the Nordic countries. Research assessments are conducted each year and often have a national and disciplinary scope, i.e., in mathematics, in political science and so forth. However, the outcomes of such assessments usually have not been very dramatic. Few rewards or sanctions are attached directly to the assessments.

At present, there is some overlap between the research assessments conducted and the upcoming accreditation schemes. As shown above, research activities are normally a part of the accreditation criteria, at least in higher degree programmes and in institutional accreditation processes. Thus, it may be expected that the two processes will collect and analyse some of the same

data. How institutions will respond to this, and whether the new accreditation regime will 'occupy' some of the territory of the NFR remains to be seen.

As in many other OECD-countries, there are also stakeholders in higher education that perform their own 'evaluations' of higher education. In Norway, four newspapers in the last four years have interviewed a substantial number of students of higher education in order to find out what they think about the programme they are enrolled at, and the institution at which they are affiliated. The study, known as 'Stud.mag' or the student satisfaction survey, covers all higher education institutions and programmes offered in Norway, although a limited number of programmes are selected each year. The questionnaire used for the interviews is developed by NIFU, an independent research institute specialised in higher education issues that also performs the quantitative analysis of the data. The result is published each year in the newspapers. The study is likely to continue and is met with an increasing interest, also among higher education institutions. In addition, the data from the study have been used to analyse a range of issues in higher education and represent a valuable source of information for higher education researchers (see e.g., Wiers-Jenssen & Aamodt, 2002, Wiers-Jenssen, Stensaker & Grøgaard, 2002).

5. Potentials and Problems of the Accreditation System

It is not easy to pinpoint any specific reason why an accreditation system was introduced in Norway. In the 1990s, a growing interest in evaluation and performance of the higher education system can be detected. Not least, a pilot project of national evaluations in various disciplines was tested out, leading to conclusions that a special body for putting quality issues on the agenda should be established, along with a more systematic approach for evaluating the higher education system (see e.g., Stensaker, 1996, p. 80). Other conclusions from the pilot project were that the higher education institutions should take a more systematic approach in assuring the quality of their programmes, and that the leadership of the institutions needed more information on the work conducted at lower levels.

In 1998, the Norway Network Council was established with the multiple purposes of giving the Ministry of Education advice on strategic issues in higher education and having the responsibility of developing a national system for evaluating higher education. The Council initiated several projects to stimulate institutional interest for quality, among them several institutional evaluations with the intention of both checking quality of teaching and learning directly, and the work conducted to secure and improve the quality of programmes offered (NNR, 1999). However, the council struggled with its legitimacy, especially in the university sector, which accused the council of not having the skills and competencies to evaluate all types of higher education institutions. One of the reasons for this scepticism can be traced back to the establishment of the body, which mainly was a result of a re-organisation of several other councils related to the college sector. The consequence was that the new body had a staff not specialised in or recruited for evaluative tasks.

In the late 1990s, a separate commission for higher education was established, the so-called Mjøs-Commission (NOU, 2000). This Commission had the task study the consequences of the increase in student numbers in higher education and how to adjust the system to the new situation. The Commission argued among others that to handle the growth in student numbers and to increase the efficiency of the system, more emphasis should be placed on competition among institutions and that more weight should be given to output rewards (NOU, 2000, p. 43).

One of the suggestions of the committee was to propose a new accreditation body with an independent status and a staff specialised in quality evaluations and assessments, which could act as a rigid quality controller of such a new system. An underlying premise for this proposal may be related to a wish to treat public and private higher education more equally. In the 1990s, private higher education institutions needed to apply to the Ministry of Education for every new programme offered, and such approval could often take up to two years to obtain. Private higher education institutions complained that this situation represented a huge advantage for the public sector (Stensaker, 2000, p. 98). The new accreditation system may indeed contribute to change this situation, since both public and private higher education institutions are scrutinised using many of the same criteria.

The institutional accreditation scheme may seem to be a rather dominating one if one compares it to accreditation schemes in other European countries, which focus more on programme accreditation (Westerheijden, 2001, p. 68). The reason is related to the fact that at present there is a strong 'institutional drift' in Norway. Several of the existing state colleges are in the process of opting for university status. This process can be found in several other countries as well (Kyvik, 2002), but in Norway it will have to be handled by the new institutional accreditation system. By defining the criteria for university status (most important: five master's degrees and four Ph.D. degrees where two must have at least regional relevance), it is up to NOKUT to decide whether university standards are met in the future. However, it is still the Ministry that decides whether university status is formally given, and this is likely to be a decision where economy will matter much.

The establishment of an accreditation system in higher education cannot be said to rest on research in the field. The decision in Parliament to establish the accreditation system neglected research suggesting that the big challenge related to quality in Norwegian higher education perhaps was not to control it more but to develop it further due to weak institutional systems for and attention related to quality issues (Stensaker, 1996, Handal et al., 1999, Stensaker & Maassen, 2001). The social-democratic government that received the report from the commission seemed to agree with such views and proposed in the white paper that followed that the existing Norway Network Council should continue its work with an emphasis on quality improvement. However, in Parliament this proposal was voted down and the suggestion for the establishment of an accreditation system was raised again. The conservative majority in the Parliament voted in favour and thus succeeded in establishing such a system and an independent body (NOKUT) conducting the accreditation. This was one of the few issues from the social-democratic government that caused disagreement in the Parliament. Other reform proposals such as changing the degree structure and increasing the efficiency of higher education were supported by a large majority in the Parliament. Later in 2001, the social-democratic government resigned and a conservative government took over with a new Minister in charge of implementing the substantial number of reform proposals made.

However, whether NOKUT really represents a big change in Norwegian higher education can be questioned for a number of reasons. First, when it comes to personnel, NOKUT is staffed with many of the same persons that worked for the former Norway Network Council. The director general is the same and several others holding key positions in the staff also worked in the former council. Second, if one takes a closer look at the procedures proposed by NOKUT, striking similarities appear between suggestions made by the former council and the institutional quality systems suggested by NOKUT (see NNR, 1999). The improvement-oriented focus of the institutional quality system is kept, and the audit approach suggested by the old council seems to be continued by NOKUT. This seems like a deliberate strategy by NOKUT (Haakstad, 2001).

The potentials of the new system implemented are that it seems to combine elements of reporting, evaluation and accreditation in a somewhat joint system. The basis of all the accreditation activities lies in the existence of an institutional quality assurance system that also has some built-in reporting activities that can be used for accreditation purposes. There also seems to be some cohesion between the different accreditation schemes. For example a rejected institutional accreditation may force institutions to apply for programme accreditation in areas, where before they had rights to establish programmes. There also seems to be huge overlaps between the criteria used for accrediting Ph.D.-programmes and the criteria used for institutional accreditation of universities and university colleges. The fact that many of the accreditation standards also seem to be quite 'soft', emphasising the existence of processes rather than checking of explicit and quantifiable standards, point in the same direction. One of the fears of a full-scale accreditation system proposed was that it could cause heavy administrative burdens for the institutions and contribute to an increased bureaucratisation of Norwegian higher education (see NOU, 2000, Stensaker & Maassen, 2001). This is still a possible unintended outcome of the new system, especially since not only institutions, but also programmes at all levels must undertake an accreditation process.

For higher education institutions, the new accreditation procedures will most likely contribute to further strengthen institutional leadership. The fact that institutional leadership is made formally responsible for the institutional quality assurance system, and that institutional developments can be severely restricted by not obtaining programme accreditation support this assertion. A strengthened institutional leadership, on the other hand, may limit the power that departments traditionally have had in Norwegian higher education. The criteria describing the institutional quality system make it clear that departments to a much larger degree than before must report to the institution about 'quality failures', and also open up for increased institutional 'interference' in departmental decision-making.

Whether NOKUT represents a shift in the power structure at national level is more difficult to project. Formally, the establishment with its independent status and based on the fact that the Ministry cannot instruct the body in other ways than through legal acts, suggests that power has been transferred from the Ministry to NOKUT. In this perspective, the establishment of NOKUT represents a decentralisation in Norwegian higher education. Procedures that traditionally belonged to the Ministry have been taken over by NOKUT, and the new system makes it easier to differentiate between decisions made on expert criteria and decisions based on political considerations. On the other hand, it is still the Ministry that has the final say when it comes to granting institutions a certain status (e.g., to become a university). Thus, one may also claim that it is only the 'unimportant procedural' aspects that have been moved out of the Ministry, making it more of a political secretariat for the political leadership. In this perspective, the changes are not so much about de-centralisation but a rearrangement of the dominant position the state has in Norwegian higher education. How the board of NOKUT will function is, however, of great significance in the latter perspective. Giving accreditation to institutions and programmes that the Ministry at a later stage turn down, may create tensions that over time may weaken the legitimacy of the system, something which can trigger a 'softer' Ministry. The fact that governments in Norway usually have not been based on a majority of members of the Parliament can contribute to weaken the Ministry. Norwegian higher education history suggests that when questions about new higher education institutions are on the agenda, the interest of the Parliament usually increases. The establishment of the regional colleges in the 1960s, and the establishments of several Norwegian universities show that issues that have both a national and regional interest trigger processes where political rather than expert criteria matter most.

The interest organisations of students in Norway supported the reform initiatives and seem to look forward to the establishment of institutional quality systems where student assessment of teaching and learning are to have a central place. To the degree that such systems actually contribute to improve the programmes offered, students may be served better by the new approaches. Whether the accreditation system, especially of programmes, will have the same effect, is more difficult to project. The old approval system where the Ministry regulated the establishment of new programmes and the traditional external examiner system, which have been turned into a voluntary system for institutions, seemed to have kept quality at a reasonably high level in the country in the past. After the reform initiatives with the introduction of new bachelor's and master's degrees, it is expected that students will receive more guidance from teachers and will be followed up more closely than in the past. Whether such follow up will take place is, first and foremost, an economic question, and may have more influence on programme quality than the new accreditation system per se. The Stud.mag study, mentioned before, also show that most Norwegian students are relatively satisfied with the quality of education they receive (Wiers-Jenssen & Aamodt, 2002), a fact that could diminish the effect of a system focused on minimum standards. If only very few programmes lose their accreditation, a consequence would be that the majority of the students will not notice much of the accreditation system. If however, a programme stands in danger of losing accreditation, the consequences for students may be dramatic since, in the worst case, they must transfer to another institution. In this case, the new accreditation system may represent a severe treat to students who have been identified to programmes of weak quality.

The latter situation also brings us to the possibility that the new accreditation may increase the 'juridification' of higher education. This tendency may occur also due to other elements in the changes proposed, not least as a consequence of the new contracts that are to be established between the institutions and individual students. In these contracts, rights and obligations of the two parties are specified in a detailed way, and students may take legal actions against violations of the agreed contract. In the accreditation system, in the complaints committee the legal influence perhaps is most visible. This committee, consisting of five persons, of whom the chairman must have qualifications to act as a judge in a civil court, will decide all complaints from the institutions. The rather 'soft' criteria suggested by NOKUT imply that much discretion is left to this committee when deciding how certain criteria should be interpreted. A possible consequence is that the committee may pay more attention to legal rather than to expert views when dealing with the complaints.

6. The International Dimension of Norwegian Higher Education

It is tempting to interpret the recent reform initiatives in Norway as a direct response to the Bologna process. The changes in the degree structure, the new grading system and the new accreditation system ring some familiar bells for students of the Bologna Declaration. Nevertheless, one should be careful to argue that the new accreditation system in Norway is directly derived from the Bologna process. The interest for quality assurance has a broader foundation than 'just' to adapt to international policy developments, as indicated above.

That being said, the international dimension has played a role in developing the new quality assurance system. Looking into the established procedures, three sources of inspiration are in particular noticeable: Sweden, Europe (Bologna Declaration) and to some extent the current GATS negotiations. Sweden seems to have been the role model when developing the institutional qual-

ity assurance system, but also some of the procedures the new accreditation schemes will use, bear great resemblance to the audit system that was implemented in Sweden in the mid-1990s. The former Norway Network Council may be an important player leading to this result. Not least, the former council published in the late 1990s a report specifying how Norwegian higher education should be evaluated in the future (NNR, 1999). In this report, it was recommended that future Norwegian evaluation systems should be based on an audit-procedure due to its 'flexibility and open approach' (NNR, 1999:81). The fact that a Swedish expert participated in the pilot project in addition may have led to this strong focus on the Swedish experiences.

This does not mean that the Bologna Declaration and the present GATS negotiations are unimportant in the Norwegian context. For politicians and for the Ministry of Education, these processes are of great importance. A closer analysis of political documents paving the way for the recent reforms in Norwegian higher education shows many references to the Bologna Declaration, to the need to internationalise Norwegian higher education and to attract foreigners into the domestic higher education system (see e.g., St.Meld.nr. 27, p. 16, 38-41). The interest in the internationalisation of higher education is not new in Norway. Norwegian students for decades have travelled abroad and at present about 10 percent of the total student population are enrolled at various foreign higher education institutions. Due to a rather generous student support scheme that makes Norwegian students very attractive to fee-based programmes abroad, the Ministry of Education follows the GATS negotiations closely. When it comes to the new accreditation schemes, both the Bologna process and the GATS negotiations seem to have been important sources of inspiration for Norwegian policy-makers, at least when it comes to introducing the term accreditation in Norwegian higher education (see e.g., the NOU, 2000, chapter 15).

However, even if the term accreditation may stem from these processes, and even if several countries have implemented accreditation schemes during the latter years, it still seems rather difficult to find a common 'European model' for accreditation. Fierce discussion on how a transparent European system for quality assurance should look like and on what 'platforms' it should be based, have complicated any policy adaptation attempt. Except for the term accreditation, there seems to have been much insecurity among Norwegian policy-makers on the content of such a system. In the Mjøs-report that laid the foundation for the latest reforms in Norwegian higher education, accreditation systems are only discussed on a couple of pages in the almost 700-page report (NOU, 2000, p. 357-359). In other words, there was little clarification concerning the substance of the accreditation schemes.

Thus, for implementers of the new accreditation system the challenges have been to 'operationalise' these schemes and to provide them with substance. A look at the accreditation schemes as they appear today point to the tendency that the new schemes are a re-built (Swedish) audit model that builds on the past experiences and on pilot projects carried out by the former Norway Network Council. One might claim that the accreditation schemes have been somewhat 'transformed' during implementation and that the implementers in this respect may have learned from the experiences of 'the first generation' of accreditation schemes developed in Central and Eastern European countries (see Westerheijden, 2001 for a more detailed description). In this way, some of the shortcomings of existing accreditation systems, i.e., the conservative nature of judgements reached and the lack of an improvement orientation, may be addressed. In a recent article by one of the staff members of NOKUT, this seems to be one of the central intentions of the new body (Haakstad, 2001, p. 82). An additional advantage with such a combined accreditation/audit approach may be found in its potentially efficient way of integrating various processes in a joint system. Whether the accreditation schemes in fact will trigger such effects remains yet to be seen.

7. An Integrated Approach for Improvement and Control?

A conclusion that may be reached from this chapter is that what seems to be an accreditation system adapted to future expectations about deregulated higher education markets and the ongoing European and global integration processes, is geared heavily to pressing domestic needs at the same time. (The public/private dimension and the need to deal with 'institutional drift'.) During implementation the somewhat 'solution-driven' changes related to the Bologna process also show signs of being adjusted to prior experiences in evaluation and shortcoming in the quality of Norwegian higher education provision. The result seems to be a hybrid between (solution-driven) international developments and domestic needs.

The interesting questions for the future include how the new accreditation system in Norway matches the developments in other countries. For instance, in the Nordic countries a system for exchange of students and staff exists that may be affected by the new accreditation system. Will the other Nordic countries accept the accreditation given by NOKUT, or will Nordic and/or international developments put pressure on the Norwegian accreditation schemes to adjust to emerging 'standards' in this field? In relation to this, it is also interesting to see whether the monopoly NOKUT has in the accreditation area at present will continue in the future. Even if other accreditation agencies are allowed to accredit Norwegian higher education also in the new system, it is only the 'stamp' provided by NOKUT that at present provides students with access to the state supported student financing system. At present, the new accreditation system seems to represent a desire for national control over higher education. This is, however, not unusual in a European perspective (Westerheijden, 2001, p. 73).

Also domestically, the new accreditation schemes represent a challenge, not least in terms of integrating the new accreditation schemes with other quality assessment activities in the sector. Not least are Norwegian higher education institutions mandated to have systems that secure the staff a good working environment ('HMS', which stands for health, environment, security). At present, these HMS systems are not a part of the accreditation schemes developed even if in some areas they overlap considerably, e.g., when it comes to staffing and infrastructure. Furthermore, the reform and the new legislation also guarantee the students a physical learning environment (not regulated before), where it is currently suggested that the existing Labour Inspection Authority (*Arbeidstilsynet*) should monitor the learning environment. In these areas, a potential exists for integration and rationalisation.

Traditionally, the Ministry demanded several annual (quantitative) reports about the activity and 'production' of the higher education institutions. In the new system, these reports are supposed to be part of the institutional quality system upon which that all accreditation activities should be based. This 'performance indicator' system has provided the Ministry with important information about the quality and efficiency of the higher education system, and the intention with the integration in the institutional quality system seems to be that the institutions themselves must take independent actions on the basis of these data to a larger extent than before. In the new system, the quantitative indicators will also be sent to the Ministry where they will be an important element in the new and more output-based financing system.[1] In other words, im-

1 The new funding system for higher education in Norway was introduced as of the budget year 2002. In it, grants to higher education institutions consist of three main components: a) a basic component (approximately 60 percent of the total allocation), b) an education component (approximately 25 percent) based on the number of completed student credits, the number of graduates (scheduled to begin in 2005), and the number of exchange students (in + out), c) a research component (approximately 15 percent) which consists of result-based allocation (competitive), and a strategic allocation.

provement and control, and quality and funding will become more tightly coupled both at the institutional and at the national levels. In the discussions about the new accreditation system in Norway, the problematic relation to the new funding systems has been raised frequently. The fear is that quality standards may suffer due to possible institutional budgetary gains. This is a question that also needs to be investigated closely in the coming years.

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Country Report Poland

Ewa Chmielecka, Marcin Dabrowski

1. Introduction

The legal regulations adopted in Poland in 1990 and later (AHEd 1990, ASTD 1990, ASCSR 1991, AHVE 1997) were conducive to a quantitative expansion of higher education. The past decade saw the creation of over 250 non-state institutions and over 20 state vocational institutions of higher education, while the state academic institutions greatly increased their enrolment at all levels of study. During this period the total number of students increased approximately fourfold, which means that we are definitely seeing higher education on a mass scale in Poland. The tables below illustrate the size and structure of the Polish higher education system (CHMI 2000, HSaF 2002, www.stat.gov.pl).

Table 1: Student numbers

Academic year	2001/2002	2000/2001	1999/2000	1990/1991
Students	1,718,700	1,584,800	1,431,900	408,800
Percentage of age cohort	Net 32,7 Gross 43,6	Net 30,6 Gross 40,7	Net 28,0 Gross 36,9	Net 9,8 Gross 12,9

In the academic year 2001/2002, of 1,711,367 students, 1,203,517 were enrolled at public universities and 507,850 at private ones. 1,067,415 students were charged fees and only 643,952 were getting free education. The latter shows that Polish youth is strongly motivated to enter higher education.

Table 2: Numbers of institutions of higher education

Academic year	2001/2002	2000/2001	1999/2000	1990/91
Public higher education institutions	123	115	113	106
Private higher education institutions	221	195	174	6
Total	344	310	287	112

The Polish higher education system has a complex structure. There are universities (in a traditional sense of the word), universities of technology, universities of economics, universities of agriculture, medical universities, pedagogical universities (or academies), academies of physical education, academies of fine arts, theological academies, state higher schools for vocational education and private higher schools (mainly for vocational education).

The professional titles awarded to graduates of higher education institutions in Poland are as follows:

- the professional (vocational) title of *licencjat* (BA) is awarded following the completion of 3 or 3.5-years of higher professional education;
- the professional title of *inzynier* is awarded following the completion of 3.5 or 4 years of higher professional education in technical areas, agriculture, economics and related areas;
- the title of *magister* (MA) is awarded following the completion of single-cycle 5 or 6-year magister-level courses in a given field of study.[1] Equivalent titles include *magister edukacji* (in Education), *magister sztuki* (in Fine Arts), *magister inzynier* (in Engineering), *magister inzynier architekt* (in Architecture), *lekarz medycyny* (in Medicine), *lekarz stomatolog* (in Dentistry) and *lekarz weterynarii* (in Veterinary Medicine). The title of *magister* may also be obtained following the completion of 2 or 2.5-year second-cycle *magister*-level courses, for which holders of the professional title of *licencjat* or *inzynier* are eligible.

To be awarded any of the above titles students must complete all subjects and internships or a practical placement included in the curriculum, submit and defend a diploma project or thesis and pass a diploma examination. Upon graduation, each student receives a diploma in a specific field of study, three copies of the diploma and, upon request, a diploma in a foreign language.

The list of fields of study (programmes) in which university-type institutions in Poland may award professional titles of *magister* contains 101 entries. The Central Council for Higher Education defines this list according to section 42.1.1. of the Act on Higher Education (AHE 1990). The names of the fields of study (programmes) that are offered in schools of higher professional (vocational) education and lead to the title of *licencjat* or *inzynier* are in accordance with the list of fields of study defined by the Central Council of Higher Education for Higher Education Schools. The list of programmes includes names of more than 170 specialist options currently offered. Names of specialist options are not regulated, and this list is open.

In Poland, there is a strong tradition of respecting studies at *magister* or degree level, which are regarded as true 'higher studies'. The *licencjat* is rejected, as both students and employers aspire to the MA. Many professions require additional certificates awarded by professional associations.
The unemployment rate in Poland is very high and in September 2002 it reached the figure of 3,112,592 people (17.5%). The number of registered unemployed higher education graduates in September 2002 was relatively small (26,415). That meant that the number of unemployed university graduates was at the level of 18.5% of the unemployed among the graduates from all school types, while within the group of all registered unemployed it came to 0.85%, which testifies to the low unemployment among the university graduates. In immediately preceding years it was at a lower level, whereas in the 1990s the demand for university graduates had even exceeded supply (http://www.mpips.gov.pl/).

The influences of actors such as state institutions and political parties, trade unions and others are moderated by a very strong tradition of university autonomy. The most important factor which orientates the existence and the development of universities (public and non-public) is The Act on Higher Education of 1990. It supplies the collegiate bodies of public universities with

1 For a brief explanation of this typically Polish organisational concept in higher education, see section 4 of this chapter.

great authority and allows non-public universities to form their decision-making structures independently. According to the Act, the main role of the Ministry of Education and Sport is to control the universities' performance in keeping with the requirements of the law. The Parliament of the Republic of Poland, by accepting the budget together with the funds for maintaining higher education, remains the only political body that has a significant influence on these funds. Political parties, trade unions and other organisations seem to be inconspicuous. They may, however, be more prominent at the local level, where the organs of the local government (and related political organisations) create and manage local universities.

2. The National System of Quality Assurance in Higher Education

2.1 Accreditation

There are two fundamental accreditation schemes in Poland (see the graph). The first is national (state-owned), represented by the State Accreditation Committee (*Panstwowa Komisja Akredytacyjna*, PKA) in operation since January 2002. The second is called 'environmental' or private and is represented by accreditation committees formed by the academic communities who are willing to accredit certain groups of programmes (fields of study) delivered by higher education institutions (usually of a certain type). The 'environmental' committees of the universities represented in the Conference of Rectors of Polish Universities (KRASP) co-operate within the framework of its Accreditation Committee (KA KRASP). SEM F operates separately. These committees had been created before PKA came into existence.

Since these two schemes are of a very different character they will be described below separately (Wójcicka, 2001, 2002; Wójcicka & Chmielecka, 2001).

*The State Accreditation Committee (*Panstwowa Komisja Akredytacyjna*, PKA)*

As from 1 January 2002, the State Accreditation Committee (PKA) offered programme accreditation nationally. It is compulsory for all degree programmes for both levels (*licencjat* and *magister* degree) offered by any higher education institution, both public and private. The PKA accreditation covers teaching (in all of its aspects) as well as scientific research. These two subjects constitute the main part of the PKA accreditation standards.

The academic community, the Central Council for Higher Education and the Ministry of National Education, had requested the creation of a national accreditation organisation since 1994 (Kawecki, 1996; Chwirot, 1998; AKA, 1997; Wnuk-Lipinska & Wójcicka, 1995). The PKA is a state institution. It was established through an amendment of The Act on Higher Education (of July 2001), which defined the PKA's fundamental obligations, competences and procedures. The law also gives PKA the right to co-operate with other accrediting institutions in Poland and abroad.

The PKA consists of 65 members, appointed by the Minister of National Education and Sport (MENiS). The Minister's decisions are based on a candidates' list, which he receives from the PKA. Candidates are entered on the list following a survey that the PKA organises amongst the university Senates. The Committee sets its own statute regulating its basic activities and the competences of its bodies and organs. The Committee has sub-committees for humanities, natural sciences (mathematics, physics and chemistry), agriculture, forestry and veterinary sciences, medi-

cal sciences, physical education, technical sciences, economics, and social studies and law (AAHEd 2001, KRASP 1998).

The PKA's Office is part of the Ministry of the National Education and Sport. The projects of the Office are supervised by the Director of the Office, who has the rank of a Vice-Director of the department of the Ministry. The minister appoints and dismisses the Chairman and the Secretary of the PKA from among the Committee members. The Committee is controlled and reviewed by the Ministry.

The PKA submits opinions to the Ministry on the:

1. creation of universities,
2. universities' right to conduct higher studies in defined fields and at certain levels of education,
3. creation by a university of a subsidiary or an exterior faculty,
4. evaluation of quality of a given field of study (programme). The evaluation of a field of study is carried out if a programme is newly created (within 3 years of its launch or being promoted from licence or engineer to master's degree), if an application is made to be upgraded to a master's level degree programme, if the PKA's Presidium chooses so, or at the Minister's request.
5. evaluation of teachers' educational quality,
6. respecting the requirements for delivery of higher education.

Probably the prime stakeholder is the Ministry of National Education and Sport (MENiS). Positive evaluations by the PKA are the basis for MENiS' approval and decision-making concerning the establishment or continuation of universities and/or fields of studies. Negative evaluations could lead to its decision to terminate or suspend teaching in a certain field.

Amongst the most important stakeholders and institutions engaged in the scheme are, second, academic teachers and higher education institutions and their units. For them, obtaining feedback on schools that comply with the basic education quality standards will give additional motivation to enhance the quality of their work. Gaining accreditation means their stabilisation on the education market and public confirmation of the basic quality of studies. They also hope to remove the worst units from the higher education system and thus increase competition on the educational service market.

A third category of stakeholders is the other accrediting institutions (especially 'environmental' ones). The accreditations they offer gain additional value, with the fundamental accreditation of the PKA as a background.

Outside academia, students, parents, and employers are affected by the scheme. They receive basic information about the credibility of schools and their achievement of fundamental quality standards. For students, for instance, this will enable better-informed choices of the place to study, and for employers it will help them for the recruitment of employees.

The PKA accreditation is free of charge. The Committee's activity is financed from the state budget. The Minister defines (through an order) the way the projects of the Committee are administrated and financed, the remuneration of its members and the conditions of reimbursements of travel costs etc. associated with meetings and reviews. The remuneration of the Council and the Committee members will be evaluated in relation to the minimal basic wage of an ordinary professor.

The formal stages of the procedure are as follows: an evaluation team is appointed to carry out an educational evaluation at a certain university unit. The Secretary of the Commission, in accordance with the Chairman of the Team, appoints the evaluation team, which consists of five persons. The chairman of the Team must be a Committee member. The evaluation proceedings

cover: the self-evaluation, the visit by the evaluation team, the preparation of the report, the consideration of the application for accreditation, and the resolution of the PKA Presidium which can be graded as follows: distinguished, positive, conditional, negative. The grades: 'distinguished' and 'positive' are granted for a period of five years. The resolution concerning the conditional grade includes the recommendations and the terms of their realisation. The Committee's resolution is passed on to the Minister and to the university. If the evaluation is negative, the Minister (having considered the type and range of the stated violations) withdraws or suspends the approval to run a given field of study at a given level of education.

The formal duration of the stages of the procedures is about four to six months. In case of disagreement with the PKA Presidium's resolution, the university may apply for reconsideration of the case. The application should be submitted to the Committee within fourteen days from delivery of the initial resolution. The application is considered during a common session of the evaluation team and the Committee Presidium within thirty days.

Generally speaking, the PKA's activity is transparent and the resolutions of the PKA Presidium are published on the PKA's website. It lists the fields of education (universities) evaluated during a given period, as well as the results of the accreditation.

The first accreditation proceedings began in 2002. Until January 2003, approximately 150 procedures were initiated, and thirteen have been completed. Accordingly, at the time of writing it was too early to summarise the experiences. But one can notice that the procedures are being implemented in accordance with the official assumptions. The results have been published. Of the thirteen completed proceedings, two had a negative grade. One of the two universities that received a negative decision announced in public that it would bring the decision before the Supreme Administrative Court. It is not known yet how MENiS will regard the negative evaluations. It might decide to close or suspend certain fields of education. As these are the first cases, the academic community is awaiting the MENiS decision. It is commonly expected that, due to the heavy workload of the PKA, its tight budget could cause difficulties in their implementation.

The 'Environmental' Accreditation Scheme

The 'environmental' accreditation scheme includes a number of accreditation agencies:

- The Association of Management Education 'Forum' (SEM F)
- KRASP Accreditation Committee, including amongst others:
  - University Accreditation Committee (UKA)
  - Accreditation Committee for Medical Universities (KAUM)
  - Accreditation Committee for Technical Universities (KAUT)
  - Foundation for Promotion and Accreditation of Economic Studies (FPAKE)

All the 'environmental' accreditation schemes listed above offer accreditation for fields of study in their discipline at both *licencjat* and *magister* levels. Their accreditation standards cover both teaching in its all aspects and scientific research. Their standards of teaching quality are set at a higher level than the requirements of the PKA.

In 1993, the Association of Management Education 'Forum' (SEM F) was founded mainly by private business schools. Since most of them had a 'vocational' rather than an 'academic' status, they were not involved in the framework of KRASP. Nevertheless, the SEM F's institutional character, accreditation standards and procedures are typical of 'environmental' accreditation schemes. In 1994, twelve SEM F members signed the Agreement of Business Schools on Quality of Education and implemented – for the first time in Poland – an accreditation system for educational programmes and managerial staff training. At the end of 2002, SEM F conducted accredita-

tion for the following fields of study (only full-time): Management and Marketing, Finance and Banking, Economics, Informatics and Econometrics, Informatics, as well as for the Master of Business Administration (MBA) programmes and one-year Managerial Study (Bielski, 2002; Kwiatkowski, 2001; SEMF, 2002; www.semforum.com.pl).

The Rectors' Conference of Academic Schools of Poland (KRASP) considers ensuring the quality of higher education to be a core activity. In August 2000, KRASP made it known that it would support the activities of the 'environmental' accreditation committees. Therefore, an Accreditation Committee was established by the Resolution of the KRASP Plenary Assembly on 7 June 2001. According to the Resolution, the KRASP Accreditation Committee is a forum of co-operation of the accreditation committees appointed by the conferences of rectors of particular university types, which are members of KRASP. The Committee itself does not undertake accreditations. These activities remain in the competence of the 'environmental' committees. The Committee's tasks include (Woznicki, 2001; Krasniewski, 2001):

- verifying the correctness of accreditation standards and procedures applied by the 'environmental' committees;
- co-ordinating the activities of the 'environmental' accreditation committees; especially adjusting the accreditation principles and proceedings to the fields of study in different types of universities;
- representing the accreditation committees operating within the KRASP framework internationally;
- inspiring the activities of the KRASP organs in education quality;
- conducting information and educational activities in the field of accreditation.

The Committee is financed by the KRASP. However, this does not apply to accreditation procedures; since their costs are borne by the 'environmental' committees.

The Accreditation Committees were established by the Conferences of Rectors of the respective universities (KAUM in 1997, UKA in 1998, FPAKE in 2000 and KAUT in 2001). The Committees represent all state universities in their fields in Poland. The disciplines accredited in the scheme are as follows:

- UKA: all fields of study in the universities, in accordance with the MENiS listing. The Guidebook of UKA, published annually, contains the list of these fields and names of the university units that offer them (UKA, 2002; Chwirot, 2001, 2002; http://main.amu.-edu.pl/ects/uka/uka.html).
- KAUM: Medical studies (the faculties of Medicine), Medical analysis, Pharmacy, Dentistry (Gembicki, 2002; Mirecka & Gembicki, 2001).
- KAUT: all fields of study offered by the technical universities. In 2002 KAUT launched its first accreditations for selected fields of study (Konczakowska, 2002; KAUT 2002).
- FPAKE by the end of 2002 prepared accreditation standards and launched accreditation for the following fields of study: Management and Marketing, Finance and Banking, Economics, International Relations, Informatics, and Econometrics. Work on standards for 'Commodities science' and MBA has begun. FPAKE's accreditation procedure covers the field of study offered full-time and all other forms, e.g. extra-mural or part-time (Chmielecka, 2001; Strahl, 2002; www.fundacja.edu.pl).

In addition to the KRASP member accreditation agencies mentioned in the list above, the Accreditation Committee for Agricultural Universities (KAUR), the Accreditation Committee for Pedagogical Universities (KAUP), the Accreditation Committees for Physical Education Academies (KAAWF), the Accreditation Committee for Universities of Fine Arts (KAUM) are also formally included in the Accreditation Committee of KRASP. Each was established by the ap-

propriate Conferences of Rectors. However, their activity remained at the pilot stage of accreditation procedures until early 2003. They do not have websites or other official information sources, therefore they are not treated in more detail in this chapter. Nevertheless, it can be expected that they will soon become more active. When that is the case, all Polish universities will be covered by the 'environmental' accreditation network (Borecki, 2002; Król, 2002; Socha, 2001, 2002).

The main group stakeholders and engaged institutions are as follows:

- Academic teachers and universities and their units: accreditation confirms the high quality of education of schools (faculties) and employed teachers. Obtaining the 'environmental' accreditation gives a distinguished position in the educational market, as it confirms a high (above-average) quality of the educational service. Lack of 'environmental' accreditation may suggest lower education quality.
- State Accreditation Committee (PKA); as the 'environmental' accreditation applies higher standards than the PKA, the results could point to interesting areas for PKA accreditation.
- For KAUM, we can add as an interested party the federal Department of Education of The United States, which suspended in 1996 recognition of physicians' diplomas issued in Poland for lack of an external quality control system in Poland. As half the faculties of medicine in Poland conducted programmes in English for foreign students, it became urgent to appoint an Accreditation Committee. Its activity was well received and the US Department of Education restored the diploma recognition, stating that the Committee's procedures corresponded to the American standards of accreditation.
- Sponsors and supporting institutions.
- Organisations making ranking lists of higher education institutions and of programmes: in the majority of them, accreditation gives additional points to units.

As for ownership, we find three main models. First, UKA, KAUM, KAUT are institutions established by the Conference of Rectors. As neither Conferences nor Committees are legal entities, they cannot be regarded as the 'owners' according to the law. It could be maintained that these accreditation agencies are 'propriety' (initiative) of the university communities in Poland and are managed and controlled through the bodies appointed by them.

The second model is that of the FPAKE. The FPAKE is a foundation that 'belongs' to the founders, e.g. to the Foundation Board, as the founders can decide about its liquidation. The composition of the Board changes with the regular elections of rectors, since only acting rectors may be Board members.

Third, the SEM F is an association, which therefore 'belongs' to its members. In 2002 SEM F's was compsed of 62 members, mainly teachers of managerial education, and representatives of the corporate world; while amongst the supporting members there were 26 higher education institutions and other institutions related to managerial education, mainly private business schools.

The activities of UKA, KAUT and KAUM are under the control of their Rectors' Conferences. The Committees send them annual reports each year, together with a financial settlement. The FPAKE is subject to the legal regulations on foundations. This obliges it to submit annual reports to the internal organs and to MENiS. The report must deal with substantial parts, as well as the finances, prepared by an accounting company. SEM F has a Revising Committee, which is in charge of controlling the Association's activities within the time limits given by law. As for the accreditation standards, they are reviewed permanently by the committees' experts according to the regulations given by their statutes.

Students, parents and employers receive reliable feedback concerning the high (above-average) quality of education, which enables better grounded choices of where to enrol, and helps em-

ployers to recruit. Information about the accreditation will be disseminated more particularly to these groups of stakeholders.

The 'environmental' accreditation agencies were created in order to balance the standards of education quality at the Polish universities, to contribute to the upgrading of the quality and to create a system of accreditation in accordance with the agreed evaluation systems applied in the European Union. To fulfil these objectives they:

- determine, on the basis of recommendations from expert groups, the standards for the quality of education in specific fields of studies; (the KAUM accreditation is based on procedures and standards of American accreditation adapted to the Polish context; the SEM F and FPAKE are strongly influenced by the EQUIS accreditation scheme).
- determine what documentation is necessary in the accreditation process;
- decide about the commencement of the accreditation procedure for the study area at a school which asks for it;
- oversee the process of each accreditation;
- nominate expert groups and their chairmen, and members of evaluation teams;
- receive reports of evaluation teams;
- award, refuse or defer accreditation for specific fields of study at given schools (KAUM, FPAKE, SEM F) or prepare requests for the Rectors' Conferences (UKA, KAUT) to do so;
- perform all other activities necessary to fulfil their mission

Their accreditation is voluntary, given for three to five years and payable (approximately € 2,500 to € 4,000).

UKA, KAUM and KAUT conduct their activities in keeping with the common law. There are no specific legal regulations. FPAKE runs its activities according to the legal regulations on foundations, and SEM F on the basis of the law on associations.

The founders of UKA and KAUT finance the costs of their functioning. The Medical Universities finance the costs of KAUM by paying annual fees, the amount of which depends on the number of students and the Commission's needs (including the number of completed accreditations). The Medical Universities do not bear any other accreditation costs. According to its statutes, FPAKE obtains funds for its activities through donations, endowments of its sponsors ('benefactors') and the income of the company operated by the Foundation. The SEM F obtains funds for its activities through entrance fees and membership premiums, donations, inheritances, endowments, the incomes through its statutory and economic activity, and incomes from the public.

The accreditation procedures adopted by all committees are very similar, differing only in some details, and consist in the following steps:

- Forming experts groups to define specific standards for the quality of education in specific fields of study, based on the general standards adopted earlier.
- Application by a university unit for a field of study to be accredited.
- Self-assessment by the school (in case of KAUM, these documents may be 1500 pages!).
- Establishing an evaluation team to:
  - conduct a comprehensive review and assessment. The evaluation is to be conducted according to the general and specific standards defined, and includes a mandatory site visit;
  - prepare a written report on the review and assessment conducted and to present it to the committee, together with the recommendation to award the accreditation, to defer it until specified conditions are met, or to refuse accreditation.

- The committee discusses the report during a plenary session and makes a decision as to whether to award, defer or refuse accreditation.

The preconditions that must be met before an accreditation procedure may begin are the following:

- The unit of the institution (a faculty, an institute, a chair) which applies for accreditation for a given area of studies applies internal methods of stimulating and evaluating the quality of the education that is offered;
- This area applies a system of credit points that is congruent with the European system (ECTS);
- The area of studies and the quality of education meet the staff quality requirements set by the committee.

The formal duration of the procedure is about six to ten months. Key and specific criteria of the committees' accreditation can differ, but they usually include: mission and strategy, students, teaching staff, facilities and administration, teaching process, scientific research, social and corporate environment.

All committees adopted rules concerning objections regarding the procedures, for instance UKA nominates an appeals team and the accredited university has the right to appeal to the Rectors' Conference.

The documentation, the process and the conclusions of the accreditation procedures are generally confidential. The decision about awarding the accreditation to an area of study is made public usually on the websites and by publishing annual reports that show that the accreditation procedures were completed successfully.

So far, there has been no formal link between the committees' accreditation and approval of other decision-making processes (for instance by PKA or the Ministry).

By January 2003, UKA had conducted some 250 accreditation proceedings covering approximately 30 fields of education in 17 universities and over ten other types of higher education institutions. In the five years of KAUM's activity, all medical faculties of all Medical Universities have undergone the accreditation process. Until the end of 2002, 19 programmes obtained SEM F's accreditation and a few re-accreditations were completed. In 2001-2002, KAUT elaborated the procedure and the general standards of accreditation and started accreditation procedures for 26 fields of study. In January 2003 the first – over ten – accreditation proceedings were expected to have been completed. In 2001-2002, FPAKE elaborated its accreditation procedures and standards. By January 2003, 16 accreditation proceedings in five fields of study were in progress. None had been completed when the present report was written.

2.2 Approval Scheme

Approval is not based on accreditation. In Poland it refers only to newly created universities, fields of study, subsidiaries and external faculties of already existing universities. Periodical approval (i.e. prolonging the permission for the existing universities) is based on the accreditation procedure of the State Accreditation Committee.

In order to understand better the basic forms of approval in Poland, one must say a few words about the recent history of higher education in Poland. According to the Act on Higher Education of 1990, public universities were established in virtue of a law by Parliament. The statute of the university was issued by the Minister, together with the opinion of the Central Council of Higher Education (which also issued an opinion about the application for creating the univer-

sity). The Minister also appointed the first rector. According to the same Act, non-public universities were established in virtue of an authorisation issued by the Minister of National Education (together with the opinion of the Central Council of Higher Education. New fields of study were created through a similar procedure).

The Act on Higher Vocational Education was adopted in 1997. It regulated the control of quality of education in the entire vocational sector of higher education (public and non-public). Since then, all vocational schools (leading to the *licencjat* or the *inzynier* degree) operate under the authorisation of the Minister of National Education, after receiving the opinion of the newly created KAWSZ, the Accreditation Committee for Higher Vocational Education (Witkowski, 2001). The Central Council kept its competences with regard to academic institutions (non-vocational higher education). The legal task of the Accreditation Committee for Vocational Education was to issue opinions about creating new institutions and fields of study and conducting periodical accreditation in vocational institutions of all types. Decisions were made by the Minister of National Education. The Committee existed until the end of 2001.

The Amendment of the Act on Higher Education of July 2001 created the State Accreditation Committee (PKA), described above. It took over the role of issuing opinions about creating new universities, subsidiaries and fields of study from the Central Council and from KAWSZ and passing them on to the Minister. This procedure refers to launching fields of study which are already on the list accepted by the Ministry. But applications for creating new types of study programmes (as yet unlisted) and their education standards are subject to the Central Council of Higher Education's opinion.

The Minister, following the Act regulations and the opinions of the Central Council for Higher Education, sets the fundamental standards, which are later used by PKA to evaluate the field of studies:

- the conditions which should be fulfilled by the university that wants to launch and maintain a field of studies at a certain level (in particular the number of academic teachers holding a scientific or academic degree, included in the staff's minimum requirements; the type of employment and the ratio of employees to the number of students),
- the names of the fields of study,
- the standards of teaching within each field of study and at each level of education; concerning the graduates' profile, overall content of studies of certain subjects, both within the group of general, basic subjects and those connected with each field,
- the teacher education standards, considering the graduate's profile, the teachers' education subjects, internships, curriculum content and required skills,
- the detailed conditions for establishing a subsidiary or an exterior faculty of the university; taking into consideration the obligation to comply with the field of studies' training requirements (as far as its creation and running at a certain level is concerned).

The university must immediately advise the minister about the loss of capacity to conduct higher studies (including changes in staff employment that influence the permission to conduct higher learning). If the university does not comply with these regulations within six months, the minister decides whether to suspend the university's rights to conduct higher learning in the given field at this level.

If the assessment by the State Accreditation Committee is negative, the minister withdraws or suspends the authorisation to conduct higher education in the field of study at that level of education, depending on the type and range of the stated violations.

2.3 Evaluation Scheme

There is no separate evaluation scheme of a supra-institutional nature in Poland. Elements of evaluation are included in the accreditation procedures, especially in the 'environmental' accreditation. The self-assessments and *peer reviews* may take the form of a weakness and strength analysis of the institution or programme. It offers recommendations for the improvement of the weaknesses. However, none of the 'environmental' accreditation committees has yet appointed an expert body to carry out evaluations at the request of higher education units without comparing the standards and that have not ended in accreditation.

3. System Dynamics

3.1 Driving Forces: Quality

The basic reason for creating and developing the accreditation system in Poland was concern about the quality of education, which was threatened by the fact that higher education in Poland had become 'mass education'. The quantitative growth had become necessary (the population with a university degree still remains below 10%) and is the justified pride and achievement of Polish society. However, the growth was not followed by appropriate funding from the state budget. The grant per student decreased dramatically. But the law authorised charging students for studies in non-public higher schools and for studies (other than full-time) in public universities. These two factors helped to develop fee-based studies (extramural in public universities and in the private sector). Unfortunately, the state organs did not control these studies effectively as far as their quality was concerned. The growth caused additional threats to quality because of:

- insufficient teaching staff: whereas the number of students quadrupled, the number of academic teachers increased only 20 to 25%;
- teaching staff hold several regular posts simultaneously, which worsens the quality of teaching and research. This is partly due to the low salaries of academic teachers, which are regulated nationally for public universities.

This went hand in hand with insufficient quality control, which consisted exclusively of approval based on the Act on Higher Education and the activities of the Central Council and the Ministry of National Education. This caused anxiety in (part of) the academic environment and led to the following:

- since the mid-1990s, with the continuous demands for a state system of accreditation; there was no excuse for the ten-year delay of the law's amendment (the first post-communist law on higher education was promulgated in 1990);
- creation of the agencies of 'environmental' accreditation;
- focusing on the most significant threats to quality (among the accreditation standards): students' attitude towards the staff, minimal programme requirements, etc.
- creating accreditation schemes directed to fields of study, as these are the basic higher education units.

3.2 Driving Forces: Political and Social Factors

The political factors include the preparation of the Polish higher education system for the forthcoming accession to the European Union, greater competition of universities on the European education market, and stimulating international co-operation and student and staff mobility.

As far as the social problems are concerned, the accreditation scheme leads to:

- Ensuring minimum quality by removing low-quality units. This accompanies the advent of mass higher education and adjusts the higher education market in Poland to these new contexts.
- Publishing PKA's results in the media should draw public attention to the threats to higher education and to the reasons for this, including the need to increase the state's higher education budget.
- Marking the institutions with distinctive quality of education, thus setting competition mechanisms.
- Implementing quality-enhancing mechanisms in universities.
- Changing teaching staff's attitude towards quality education.

It is far too early to say whether these goals have been achieved, as the state accreditation system is only in its infancy. In the case of UKA and SEM F (which have been in operation for a few years) we can confirm their positive influence.

3.3 Why Not Evaluate?

As mentioned above, there is no separate scheme of supra-institutional evaluation. This mechanism is included in the 'environmental' accreditation schemes. Their review reports end with advice for accreditation and with a summary of the weaknesses and strengths of the accredited field of study. Why does it happen this way? It is very difficult to answer this question. It could be said that uncontrolled commercialisation, massification and the 'pathologies' threatening the quality mentioned above made the universities more sensitive to quality assurance mechanisms which would provide them with certified quality (i.e. accreditation) and make them more credible. Accreditation was more urgent and socially important than quality improvement per se. Maybe evaluation can be a next step. For example: FPAKE is planning to launch an advising system for quality assurance, but still as an initial step towards accreditation.

3.4 Relationships Between Schemes

As mentioned, the approval of existing institutions is based on the accreditation conducted by PKA. It consists in verifying the conformity of universities' activities with the teaching standards for the fields of study. PKA passes the result on to MENiS, which makes the decision about continuing them or not. Concerning the approval of the creation of new universities, subsidiaries, fields of study, or authorisation to confer the master's degree, the evaluation is also being carried out by PKA, whereas MENiS makes the decisions. Here there is full co-operation between PKA and MENiS. In case of a negative opinion of PKA, the Minister must take the steps defined in the Act, e.g. suspend the field of study.

The relations between approval and accreditation are exiguous. In some cases the 'environmental' accreditation standards for a field of study and the teaching standards elaborated by the Central Council are similar and were worked out by the same team of experts (e.g. for the field of psychology, accredited by UKA).

We have two typical accreditation models in Poland. One is 'top–down', constituted by law and involving state authorities (PKA). The other is 'bottom–up', constituted by the academic community (the committees of the KA KRASP and SEM F). Their reciprocal relations and emerging co-operation together form a constantly evolving system of external quality assurance. What is rather unusual is that the academic movement appeared first, followed by that of the state. The interdependence of PKA and the 'environmental' institutions is a fundamental problem. The discussion over a model of their co-operation had preceded the Act amendment and the creation of PKA and has been continued since. However, no decisions were reached.

The institutions that are members of KA KRASP suggested the following arrangements. As the accreditation conducted by committees within KRASP is voluntary and is closely linked to the required quality of education, and as PKA's task, in accordance with the Act, consists in verifying whether the university fulfils the minimum requirements advising on applications for approval, it seems clear that both schemes complement each other. The question then is whether, as the 'environmental' committees proposed, a field of study that has already obtained 'environmental' accreditation should be awarded PKA accreditation easily (after a lighter procedure)? PKA has not reacted positively on this so far. The 'environmental' committees are afraid that the creation of PKA, with its compulsory accreditation at a basic level and its possibility to grant a 'distinguished' grade, will decrease the demand of the academic community for the voluntary 'environmental' accreditation. This could imply that their activities will be wasted. However, they wish to convince PKA to take advantage of the 'environmental' committees' attainments, since PKA's projects are vast and its budget is limited. PKA acts under very strong pressure. Its resistance to the offered co-operation is justified: taking advantage of the 'environmental' accreditations must be confirmed by total credibility of their evaluations. That is why there is a need for a 'cap' institution (like KA KRASP), which enables the rectors' conferences to confirm the integrity of the 'environmental' accreditation.

The second important type of relation is co-operation between the 'environmental' institutions. These institutions are formed 'bottom–up'. They have institutional independence and substantial autonomy. They have in common:

- self-regulative accrediting institutions;
- voluntary, paid, periodical accreditations;
- self-regulative standards (always for the 'fields of study');
- almost identical procedures of accreditation: application submitting, appointing the peer review team, self-evaluation, peer review team visit, the report, the decision about the accreditation issued by the Accreditation Committee.

What separates them, apart from some organisational differences, are the nature and level of accreditation criteria requirements. Yet these institutions are willing to co-operate and are clearly strive for a 'common currency' for their accreditations and, maybe later, mutual acceptance of their accreditations or common accreditations for related fields of study offered by universities of different types. So far, their co-operation takes the following forms:

- common sessions of the chairmen of the 'environmental' committees in KA KRASP to exchange information and sound out possibilities of co-operation;
- joint conferences, training, seminars, publications;
- mutual consultations on standards and accreditation criteria;

- forming mixed peer review teams (i.e. with members from universities of different types), e.g. FPAKE and UKA in the case of programmes in economics;
- joint accreditation for some fields of study: e.g. UKA and KAUT accredited together chemistry and some other fields of study;
- participation of representatives of various university types in the activities of accreditation committees: thus, the FPAKE committee consists of representatives of universities, technical universities and agricultural universities, which all offer economics.

There is now a variety of accreditation leading to a 'common currency'. For example: fields concerning management may obtain (apart from PKA's accreditation) SEM F, FPAKE and UKA accreditation. Each is of a slightly different nature. It is being discussed whether we should strive for unification of standards and criteria or keep the variety, which allows the universities to have several separate evaluations. So far, variety has more supporters. However, KA KRASP represents committees that are under its auspices, e.g. in the negotiations with PKA and in international forums, so the committees must give importance to the high and comparable standard of their accreditations.

In sum, we should remember that the external system of quality evaluation which was created and developed in 2002 is still in its infancy and will certainly evolve and change. It is difficult to predict the directions of its evolution. Discussions are in progress; and there is a will to maintain the variety of evaluations.

3.5 Consequences of Accreditation

The consequences of the creation of the accreditation scheme are different. The PKA controls the basic quality level, enforcing minimal requirements. There were cases where universities, having been informed about PKA accreditation procedures for one of their fields of study, replied that they had just stopped the recruitment or closed the field, which, in practice, means that they did not fulfil the minimal requirements and that the forthcoming PKA evaluation would end these fields of study. Hence, a positive influence of the common and compulsory PKA accreditation can be seen: the universities expecting PKA accreditation verify their own functioning.

The main consequences of 'environmental' accreditation include:

- Growing awareness concerning quality. Within the few years of their operation, it became obvious that quality assurance systems are necessary in higher education institutions; opposition and scepticism to accreditation, which previously existed in the academic environment, have almost vanished.
- Creating a large group of persons who are competent in matters of quality assurance mechanisms and engaged in their implementation. It is difficult to estimate the exact figure, but considering the number of peer review teams and expert group members, those who are in charge of self-evaluations at universities; and people who participate in programmes such as TEMPUS and the others devoted to the quality of higher education, it would represent a few thousand (mainly connected with UKA)
- Spreading practices linked to accreditation standards; e.g. ECTS, transparency of the teaching processes, student surveys, etc.
- Establishing offices or rectors' plenipotentiaries responsible for quality assurance in many universities.
- Ensuring fair competition on the market between higher education institutions, making clear which of them are better than others.

- For students, at present, the most important changes are the following:
- better information about the quality of studies, and hence a better possibility of choosing their institution;
- greater influence of students on the teaching processes (through feedback e.g. in surveys, greater transparency of the teaching procedures, and larger choice of courses);
- greater mobility through the ECTS system.

As the accreditation enhances quality of education, and is expected to continue to do so in future, we can expect:

- better educated graduates, who will make up the social and professional elites;
- better use of public funds for higher education;
- information for parents and students about where it is best to study, which means better use of private funds for education;
- better recognition of graduates by employers;
- introducing this sector of Polish public life into the European higher education area – which brings us to the topic of the next section.

4. Drivers From Abroad

All accrediting institutions quote in their documentation that their fundamental targets are their will to introduce Polish higher education into the European education area and to create procedures and standards in accordance with those of European Union accreditation schemes (e.g. the ECTS system). The oldest 'environmental' committees (SEM F, UKA) took advantage of assistance funds (TEMPUS, PHARE, and others). These funds enabled them to co-operate with Western accreditation institutions and experts to draft their own procedures (study visits, seminars and training, in Poland and abroad). The committees that were established later (KAUT, FPAKE) often based their approaches on the example of the older Polish accreditation committees. All were greatly influenced in their standards and approaches by this exposure to European and – especially in the case of KAUM – American accreditation.

The appointment of the State Accreditation Committee fulfils the postulate requiring each education system in Europe to possess a central accreditation and approval system, which would cover all higher education institutions in the country (*Furthering the Bologna Process*, 2001; *From Prague to Berlin*, 2002; Krasniewski & Macukow, 2002).

Some of the accrediting institutions are members of European and international accreditation organisations and/or their networks, or they intend to apply for membership after they have developed their activity. Thus, PKA and UKA are members of the Network of Central and Eastern European Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (http://www.ceenetwork.hu/index.-html), and SEM F is a member of EQUIS; and is also deeply involved in CEEMAN's activities.

The basic difference and source of the most significant problems faced by Polish accreditation institutions that are willing to adopt the European pattern of accreditation is the *'field of study'*. The entire higher education system in Poland is based on 'fields of study'. 'Fields of study' are neither pure programmes nor institutions, although they must be conducted by university faculties. The list of recognised fields of study is given by MENiS. The basic or minimal curriculum requirements for each field of study are also centrally set. The recruitment of students is conducted collectively within a given 'field of study'. This system was reinforced by the State Accreditation Committee, which created its accreditation model according to fields of study. The

universities applying for accreditation are therefore interested in the accreditation for a field of study. That is why 'environmental' accreditation committees also adopted a field-of-study structure of assessment. But the Polish higher education system also requires accreditation of institutions, because the most important threats to education quality are not the programme content but the functioning of universities. This is why the accreditation standards combine institutional assessment requirements and curriculum requirements, which are very often separated (SEM F, KAUM) into two individual issues (which does not conform with the patterns that are common in Europe).

The second problem and reproach reported by Western reviewers concerning 'environmental' accreditations is that they are established by the rectors' conferences, i.e. by the authorities of universities, and not by the 'scientific community itself' (Westerheijden, 2001; Wójcicka, 2001a). However, rectors are elected by the communities of their universities, and the Accreditation Committees' projects, such as the expert teams' elaborations of standards and, above all, the assessment teams' tasks are carried out by representatives of the academic community (which do not represent the decision-making structures in the university).

It is also reproached that *all* accreditation systems in Poland focus on the 'input' of the education process and not on the graduates' competences and added value achieved within the education process, i.e. output. (By the way, an 'output' accreditation model would minimise the discrepancies between the accreditation for the field of study and that of the institution, mentioned above). There is a question then whether the Polish accreditation scheme is capable of adopting the above quality assessment model and whether it could be applied if the main problems of the quality of education were strictly related to the university's 'input'. Such solutions are the outcome of a long-lasting evolution and preparation of the academic environment of the EU countries and the much higher funds that they have available, e.g. to follow their graduates' careers. Nothing similar has existed in Poland as yet.

5. Other Forms of Assessment

We could mention the following elements of assessment, covering all universities:

- An obligatory assessment of academic teachers' achievements in public universities. Article 104 of the Act on Higher Education states that all academic teachers should be subject to evaluation at least every four years, at the request of their superiors, or before the termination of their appointment. The rules of this assessment are set by the university, but it was regulated nationally that the university can dismiss an employee who had negative grades twice. If the employee does not obtain the doctor's degree within eight years of employment, or the *doctor habilitatus* degree within nine years after obtaining the doctorate (unless the statute of the university states otherwise), this also leads to dismissal (the so-called employee 'rotation').
- An assessment of the State Committee for Scientific Research (KBN) of all units (in universities as well as in research institutions) leading to the award of one of four categories with regard to their research standing.
- An assessment of the Central Commission for Scientific Title and Degrees of how an individual obtained the *doctor habilitatus* degree or the title of professor. The assessment focuses on the candidates' achievements to obtain the degree or the title; and indirectly evaluates

the activities of the scientific councils (faculty councils) that apply for awarding the degree or title.

The relations between accreditation proceedings and the assessments above are not very explicit. However, the evaluation criteria of certain 'environmental' institutions (e.g. FPAKE) include questions about systematic staff review and the ways of using of outcomes, similarly for the number of *habilitation* professor procedures. In addition, the KBN research category is taken into consideration in the assessment standards of an academic institution, which considers a high KBN category as a confirmation of a high level of scientific research.

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Country Report Portugal

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1. Executive summary

There is not yet any national accreditation system of higher education institutions or of study programmes. The traditional methodology used by the State is the *a priori* approval of new institutions and new programmes through a bureaucratic process that in some cases is advertised by publication of a legal decision of the Ministry.

There is a national system for quality evaluation of study programmes that follows quite closely the Dutch system, but there are signs of increasing dissatisfaction with the apparent lack of capacity of the system in demonstrating it's effectiveness in improving the quality of educational provision.

Professional associations play some role in the control of the quality graduates applying for the association's membership that in general is a necessary condition to be entitled to practise the profession. However, the Engineers' Association is the only institution with a well-established formal system for accreditation of higher education engineering institutions and of study programmes, established in 1994. More recently, other professional associations have initiated moves in the same direction. The Architects' Association has started an accreditation system in 2000 and the Pharmacists' Association intends to start one in 2003/04. The Economists' Association has initiated a 'mixed' system in 1999. Other Associations have made public plans to establish accreditation systems (Lawyers, Nurses, Dentists, Veterinary Surgeons, Solicitors).

So far there is no direct relationship between the national system of quality evaluation of study programmes and the parallel accreditation systems of professional organisations. However, the peer review teams working within the National Quality Evaluation Agency (NQEA) framework include, as a general rule, at least a representative of the professional association, if there is one. Negotiations were recently initiated in order to see how far it is possible to make compatible

the procedures used by the NQEA and the Engineers' Association in order to avoid institutional evaluation fatigue in the schools of Engineering.

Transnational education activities have raised some concerns that were translated into legislation. There is legislation determining that degrees obtained through franchising operations will not be given equivalence or recognition. More recently there is legislation (Law 1/2003 of 6th January) forbidding this kind of activities.

Very recently (6th of January 2003) the Parliament has passed a new law that determines the accreditation of higher education institutions and of study programmes. The agency responsible for quality evaluation will be also responsible for the accreditation. It is not at all clear what the accreditation mechanisms will be. A possible development could be to use directly the quality evaluation procedures to produce accreditation decisions, despite the obvious difficulties of such a course of action.

On the other hand, it's not at all obvious what will be the relationship of this new system to the parallel activities of professional associations. It's possible that in the future professional associations will be divested of their present powers of accreditation. Another possibility will be for the NQEA and the Professional Associations to reach an agreement that will allow for a harmonisation of both systems. The third possibility is obviously to run the two systems in parallel, running the risk of producing incompatible decisions on the same study programme and creating an excessive burden for the institutions. However, it is too early to have clues about future developments.

2. General information about the system

2.1 Main components of the Portuguese higher education system

The Portuguese higher education system is binary, including universities and polytechnics. These institutions are both public and private. In the public sector there are 13 universities, one Open University *(Universidade Aberta*) and an independent institute, ISCTE (*Instituto Superior de Ciências do Trabalho*); there are also 16 polytechnics – and the University of the Algarve and the University of Aveiro include some polytechnic schools within their structure – and 32 non-integrated schools. This subsystem also includes a network of nursing institutes, three institutes for training technicians for health services (Lisbon, Porto and Coimbra), a school of hostelry and tourism, and a school of art restoration. Some public higher education is dependent on the Armed Forces and Police Forces (Military Academy, Air Force Academy, Naval School and the Higher School of Police). In the private sector there are presently 9 universities and 72 polytechnics (including non-integrated polytechnic schools)[1].

There is also a Catholic University established under a concordat between the Portuguese State and the Holy See.

1 Some institutions have more than one regional campus located in different towns. If they are counted separately then the number of universities increases to 14 and the number of other institutions to 98.

Table 1: Degrees awarded

Degree	Institution/Sector	Length
Bacharelato	Polytechnics	3 years
Licenciatura	Universities/Polytechnics	4/6 years
Mestrado	Universities	+2
Doutoramento	Universities	+ 3 (+)

Table 2: The research role of each sector

Sector	Research role
Polytechnic sector	Polytechnics are assumed to be vocational-driven, with no fundamental research. Only applied research was conceived for the sector.
University sector	Fundamental research and applied research

Table 3: Size of the different components (2001/02)

	Public			Private		
	Universities	Polytechnics	Army/Police	Universities	Polytechnics	Catholic U.
No. students	171 014	108 136	1 456	41 331	60 186	10 136

2.2 Transition to the labour market

The Portuguese higher education system has undergone a very fast expansion mainly during the 80s and early 90s, with a major contribution from the private sector. Expansion of higher education and diversification, as well as the increase of student enrolment in fields that were of economic importance has been explicit government policy goals for more than a decade. However, these policy goals have not been fully attained, both because of mushrooming of the private sector in direction contrary to the aims of the diversification policy (geographical distortions and insufficient supply of technical degrees), and because of some academic drift of the polytechnics.

The new private institutions were not in general sound academic and financial projects, but rather short-term-profit-making attempts. This is confirmed by the type of courses provided, by the extremely fast expansion of most of these institutions, by the almost absence of any research activities, by the reliance on the moonlighting of the staff of public institutions for teaching, or by the lack of enthusiasm towards quality evaluation issues. Altogether, if it has provided a good business to some, it has compromised the future credibility of an important part of the system.

The combined result of uncontrolled expansion of the private sector with the public polytechnics academic drift and excessive pedagogical autonomy of public universities has been a serious mismatch between the outputs of higher education and the needs of the labour market that is being translated into an increase in the unemployment rate of graduates and has paved the way to professional accreditation. More recently, due to a combined effect of a decrease of the total number of candidates, with an increase of new places offered by the public sector, many places in higher education are now left without candidates, namely in private institutions and, as a result, private institutions are entering a difficult fight for economic survival. At the same time, candi-

dates are now more aware of the labour market situation and avoid those study programmes with lower employability prospects. This will have an effect over the offer of study programmes. This was already clearly visible in the enrolments of new students for the academic year 2002/2003 as some of the less popular study programmes were confronted with a decrease in the number of candidates – in some cases there were no candidates at all!

2.3 Steering of the system

In Portugal, the most visible actors involved in the process of higher education are the Government (represented by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education[2]), the CRUP (Portuguese Council of Rectors), the CCISP (the co-ordinating structure of public polytechnics) and the CNE (National Council for Education). The private sector of higher education also has a large influence but it prefers to act undercover, using a well-established network of political and economic interests, rather than using very visible institutional structures.

The most important actor is the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. In the Parliament, all political parties emphasise the strategic role of education in the context of Portuguese economic, social and political development, but in general political activity is reduced to generic political statements while high technical quality is in general conspicuously absent from political debates. According to the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos this is the result of what he calls the 'parallel state'[3].

The General Directorate of Higher Education belonging to the Ministry is responsible for all the administrative processes related to higher education but regarding public universities its role was clearly reduced by the 1988 University Autonomy Act. The Council of Rectors of Portuguese Universities (CRUP) and the Polytechnic's Co-ordinator Council (CCISP) are two of the main actors in the national higher education policy, but social and cultural tradition have until now kept CCISP as a weaker political stakeholder than its university partner.

The University Autonomy Act (article 4) gives CRUP the mission „of co-operating with the State in the making of national policies for education, science, and culture". Co-operation, at this formal level, is translated into compulsory advising functions on all legislative projects concerning higher education. However CRUP's political weight has been more important than this formal role could suggest and this was probably due to the fact that the rectors of most Portuguese universities have been elected for more than one term, thus being able to create strong personal ties allowing them to define a common set of academic values which were then translated into clear strategic choices in the relationships with other political actors.

The CRUP was created by Decree Law 107/79 of the 2nd of May but its action became relevant mainly with the discussion and implementation of the Law of Autonomy and its structure was altered by the Decree Law 283/93 of 18th of August. The conduct of CRUP has been clearly in harmony with the characteristics of the Portuguese society, namely a low public profile, avoid-

2 Until this last government there was a Ministry of Education (all levels of education, incuding HE) and a Ministry of Science and Technology (responsible for research). At present the Ministry of Education is no longer responsible for HE that was merged with research in a new ministry for Science and Higher Education.

3 The new Constitution approved in 1976, after the revolution, had a very strong left-wing influence and was indeed a detailed programme for building a socialist country. However, none of the governments elected after the Constitution was approved could be considered as Marxist or extreme-leftist. This has resulted in a gap between the objectives and intentions of legislation and the social and political tissue that they intend to regulate. Over the years, many laws have fallen into oblivion without producing effects while the Constitution was progressively amended to eliminate the more obvious ornaments of a socialist ideology. This is what Santos calls the 'parallel state'.

ance on unnecessary conflicts, and strong negotiating capacity. In general CRUP does not present public criticisms addressed at the government's actions, avoids any political partisan influence and prefers to negotiate supported by sound technical documents produced by its members and approved by the Council.

However the CRUP has taken a very critical position regarding the uncontrolled expansion of private higher education and the government's contribution to facilitate the accumulation of teaching activities in both public and private institutions, as it became immediately apparent that the development of the private sector would also downgrade some areas of the public sector. One of the reasons why the CRUP has decided to lead the implementation of the quality evaluation system is based on the public universities opinion that the quality evaluation system is a guarantee of their quality vis-à-vis the private sector, as well as a means to moralise the behaviour of the academic staff. The CRUP has also produced policy papers about the higher education system, which address amongst others the problems of diversity and the relationship universities/polytechnics[4] as well as the importance of life-long learning. Public discussions of these policy papers have been organised for collecting relevant contributions to shaping the future changes of the system.

Another important actor is the students' unions. Following the 1974 revolution, students where given participation at all levels of institutional governance, and if they are not directly involved in the strict setting up of higher education policies, they are in the process *really*. For a long time after the revolution, and because many of their leaders were more concerned with political party warfare than with academic policies, students' unions were not very visible in the definition of higher education policies. However a governmental decision to increase the level of tuition fees (kept frozen for decades) has acted as a catalyst of student discontent thus propelling students' organisations into a much more active role in the definition of political regulation instruments such as fees, grants, student's social welfare or *numerus clausus*.

The most absent actors are employers' organisations. Paradoxically, at the very same time that governments initiate a new discourse giving the market a more important role in the regulation of higher education and emphasising the importance of higher education as a factor for the development of economic activities, Portuguese employers and their organisations are far from assuming the statute of effective political actors thus confirming what Santos calls the heterogeneity[5] of the Portuguese State.

3. Accreditation mechanisms

3.1 Control by the State

At present there is not any national accreditation system run or controlled by the state (however, see Chapter 3 for some very recent changes). At the level of study programmes state control is ex-

4 CRUP favours diversity of the HE system, with additional short cycle vocational diplomas which could help in solving the problem of dropouts and it is critical of the polytechnic's academic drift.

5 After the 1974 revolution, Portugal emerged from decades of a state of isolation and in few years „the Portuguese corporative state went through a transition to socialism, a fordist regulation and a Welfare State regulation, and even a neo-liberal regulation. The structure of the state presents, in each moment, a geological composition with several layers, sedimented in different forms, some old, some recent, each one with its own internal logic and its own strategical orientation. This is the meaning of the heterogeneous state."

ercised through bureaucratic approval of study programmes, but the situation is different for the different segments of the higher education system.

For instance, Article 7 of the University Autonomy Act (Law 108/88 of 24 September) grants public universities full pedagogic autonomy, meaning in practice that public universities have almost complete freedom to start, suspend or cancel study programmes – and they have used this capacity quite extensively. At present, there is even some feeling that public universities have too much pedagogical autonomy that makes almost impossible achieving effective co-ordination of the sector. It is true that the Ministry must register new degrees[6], but the Ministry cannot refuse registration unless the degrees are illegal (for instance because of problems over the duration of the programme or the total number of credits necessary for obtaining the degree). If that is not the case, then the Ministry's only option for trying to dissuade the institution from starting the new study programme is determining that students enrolled in that programme will not be counted for funding purposes, but so far this has never been done[7].

In contrast, public polytechnics are not allowed to create, suspend or cancel study programmes: they have to submit all proposals for the Ministry's specific approval. It is also important to realise that, in principle, private institutions are also subject to strong control by the Ministry: they must ask for permission before starting or modifying any study programme, and they must apply for state recognition of all their degrees and diplomas, in order to command the same status and recognition for academic and professional purposes as those conferred by public institutions.

At the level of institutions the Ministry has full power of approval. The establishment of a new public institution is an act of the Government that in general takes the form of a Decree-Law approved by the cabinet. The establishment of a new organic unit in an already existing public institution (for instance the establishment of a new school or faculty in an existing university) starts with the approval of a proposal by the Senate but this proposal has to be approved by the Ministry. As for private institutions, they cannot start operating without the previous approval by the Ministry.

The special case of Medicine and Dental Medicine

The government has decided (Council of Ministers deliberation of November 1998) to implement a special programme for health sciences. One of the main reasons for this has been the present lack of physicians as result of strong restrictions to the *numerus clausus* of the schools of Medicine during the 80's – a recommendation from the World Bank. In the case of Medicine and Dental Medicine, the proposals for establishment of new schools or of study programmes are evaluated by International Review Teams that produce recommendations following the traditional quality evaluation methodology: the institution presenting the proposal produces a self evaluation report, the review team visits the institution and produces an evaluation report.

There are also plans to establish a system of accreditation for hospitals' clinics and health centres where training of physicians can be made.

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6 The General Directorate for Higher Education of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, is responsible for the registration of all the teaching programmes of public universities and for the preparation of all the demands for the establishment, modification or closure of courses of public polytechnic as well as for the preparation of the legal procedures of the demands for recognition and authorisation for the courses of public polytechnics and private higher education institutions.

7 The budget allocated by the funding formula is proportional to the students' enrolment. Only in the case of the creation of a new study programme in Law by the Universidade do Minho did the Ministry decide not to include the students in the financing formula. However, after two years, this decision was reversed.

Special case of teacher training

Decree-Law 290/98 of 17 September has established the National Institute for Accreditation of Teacher Training (INAFOP) under the orders of the Ministry of Education. INAFOP was responsible for accreditation and professional certification of professor for nurseries and schools of basic and secondary education. This was the only case where the Portuguese state has established an accreditation agency supported by the Ministry of Education. However, the new government invested in 2002 after general elections has decided to close down the accreditation agency, one of the reasons being its interference with the pedagogic and scientific autonomy of higher education institutions.

3.2 The national system for quality evaluation

Both because of the imposition of the Law of Autonomy and because of quality problems raised by the very fast development of the private sector of higher education, there was a national consensus around the necessity of setting up a national quality evaluation system. Public universities regarded the quality evaluation system as a guarantee of their quality vis-à-vis the private sector, as well as a means to moralize the behaviour of some academic staff.

For these reasons the Portuguese Council of Rectors (CRUP) decided to lead the implementation of the quality evaluation system, appointing a commission to deal with this problem. In October 1992 a seminar on evaluation was organized at the University of Porto; under the presidency of the Minister of Education and with participation of experts from France, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, the different evaluation systems already implemented in Europe were comparatively examined. Following this debate the Council of Rectors decided to elect as model the Dutch system on account of several characteristics: its main emphasis on quality improvement, the recognition that higher education institutions should be responsible for the quality evaluation system and its compatibility with the University Autonomy Act.

To implement the system the CRUP decided to start off with an experimental phase by using the Dutch system on five disciplines: Physics, Computer Sciences, Electrical Engineering, Economy and French. This experiment was designed with technical assistance from the Dutch VSNU and the University of Twente; with their help several seminars were organized addressing the rectors and the Faculty deans, the representatives of the institutions to be evaluated, the members of the visiting committees, etc. A Portuguese version of the Dutch „Guide for external program review" was prepared with the necessary adaptations to our educational system. Later, the CRUP has set up the Foundation of the Portuguese Universities, a private institution independent from the universities and similar to the VSNU, which became responsible for the quality evaluation system for public universities.

These initiatives were taken in agreement with the Ministry of Education and with its collaboration and support. At the same time a draft version of the Law of Quality Evaluation was prepared, in consultation between the Ministry and the CRUP. Because of the complexity of the Portuguese higher education system (universities and polytechnics, both public and private) it was decided that the proposal of law to be submitted to Parliament should define only the general characteristics of the quality evaluation system, leaving the definition of its details to specific protocols to be negotiated between the Ministry of Education and each of the higher education subsectors.

The final version of the law was passed by the Parliament in 1994 as Law 38/94 of 21 of November, and some of its more relevant articles are article 2 and 3 (see below).

Article 2
Scope of application

The evaluation and supervision system embodies the public and private higher education institutions, universities and polytechnics.

Article 3
Incidence

1. The evaluation and supervision system is directed at the quality of the higher education institutions' pedagogical and scientific performance, in accordance with the nature and type of their teaching, the academic preparation of their teaching staff and their functioning conditions.

2. The evaluation and supervision system of the higher education institutions takes the following items into consideration:
   a) The teaching, in particular the curricular structure, the scientific level, the pedagogical processes and their innovative characteristics;
   b) The qualification of the teaching staff;
   c) The research performed;
   d) The links with the community, in particular through service rendering and cultural activities;
   e) The condition of the facilities and the pedagogical and scientific equipment;
   f) The international cooperation projects.

3. Without prejudice to other relevant aspects, the evaluation and supervision system of the higher education institutions also considers:
   a) The actual students' demand, the school success and the mechanisms of social support;
   b) The interdisciplinary, inter-service and inter-institutional collaboration;
   c) The insertion of the graduates into the labour market;
   d) The organisation and management efficiency.

Article 4
The objectives of evaluation

The evaluation and supervision system of higher education institutions has the following objectives:
   a) To promote the quality increase of the activities performed
   b) To inform and clarify the educational and Portuguese communities in general;
   c) To ensure a more accurate knowledge and a more transparent dialogue between higher education institutions;
   d) To contribute to the regulation of the higher institutions network.

A close observation demonstrates that the Portuguese law retains most characteristics the Dutch methodology:

1. The main objective of the quality evaluation system is the improvement of the activities performed by the institutions; the results of evaluation will also be used for accountancy purposes.
2. The institutions of higher education will be mainly responsible for the quality evaluation system. The most important document of the quality evaluation activities is the self-study report to be submitted to the external visiting committee. The system is national (all institutions are involved), periodic (after a complete round of evaluations is finished, a new one will be initiated) and comprehensive (all the disciplines and all study programmes will be examined).
3. The students will participate in the quality evaluation activities and the external-visiting committees will take their opinions into account.
4. The final evaluation reports will be made public and will contain the responses from the evaluated institutions.
5. There will be no direct relation between the results of evaluation and the level of funding of the institutions; the formula for the funding of higher education institutions does not contain any component dependent on the results of quality evaluation.
6. The results of the evaluation will have implications for the institutions. In the case of successive negative evaluations or when, upon a negative evaluation, the institution fails to implement the recommendations of the visiting committee, the Minister of Education can take one or more of the following actions:
   a) To decrease or to suspend the funding given – public institutions.
   b) To suspend the registration of the degrees conferred – public universities.
   c) To suspend the degrees offered – the public polytechnics.
   d) To withdraw the permission given to confer degrees – private institutions.
   e) To suspend the accreditation of the degrees offered – private institutions.
   f) To suspend the degrees conferred – private institutions.
8. The evaluation will take place by disciplines and will be implemented in successive phases, starting with quality evaluation of education. Later the system will be extended to research activities and to extension services offered to the outside community.
9. The Inspectorate has no direct action in the evaluation activities; the only role of the Inspectorate will be the validation of the data produced by the institutions for evaluation purposes, in case there is some doubt about its reliability.

The double divide universities/polytechnics and public/private has originated three sub-systems of evaluation (public universities, public polytechnics, private sector) each with its own Evaluation Council. To co-ordinate these sub-systems Decree-Law 205/98 of 11 July established the National Evaluation Council for Higher Education to ensure the „harmony, cohesion and credibility" of the overall system and to carry-out the meta-evaluation of the system, if necessary with support from foreign experts.

In Chapter 4, under § 4.2 – international influences, we present a comparison of the Portuguese and the Dutch systems that makes clearer the organisation of the Portuguese national quality evaluation system.

3.3 The role of professional associations

Professional associations (Ordens) were professional public corporations relative to the traditional liberal professions (lawyers, doctors, engineers and pharmacists), public bodies with an associative basis or in the English terminology „statutory membership organisations", working within the public law. After the 1974 revolution the number of these professional associations has trebled.

The Constitution of the Portuguese Republic grants the freedom of professional exercise:

> **Article 47**
> **Freedom to choose an occupation…**
>
> 1. Everyone has the right to choose freely his or her occupation or type of work, subject to restrictions laid down by law in the public interest or inherent in his or her capacity.

Meaning the only limitations to professional exercise need to be established by law if there is a case of public interest. That is why Professional Associations with power to limit or to condition access to professional exercise (in some relevant cases, professionals can only practice provided they are effective members of the professional association) need to be established by an Act of Parliament of by a government Decree-Law duly authorised by Parliament.

Association	Initial year	Mode of access	Initial year	Accreditation of professional study programmes	Initial year
Layers	1926	Training + Examination		Wants to develop an accreditation system for Law study programmes	
Architects	1998	Examination and/or training	2002	Has an accreditation system (21 accredited study programmes)	2000
Biologists	1998	Degree		Wants to develop a certification system for Biology study programmes	
Economists	1998	Examination + training	1998	Has a system that is not a proper accreditation system and visits to institutions very seldom take place	1999
Nurses	1998	Degree		Wants to introduce examinations and to develop an accreditation system.	
Engineers	1936	Examination + training	1994	Has developed an accreditation system (88 accredited study programmes)	1994
Pharmacists	1972	Examination and/or training	2004	Wants to develop an accreditation system	2003/4
Doctors	1938	Degree**			
Dentists	1998	Degree		Wants to introduce training periods and to develop an accreditation system	
Vet. Doctors	1990	Degree		Wants to develop an accreditation system	
O.C.As*	1999	Examination + training	2000		
Solicitors	1944	Degree		The new statute allows for the introduction of examinations and/or training periods and to develop an accreditation system	

* Official Copyholders of Accounts ** Doctors have in general long training periods (internships) up to six years
This table was compiled by Professor Fernando Ramos.

Despite those precautions there are today a sizeable number (some even say an excessive number) of professional associations (Ordens): Pharmacists, Economists, Engineers, Lawyers, Nurses, Doctors, Veterinary Doctors, Dentists, Architects, Biologists, Official Copyholders of Accounts. There are also a Chamber of Solicitors, an Association of Nutritionists and an Association of Technical Engineers.

The requirements for becoming an effective member of a professional association varies substantially with the profession (see table 1). In some cases holding the appropriate degree is a sufficient condition. In other cases admission is allowed after a training period and/or an examination. In 1994 the Engineers' Association (Ordem dos Engenheiros) established a system of accreditation, and apparently other professional associations are following suite. As a general rule when an accreditation system exists, graduates from accredited higher education institutions have direct access to effective membership. All these cases will be analysed individually.

The Engineers' Association

Anyone intending to work professionally as an Engineer must become a full member of the Engineers' Association. And to become a full member of the association it is necessary but not sufficient to hold a recognised degree in Engineering. It is also necessary either that the Association has accredited the study programme or that the candidate passes an examination organised by the Association. This process confers a lot of power to the Engineers' Association: if the study programmes in Engineering at University A are not accredited then students are not sure that they will become chartered engineers because they need to pass the Association's examination, while students enrolled at University B where study programmes were given accreditation know that they will automatically become effective members of the association.

The system of accreditation uses a methodology that is quite similar to the national system of quality evaluation. Accreditation is periodical and is supported by a self-evaluation report and a visit by a review team. The Association publishes a list of all accredited study programmes but not of those programmes that have been refused accreditation.

The accreditation process is voluntary but as we said those study programmes, which were accredited, have an important competitive advantage. The accreditation is given to study programmes and not to Faculties or Departments, as it is known that different programmes offered by the same faculty can have different levels of quality.

The accreditation process is quite complex and demands a lot of bureaucracy and it takes thirteen months on average. Any institution demanding accreditation for their study programmes must apply to the Association for the accreditation process to be initiated, providing copies of the self-evaluation reports for each study programme to be accredited and copies of the institutional report. Those self-evaluation reports must follow the guidelines set forward by the Association.

The study programmes' self-evaluation reports contain detailed information about the organisation of the study programme, duration, enrolments, core and optional courses (with the number of teaching hours and credits for each course[8], as well as its study contents), curriculum vitae of all professors, pedagogical methods, details of the recommended bibliography, data on employment of graduates, etc.

The institutional self-evaluation report contains general information about the institution, including the composition of the Executive Board, budget, total enrolments (in all study pro-

8 This refers only to courses that are specific to the study programmes. Details of other courses which are common to other study programmes (for instance Mats or Physics) are presented in the institutional self-evaluation report.

grammes), data on research activity and contracts with industries, research contracts, as well as information about general courses and professors (this refers to information about courses that are taught simultaneously to students of more than one study programme).

The review team visits the institution for 1 or 2 days and interviews members of the Executive Board, Professors, Students and Staff. After the visit the review team writes a preliminary report, including main findings, the opinion about the clarity, objectivity and completeness of the elements of the self-evaluation reports and an appreciation of strong and weak points. However, when drafting the report, the review team should try to avoid giving any impression about the final decision (yes or no to the accreditation demand). This report is forwarded to the institution that will check that there are no factual mistakes.

The review team then produces the final report, including recommendations for improvement of the study programme, and a recommendation for a positive or negative decision about the accreditation process. The report also contains detailed explanations of the rationale that justifies the recommendations.

The report is submitted to the joint appreciation of the Council for Admission and Qualification [of new individual members of the Association] and of the Council for Accreditation and the final decision is forwarded to the Association's National Executive Board that ratifies that decision. The Faculty is then given notice of the final decision in writing. The final decision can take one of three possible forms:

- Full accreditation for a period of six years, when renewal of the accreditation will be necessary.
- Conditional accreditation for a period of three years, with recommendations of improvements that need to be implemented over that period and that needs to be confirmed by a review team once the approbatory period is over.
- Refusal of accreditation with a list of the reasons that support this decision.

The whole procedure is confidential and can only be made public with permission from the institution being accredited. However the Association publishes a list of the accredited study programmes (but not of those programmes that were denied accreditation). More complete information can be obtained from FEANI's site in the NET: http://www.feani.org/.

The Architects' Association

The statutes of the Association determine that to become a member a graduate needs to hold a degree of architecture recognised by the Association, and the candidate may be asked to pass an examination set-up by the Association to determine its professional aptitude and/or to be on probation for a period of one year under conditions of professional tutelage approved by the Association.

The National Executive Board of the Association has approved proposals set forward by the National Council for Admissions in order to define objective criteria for exemption of the aptitude examination, renewed periodically and based upon the curricula of the study programmes, the conditions of learning and evaluations. This means that the Architects' Association has established a system for the accreditation of study programmes similar to the system implemented by the Engineer's Association. This system has been in operation since the end of year 2000 (the accreditation guidelines for review teams were approved in 16 of December, 2000) and so far 21 study programmes have been accredited, allowing the graduates from those programmes to become automatically effective members of the association.

The objectives and methodology of the accreditation system of the Architects' Association follows very closely those already in operation since 1994 for the accreditation of Engineering study programmes. As for engineering programmes the architects' system is voluntary, periodical, based on institutional and study programmes self-evaluation reports, peer review visits and external evaluation report. The results of the exercise can be full accreditation for six years, accreditation for shorter periods (there is more flexibility than in the case of engineering as a three year period is not imposed).

However, this system presents an important innovation to the accreditation system adopted by the Engineers' Association: the Association accepts that the information necessary for the accreditation process and supplied by the institution, may be collected from already available sources such as the internal and external reports produced in the National Quality Evaluation System. On the one hand this reduces the bureaucratic work impinging on institutions and, on the other hand may contribute to increased compatibility between the two parallel systems. It is important to emphasise that accreditation is based upon the fulfilment of an EU directive, as minimum conditions for accreditation are:

1. Study programmes need to be officially recognised.
2. Study programmes need to have level appropriate to a university degree.
3. The contents of study programmes must comply with article 3 of EU Directive 85/384/CCC of 10 of June.
4. The minimum duration of study programmes is 5 years and about 4000 hours of classes (full time), or the equivalent in part time.
5. There is a medium term objective of 4500 hours of classes.

The Pharmacists' Association

The new statutes of the Pharmacists' Association were approved by Decree-Law 288/2001 of 10 of November. The new statutes allow the association to define objective criteria to be periodically revised that allow candidates to be exempt from admission examinations. These criteria will be based upon the contents of study programmes, the educational resources and the methods of assessment.

Following the approval of the new statues the Pharmacists' Association has decided to implement an accreditation system of study programmes that has been discussed with its members and higher education institutions. The Association intends to initiate accreditation activities in 2003/04 and the objectives and procedures will follow more or less closely the system implemented by the Engineers' Association.

The Pharmacists' Association has an innovative system for the renewal of the professional membership card. The card needs to be renewed every five years and renewal is subject to the accumulation of a minimum number of credits obtained through lifelong education activities. These activities include continuing education programmes, post-graduation programmes (including master degrees, PhDs, and „agregações"[9]), scientific research activity, etc. In order to recognise credits of continuing education programmes the Association is also creating an accreditation system for institutions and agencies that provide that kind of programmes.

9 Equivalent to the German Habitur.

The Economists' Association

The Economists' Association has not established a formal system of accreditation and only under very special circumstances there will be institutional visits by review teams. The Association will take into consideration the results of the National System of Quality Evaluation (NSQE) and a training period is obligatory before admission of candidates.

The informal „accreditation" criteria includes:

1. The programme has been officially recognised (registered) by the Ministry.
2. The study programme has positive evaluation by the NSQE.
3. A curriculum that guarantees the transmission of a minimum technical knowledge and a culture appropriate to professional exercise.
4. A minimum number of credits in specific scientific areas.

Dentists' association

The statutes of the Dentists' Association do not allow for the establishment of an accreditation system for study programmes in Dental Medicine. However the Association intends to initiate an accreditation system and has submitted a new proposal of statutes to Parliament. So far no decision has yet been taken.

The Veterinary Surgeons' Association

This Association intends to initiate an accreditation system but with a clear European emphasis. The Commission's Directive 78/1027/CEE has established the minimum criteria for Veterinary Surgeons to be allowed to practise in the Union. The Commission's Directive 89/98/CEE while defining the conditions for recognition of higher education diplomas with duration of at least three years, at the same time eliminates the automatic recognition of professional qualifications by allowing member states to control the quality of the professionals. This may be seen as a restriction to the former Commission's Directive 78/1026/CEE conferring automatic accreditation to all European degrees with at least three years of duration.

The national representatives of the profession and their organisations started in 1986 a pilot project for international evaluation of European Schools of Veterinary Medicine that has finally resulted in the approval by the Veterinary Surgeons Training Advisory Committee of an evaluation protocol. The Portuguese Association would like to restrict accreditation of Portuguese Veterinary schools to those with a positive European evaluation.

The Biologists' Association, the Nurses' Association, the Chamber of Solicitors

So far none of these organisations has implemented a system of accreditation. In general the sufficient condition for membership is holding a recognised Portuguese degree, or a foreign degree that has been granted equivalence to a Portuguese degree, or a degree from a European country under the laws of the European Union. None of these associations demands a training period under conditions they approve.

However, all three organisations would like to implement accreditation systems for those study programmes entitling graduates to professional practise.

The Medical Association

The Medical Association does not have an accreditation role regarding undergraduate teaching of Medicine. However, the Association plays a very important role in the control of internships after the students leave the university. A good critical analysis of the present situation was provided by a recent evaluation of the Portuguese medical schools by a review team of the Association of European Universities. This report has a critical view of the lack of participation of the university in specialisation training that „is managed by the professional specialised associations in the medical sector (practitioners), in co-operation with the Ministry of Health, and with very little influence from the academics; there is one national „college" for each specialisation.

The Lawyers' Association

It can be said that the role of the Lawyers' Association is rather similar to the role of the Medical Association. So far the Lawyers' Association does not have a role in the accreditation of study programmes in Law but the association is responsible for the professional training of the future lawyers. Indeed, students after leaving the university must go through a training period in an established lawyers office where they work as practitioners, the training period being in principle controlled by the professional association.

Quite recently, the new head of the Lawyers' Association has declared publicly its intention of establishing a system for the periodic accreditation of study programmes but so far this system has not been implemented.

The Association of Official Copyholders of Accounts

So far membership is determined by appropriate academic qualifications, an examination and a training period. There are no intentions of starting an accreditation system.

Technical Engineers

Short-cycle courses, that last 3 years, are provided by the Polytechnic Institutes, which grant the academic degree of „Bacharel". Parallel with the „Ordem dos Engenheiros", so to say, there was a similar Institution called the APET – Associação Portuguesa dos Engenheiros Técnicos – which has implemented its own accreditation procedures to grant the professional title of „Engenheiro Técnico" (Technical engineer). APET has developed, in co-operation with the Engineers' Association an accreditation system similar in form to the accreditation system now in use by the Engineers' Association. APET had also links with FEANI and a substantial number of the short cycle courses are now registered in the EurIng index.

Recent changes in legislation allow Polytechnics to offer a two-tier degree conferring a degree of „licenciado" with the same legal value of degrees conferred by university engineering schools. And APET has been replaced by ANET (Associação Nacional dos Engenheiros Técnicos), an association under public law with statutes approved by Decree-Law 349/99 of 2nd of September.

The transition to the new organisation has not been completely peaceful and accreditation activities have been suspended for some time.

4. The analysis of the different systems and their eventual relationship

4.1 Driving forces for accreditation

The main driving forces for accreditation are the fast expansion of higher education, the recognition that some educational provision had low quality and a serious mismatch between the outputs of higher education and the needs of the labour market (see page 2). Those driving forces gave rise to a movement led by the Engineers' Professional Association that led to the emergence of accreditation systems. The Association controls the quality of the individuals allowed to work as chartered engineers. Traditionally this was made by an examination organised by the Association, but since 1974 the Association has decided to play a more visible regulatory role by establishing a system of accreditation that will be an indicator for all students that intend to enrol in engineering programmes. This is the main reason why the Association publishes a list of accredited study programmes.

Other professional associations are following the initiative taken by the engineers, and made proposals to change their statues accordingly. As described in detail in 2.3 different associations are in different stages of implementation of accreditations systems.

4.2 Other approval schemes

There are three main evaluation/approval schemes not based on accreditation: registration and/or approval of institutions and study programmes by the state, the national quality evaluation system and diverse schemes run by professional organisations.

Registration and/or approval by the state

In principle the state controls both the quantity and the quality of educational provision. Quantity is controlled through the establishment of a generalised system of *numerus clausus* for all study programmes, of universities and polytechnics, both public and private. Every year the higher education institutions make proposals of *numerus clausus* for every available study programme but the Minister makes the final decision.

The registration of study programmes by the Ministry is today a necessary condition for starting enrolments in a new study programme. This can be seen as an *a priori* system of quality control, as well as of the adequacy of the new study programmes to the needs of society and the economy. However it remains to be seen if this will be an effective system of regulation.

Expansion of higher education and diversification, as well as increase of student enrolment in fields that were considered of economic importance has been explicit government policy goals for more than a decade. However, these policy goals have not been fully attained, both because of mushrooming of the private sector in direction contrary to the aims of the diversification policy (geographical distortions and insufficient supply of technical degrees), and because of some academic drift of the polytechnics. In this process it is evident that the State is very much to be blamed and it demonstrates that the system of registration was not a very effective regulation device. Only the peculiar characteristics of the Portuguese society can explain why it was possible that expansion and diversification have occurred in a direction opposite to explicit government

policy goals when polytechnics and the private sector had to submit their study programme proposals to the approval of the Ministry of Education.

Some problems raised by this recent evolution are due to a paradoxical situation in which the government has the power and the instruments to regulate the system, but frequently abstains from using them. Indeed, the Portuguese society can be considered rather soft, gentle and permissive. Conflicts seldom lead to violent action, harsh measures very seldom are enforced to the very end, and a lot of sympathy is frequently developed towards the weak and the fallen. It is also true that there are many laws with strong regulatory character, but they are not always taken very seriously. For the same reason the State has clear difficulties in enforcing any credible system of *„a posteriori"* control, and in general prefers to resort to *„a priori"* close scrutiny of proposals submitted to the approval of the Ministry of Education.

In practice however private institutions (or at least some of them) have strong lobbying capacity, allowing them to get official recognition without severe scrutiny of the legal demands or the quality of teaching. And it is true that the national practice of avoiding conflicts and of taking harsh decisions has many times resulted in late approval of proposals.

Indeed it is no surprise to see that sometimes the Ministry, instead of answering with a clear yes or no the demands of private institutions, has decided to ignore all legal deadlines by choosing not to answer at all. As it is no surprise to observe that many private institutions have illegally initiated study programs without the necessary governmental permission, being later absolved of any sin by retroactive governmental decisions that legalise the situation when problems might become serious[10].

It is obvious that the State has important responsibilities in the present crisis, since it has promoted the uncontrolled expansion of the private sector, through several signs of negligence and lack of rigour in law enforcement, thus giving way to a private sector *„veni, vedi, vinci"* approach. Moreover, we have to recall that the State has kept the main regulation of the system on its hands, and that large part of the decision processes of private institutions has to previously obtain the government's approval. These omissions in the use of regulation mechanisms have created serious and disturbing consequences in shaping the current situation. So it is no wonder that private institutions have been encouraged to develop without any effective state control neither over the offer of study programs or over quality, in the illusion that there was an ever-growing market for higher education.

A new law (Law 1/2003 of the 6th of January) has established a kind of buffer organisation, the Advisory Council on Higher Education. We say that it is a 'kind of buffer' because although its 17 members are appointed by institutions such as the Council of Rectors of the Portuguese Universities, the Council of the Presidents of the Portuguese Polytechnics or the Association of the Presidents of Private Higher Education, this Advisory Council is presided by the Minister or its representative. In any case, the Council will formulate opinions about the development priorities of the higher education system and the establishment and recognition of new higher education institutions. However, it is yet too early to determine if the new system will be more effective than the previous one in regulating the higher education system.

10 Not long ago the President of the Republic faced with still one more of these retroactive decrees has refused its promulgation without the approval of a decree clearly establishing that illegal higher education institutions would be closed down, if necessary with the help of police.

National quality evaluation system

The main objective of the national quality evaluation system is to improve the quality of educational provision. The system is described elsewhere and is quite similar to the original Dutch system. The final reports are made public but they are in general rather cryptic and carefully written to avoid rankings, and as such have been a frustration to the national media. There is now some public feeling that the published results are more or less useless as a source of information for the public, and rather ineffective as instruments for quality improvement.

Schemes run by professional organisations

In general these schemes intend to guarantee the preparedness to practice of new graduates willing to start professional practice. It is considered that these schemes are appropriate and apparently no important cases of generalised misbehaviour or incapacity to practice have been reported.

4.3 Relationship between accreditation and other schemes

There is no formal relationship between the existing accreditation systems and other quality evaluation schemes. However, it is true that in the national quality evaluation system, when evaluating study programmes that train for professions it is common practice to invite at least one member of the peer review team among people with a relationship to the professional association if one exists. More recently, conversations were initiated between people from the national system and people from the Engineers' Association to see if it is possible to combine the two systems in order to avoid some „evaluation fatigue" of the higher education institutions, but these are only very preliminary negotiations. In other cases the Association (architects) allows institutions to use data from the national quality system self-evaluation report as elements for accreditation. In other cases the Association (economists) does not have a formal system of accreditation and relies upon the results of the national quality evaluation system.

The only formal relationship exists within the Professional Associations themselves: graduates from accredited study programmes become automatically members of the association without taking the examination set up by the association for admission of new members.

4.4 Consequences for institutions and scholars

The obvious consequence of refusal of accreditation of a study programme by a Professional Association will be loss of prestige and diminished capacity to enrol students in that study programme. This may be a serious threat now that the total number of candidates for higher education is substantially lower than total the number of vacancies. And lower enrolments mean lower budgets, both for public and private institutions. The consequences for scholars are those resulting from a budget that may become insufficient to support their research activity, or even worse their salaries.

4.5 Consequences for students

Graduates from a study programme or institution not accredited by a Professional Association have to pass an examination set-up by the Association in order to be able to register as full members, thus being entitled to practise its profession. The advantage for graduates from accredited study programmes is automatic registration as effective members of the Association.

4.6 Consequences for other stakeholders

There are no dramatic consequences for other stakeholders. The most obvious consequence is the loss of public prestige of not accredited institutions and programmes. It is also possible that employers will avoid hiring graduates from the less prestigious institutions and/or study programmes.

4.7 Recent developments and projections for the future

Law 1/2003 was passed by Parliament and published on the 6th of January. Its articles 36th and 37th are relevant for the present report as they establish an 'academic accreditation' to be implemented by the same agencies responsible for the quality evaluation system, and they also define

Article 36
Accreditation

1. Academic accreditation consists in the verification of the fulfilment of the requisites necessary for the establishment and functioning of higher education institutions and for the registration of study programmes.
2. Accreditation is a responsibility of the agency responsible for quality evaluation.
3. The results of accreditation are 'accredited' and 'not accredited'.
4. The decisions of accreditation or of non accreditation of higher education institutions and of study programmes are forwarded to the Minister of Science and Higher Education for the purposes mentioned in the following paragraphs.
5. The refusal to accredit a higher education institution may imply the suspension of its operation and the cancellation of the authorisation to operate or of the recognition of public utility, according to the cases.
6. The refusal to accredit a study programme may imply the cancellation of its registration with the subsequent suspension of its operation.
7. In the case of the two previous paragraphs the Ministry will establish the conditions allowing students to transfer to another higher education institution.

Article 37
Accreditation of study programmes

1. The accreditation of a study programme also implies the accreditation of its curricula.
2. The accreditation of curricula also implies the public recognition of all courses taken, thus allowing students to continue studies in a different higher education institution.

the consequences of refusal of accreditation both for study programmes, as well as for institutions. The Law however, does not clarify the relationship of this system to the accreditation schemes run by professional associations.

The full consequences of this quite new law are difficult to assess. It is not clear if the accreditation powers will be completely transferred to the agency responsible for quality evaluation, thus depriving professional associations from their present powers of accreditation, or if the two systems will be allowed to run in parallel with the obvious risk of running into contradictory decisions. A better alternative would be to combine the two systems thus offsetting the danger of overburdening the institutions with an excessive number of quality exercises[11].

On the other hand, the consequences of accreditation (article 36, § 5 and 6) are not very different from the consequences of a negative quality evaluation:

Law 38/94 of 21 November
Article 5
Evaluation results

1. The results of the evaluation shall be considered by the Ministry of Education to the effect of the application of measures adequate to the nature of the evaluated activities, in particular:
   a) of the public financing.
   b) Incentive to the creation of new courses or development of the already existent courses.
   c) Enhancement of the support to scientific research activities.
   d) Celebration of development contracts, aiming at the correction of the deficiencies and disparities found during the evaluation procedures.

2. If the results of the continuing evaluation of the higher education institutions are negative, they may determine the following measures:
   a) Reduction or suspension of the public financing whenever the institutions do not follow the reviewers' recommendations.
   b) Suspension of the register of the courses in the public higher education system.
   c) Cancellation of the authorization for the functioning of courses in the public higher education polytechnic system.
   d) Cancellation of the authorization for the functioning of courses or the recognition of degrees in the private higher education system.

It is true that the final reports of quality evaluation exercises, because they are made public are in general carefully drafted so that the public in general and the media in particular can not easily draw league tables out of them. This means that those reports very seldom offer clear basis for drastic decisions leading in practice to cancellation of study programmes. If the quality evaluation agency is forced to produce an accreditation-type conclusion – a yes or no answer – this will give

11 It is not clear how far the two systems can be run in parallel. A distinction between 'academic' and 'professional' accreditation does not seem to provide clear and non-overlaping boundaries for both systems. Professor Vital Moreira, a well-reputed professor of Constitutional Law considers that as higher education degrees are public or publicly validated – and this will be reinforced by a national system of accreditation – then the reaccreditation by professional associations does not make sense (it may even raise doubts of its constitutionallity). Professional Associations are „statutory membership organisations", or corporative public bodies representing the interests of their associates while the state represents the general interest, and as such the corporative interest cannot override the general public interest.

the Minister a much more sound basis for acting. Indeed the Minister has publicly complained on several public appearances that the conclusions of the reports of quality evaluation agencies were quite obscure, and this may explain the provisions for accreditation in the new Law.

5. European and global influences

5.1 Europe and GATS

So far we cannot detect any profound influence of ideas/concepts/perceptions regarding Europe, such as the Bologna process, over the established accreditation and evaluation schemes. Those cases of a more evident European influence are those where the Commission has produced directives concerning the professions of nurse responsible for general care, dental practitioner, veterinary surgeon, midwife, architect, pharmacist and doctor. It is believed that the subsidiarity principle means that quality evaluation/accreditation is a competence reserved to the member states and not to be transferred to Brussels or to a European centralised accreditation agency.

No decisive measures were yet taken to follow orientations defined by the Bologna process: there are still 4 different degrees (bacharel – bachelor, licenciado, mestre – Master and doutor – doctor/Ph.D.) and there is a lot of disagreement about changes necessary to comply with Bologna. Most universities still offer 5 years study programmes in Engineering, Economics, and Law, while Pharmacy and Architecture offer 5,5 and 5 or 6 years programmes, respectively. A recent law (Law 1/2003 of 6 of January) determines that study programmes must be organised within a credits structure „to comply with the orientations of the Bologna process, to promote internal and international mobility of students and to facilitate lifelong education activities through credit accumulation" but no visible action has been evident[12].

Article 16
Education institutions under franchising agreements

The establishment of education institutions operating under franchising agreements is forbidden.

Regarding globalisation we can only detect that recent legislation contains provisions against franchising education activities. Following the Lisbon declaration (on mutual recognition of diplomas) there is a system for almost automatic recognition of foreign doctoral degrees, which however excludes degrees conferred under franchising activities from the agreement. And a new law (Law 1/2003) forbids franchising activities.

12 This is not very surprising compared with other countries. Most German universities chose to postpone the implementation of the Bologna process, according to a recent survey by the Federal Statistical Office. The study reveals that the new bachelor/master „European-type" courses represent only 2% of total student enrolment. The lack of enthusiasm for the conversion to the new European curriculum is mainly due to the professionals' strong attachment to the centuries-old Magister, a degree that takes ten to fourteen semesters to complete (see http://www.educationews.com/newsletter4/Newsletterweb.htm. In Italy, education minister Letizia Moratti plans to abandon the recently introduced three-plus-two-year degree based on the „European degree" structure (Times Higher Education Suppl., February 14, 2003, page 10).

5.2 Influence from other international models

There has been some international influence on the implementation of the Portuguese national quality evaluation system. At the time when references to quality started to find its way into political discourses and into legislation, the Ministers of Education of the EU, then under the Dutch Presidency, agreed that the Commission should undertake the following steps to strengthen the evaluation of higher education in Europe:

- Comparative study of the evaluation methods used by Member States.
- Development of a limited number of co-operative pilot projects in this area.
- Creation of mechanisms for strengthening European co-operation, taking into accounts the concrete evaluation experience that has already been established.

The comparative study the evaluation methods used in the Member States was published in October 1993. A European Pilot Project on quality evaluation was carried out in 1995 using a methodology with elements common to the existing national systems of quality. Some members of the European academic community were afraid that this initiative might lead to a new European centralised bureaucracy and to a quality evaluation model following the already existing national quality systems. The vice-president of the Confederation Presidents of European Rectors Councils, Professor Michel Cousin, had a joint meeting with the Council of Rectors of Portuguese Universities where he pointed to the dangers of the Ministers' decision while advising Portuguese Universities to start a national system as soon as possible as a measure to avoid the imposition of one of the available models. This advice was taken seriously and the Portuguese national system was implemented soon afterwards with technical support from the Dutch VSNU and the University of Twente. However, there are some differences between the Portuguese system and the initial Dutch system:

1. In the Portuguese system there is no meta-evaluation committed to the Inspectorate.
2. As the external credibility of the evaluation system will be reinforced if the independent character of the external visiting committees is stressed, the members of the visiting committees will be appointed by the structures which represent the different sectors of higher education (for instance the Foundation of the Portuguese Universities, in the case of the public universities) from lists of experts previously submitted to the approval of the Minister.
3. After an evaluation report is completed the institutions, if they wish to do so, can respond to the report, and the response will be included as an appendix. However, the institutions must report to the Minister the procedures to be followed by the institutions for the implementation of the recommendations of the visiting committee to eliminate the weak points found in the degree programme.
4. Besides the normal evaluation by discipline the possibility of evaluating an institution as a whole has also been considered, for the future.
5. The law also considers the need to set up a national database on the higher education system to ensure that the data from the different institutions is uniform, thereby allowing for easy comparisons.

6. Other activities

6.1 Research

In general research money is allocated under a competitive system based upon an evaluation of research centres and groups by pools of reviewers with a majority of international experts. The level of funding is clearly linked to the results of evaluation.

It is important to know that until quite recently (March 2002) the Ministry of Education was mainly responsible for the 'education' budget of higher education institutions while the Ministry of Science and Technology was mainly responsible for funding research. Both ministries had their own quality evaluation systems, respectively for education and research, using different rules and regulations and different approaches to quality evaluation.

The new government has a different structure: a Ministry of Education that is no longer responsible for higher education, and a new Ministry of Science and Higher Education, which is responsible for higher education and for the activities of the former Ministry of Science and Technology. It is possible that this new organisational structure will result in changes at the level of evaluation mechanisms, but it is yet too early to be sure of future developments.

6.2 Institutional evaluation

The national legislation for quality evaluation of higher education (Quality Evaluation Act no. 38/94, of 21st November) contains provisions for institutional evaluation. However so far this system has only performed discipline based evaluations.

6.3 International activities

The Portuguese universities have played an important role in the development of the system of Institutional Quality Audits offered by the EUA (former CRE) – European University Association – to its member institutions. The University of Porto, together with the Universities of Utrecht and Gothenburg were responsible for the initial experimental exercise that allowed for the final design of the system. Later the University of Lisbon, Technical University of Lisbon, New University of Lisbon, University of Minho, University of Aveiro, University of Algarve and the Catholic University (80% of the total Portuguese membership of EUA) were all audited by EUA.

6.4 Other activities

There were some disperse evaluation activities, without any systematic character. We can refer, for instance, benchmarking exercises promoted by the Columbus association (University of Lisbon) and experiments at using TQM and ISO 9000 certification for higher education institutions (for instance the Polytechnic Institute of Porto).

6.5 Open questions

The autonomy laws transfer to individual universities and polytechnics decisions about promotion of its academic personnel, subject to some general rules such as filling the vacancies by means a public (national or international) tender and participation of outside peers in the decisions about the candidates. However, some criticism has been voiced about the still quite closed character of these tenders, as in general most candidates come from inside the institution, and some people have suggested that promotions should be decided on a national level, following a more independent evaluation of the candidates' CVs – not very different from the old practice in France and Italy. So far this has not been taken seriously.

A Decade of Quality Assurance in Spanish Universities Country Report Spain

Jose-Gines Mora

1. Introduction

The traditional Spanish higher education system, which was monopolized and regulated by the State, was obviously not interested in accountability. However, as the system has become more autonomous, the more necessary accountability is. In Spain, higher education accountability and assessment are recent but it is a very rapidly developing area. Generalized assessment of individuals and institutions began in the early 1990's. Teaching and research activities of academics are evaluated on a regular basis. Promotion and some salary increases depend on assessments (Mora, 2001). On the other hand, after several pilot projects the Council of Universities established the National Program for Assessment of Quality in Universities in 1995 (Mora, 1997; Mora and Vidal, 1998) in the aim of introducing a systematic assessment of universities. After only a few years, Spanish universities have set up new offices to support quality assurance programs and thousands of people are participating in self-assessment activities and external visits around the country. Regional governments are also involved in these programs, and have even created their own quality agencies. The final impact of these activities has been irregular: some universities and regions are very active in this matter (for instance, Catalan universities with the support of the very active Catalan Agency for Quality); in others the impact has been lower because neither the university leaders nor the regional governments have shown any special interest in quality assurance.

After ten years' experience in quality assessment, the LOU established that syllabi must undergo assessment, certification and accreditation. These activities may be carried out by the newly created National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA) or by regional agencies in areas which have them. The LOU also obliges degree programs to undergo a process of accreditation in order for them to be considered official qualifications. This system of setting minimum accreditation standards has been set up to ensure the quality of all study programs. This represents an important innovation in Spanish higher education system regulations. Prior requirements have always had to be met in order to obtain official approval, but no further checks were made after that. The accreditation of study programs is currently in an experimental design phase and it will be at least two years before it is introduced. In line with the most up-to-date accreditation criteria commonly used in other European countries, an accreditation system is

being developed which focuses on discovering the extent to which programs provide students with the expertise (knowledge, skills and attitudes) required by the labour market.

On the following pages we shall present a detailed analysis and description of the activities undertaken in the field of quality assurance and those planned in the area of accreditation. Before that, we shall present a brief analysis of the structural context of the Spanish university system.

2. The Spanish higher education system

2.1 Legal framework

To understand the current quality assurance movement in Spain, it is necessary to review the recent history and structure of its universities. Spanish universities, the oldest of which was founded in the Middle Ages, remained relatively unchanged until the eighteenth century under the influence of the Catholic Church. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, liberalism stemming from the French Revolution changed the structure of the State. Under the „Napoleonic" system of higher education adopted by Spain, the universities were in fact state agencies that were totally regulated by laws and norms issued by the State. Everything in the daily functioning of a higher education institution was a consequence of the application of external rules, which applied to all educational institutions. Until very recently, academic programs were identical in all institutions. They had the same curricula and there were no differences even in the syllabus. Universities had no specific budgets and expenditure was regulated by the state to the most minute detail. Professors were appointed after a strict selection procedure as members of a national body of civil servants.

In this stifling atmosphere of State regulation, quality assurance, as currently understood, did not have a place. The higher education processes, from the financial issues to the number of teaching hours of a course, followed established state rules and deviations from these rules were not permitted, at least in theory. The control of the processes was exclusively *ex-ante*, and criteria and standards were pre-established. The system relied on the integrity of appointed „professor-officials" to assure strict fulfilment of the rules. Only in cases of glaring misbehaviour did the State make an *ex-post* intervention to correct problems.

This strictly regulated higher education system was also an elitist system whose main goal was to prepare the ruling group of the modern State, especially the civil servants. Spanish universities, like their French and Italian counterparts, had a strong professional orientation. The teaching process was focused on the transmission of skills essential to the development of professions, many of which were in the State structure. The strict system used in the selection of civil servants functioned as an *ex-post* system of quality control.

The situation described above began to change during the 1970s, when the system started to shift from an elite system to a mass higher education. Legal changes also helped trigger a complete renovation of the higher education system. The 1983 University Reform Act (LRU) formed the basis for the process of emancipation of higher education from the control of the State, as occurred in other European countries during this decade (Neave and Van Vught, 1991). The main changes introduced by this Act were: (a) universities became autonomous entities with the capacity to establish their own programs and curricula; (b) institutions were conceived as independent and competitive units; (c) professors were no longer part of a national body and began to „belong" to each university; (d) responsibility for universities was transferred to regional government;

and (e) institutions began to receive public appropriations as a lump sum, and to have wide-ranging capabilities in allocating funds internally. There is not only a shift of formal control from the government to the institutions, as in other countries (Woodhouse, 1996), but also a movement from the national government to the regional governments.

In recent years, the situation seems to have stabilized as a result of the falling birth-rate which has led to a slight drop in student numbers. The need for greater investment in buildings and academic staff has also begun to stabilize. However, two factors have led to a new situation in Spanish universities: a new legal framework which was drawn up by the government towards the end of 2001 (the new *Ley Orgánica de Universidades* (Organic Law on Universities), hereafter referred to as *LOU*), and the Bologna Declaration, which affects all European higher education systems. Important curricular and organizational changes are required in order to adapt to the new situation, in addition to changes in the teaching methods. Once again, after a long period of flux, Spanish universities are now facing the need for radical change once again.

The new law made certain changes to the legal structure of higher education. Among the most noteworthy features of the law were: a) the incorporation of some lay persons in the running of university (always a minority group); b) election of the rector by direct vote (as opposed to being voted indirectly by the senate); c) an increase in academic staff representation, which implies a slight reduction in student representation; d) the requirement that academic staff have to gain national habilitation before being named by universities; and e) the obligatory accreditation of degree programs by the new National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación, ANECA).

In general, the law gives universities and autonomous regions more independence to organize themselves as they wish. This is a positive feature of this law because it allows both universities and regions to rethink their own legal regulations and adapt them to the new situation. This could perhaps have been done without the LOU, but it has created the need to introduce changes. Many university statutes may improve because they are better adapted to a situation which is very different from that of 20 years ago, at the end of the Franco dictatorship. Moreover, the autonomous regions are starting to draw up their own university laws with their own regulations, in addition to setting up their own agencies to assess the quality of teaching and institutions. This new situation is interesting insofar as it will allow the differentiation and improvement of those universities which fulfil two conditions: their heads must be interested in promoting change and they must be located in an autonomous region whose governors are also concerned about the competitiveness of its universities. It is still too soon to see the initial results, but it can already be seen that some regions are doing more than others on this front.

2.2 Basic structure

Higher education in Spain consists almost exclusively of universities (50 public and 14 private). Most students enrol in public universities, although an increasing number of private universities enrol roughly 6 percent of higher education students. There are three basic types of university programmes: short-cycle programmes, which are more vocationally oriented and run three years; long-cycle programmes, which last five or six years; and doctoral programmes, which add two years of course work and require the preparation of a research-oriented thesis after a long-cycle degree. Doctoral programmes are pursued primarily by students interested in an academic career. Generally speaking, people with greater economic resources or intellectual capabilities traditionally have preferred long cycles university programmes.

The Spanish higher education system has become a mass system, with increasing proportions of people enrolling in higher education institutions. The gross enrolment quota for the 18-23 year-old population is 41%, and the percentage of new entrants in higher education among the 18 year-old cohort is around 55 percent (Mora et al., 2000). The increase in the number of higher education students in recent decades has been dramatic. Numbers have almost doubled each decade since 1960. However, the figure reached a maximum in 1998-99 (1,583,000 students) and started to decrease slowly due to the remarkable reduction in the size of the youth cohort reaching higher education age (CU, several years).

The current decline in student numbers is extremely important. For the first time in the recent history of Spanish higher education, there is no guarantee that there will be a demand for university places irrespective of the quality of the service offered by the institutions. This is bound to have a considerable effect on institutions' attitudes towards improving the quality of their teaching and their services. The question is whether institutions and staff that have always lived with periods of growth will find it easy to adapt to a new era of stability in which the efficient use of available resources becomes the main objective.

On the other hand, access to higher education is relatively open to all social classes. An analysis of the socio-economic background of higher education students shows a fair representation of young people from middle and upper class groups. Young people from lower socioeconomic groups (unskilled, agricultural and industrial workers) also have significant access to higher education, though they are still underrepresented (Mora, 1997). The proportion of women among higher education students surpasses the proportion of men. In 1970, the proportion of women enrolled in higher education was just 26 percent, but by 1986 numbers reached 50 percent and they have continued to increase to currently stand at 53.3 percent of the higher education population (CCU, 2003).

Spanish universities, then, are currently in a position that could be considered as promising. Nevertheless, it is the general consensus in academic and governmental sectors that an additional effort must now be made to improve the overall quality of institutions and their programs. If during the last few years considerable efforts have been made to stimulate the growth of higher education, quality improvement is clearly the main goal for the near future. Quality assessment and accreditation have become central issues on the higher education agenda and in the policies of central and regional governments.

3. Quality assessment and accreditation

3.1 Initial Experiences in Quality Assessment

The Act that devolved autonomy to universities (LRU) in 1983 made a general statement about the necessity to incorporate some formal system of quality assessment for universities. Nevertheless, several years passed before this principle started to be implemented. In the early 1990s, several studies analysed the experiences of quality assessment in other countries. At that time, three main models were employed in Europe: the Dutch, the British, and the French models. The Dutch assessment model was primarily program-centred and based on self-study and external visits (Vroeijenstijn, 1995). Experts recommended this approach for Spain as well as adding institutional assessment of research and management. Based on these assumptions the „Experimental

Program for Assessment of the Quality in the University System", which included these elements, was launched in 1993.

The Experimental Program evaluated teaching, research, and institutional management in several universities (García et al., 1995; Mora, 1997b). As an experimental project, the primary purpose was to try various methods and make proposals for change based on the experiences gained. The experiment proved to be extensive enough to draw meaningful conclusions. In general, the Experimental Program attained its main objectives: (a) testing the accuracy of a methodology and (b) extending the culture of assessment in Spanish universities. On the other hand, some weak points were discovered such as (a) lack of institutional data for quality assessment, (b) lack of support from leaders in some universities, and (c) methodological problems as a consequence of the inexperience of the assessors. Generally speaking, the project created and extended quality assessment in universities as a first step towards improving institutional quality over a very short period of time.

Immediately after the Experimental Program, the European Union launched the *European Pilot Project for Evaluating Quality in Higher Education*. This was also a pilot project for testing a common methodology among European universities. The methodology was very similar to the one used in the Experimental Program. The European Project modified the methodology and adapted it to a broader European context. However, the most important result of the project was probably the recommendation made by the European Commission in 1998 (EC, 1998) to establish a relatively common system of quality assessment in European universities based on the methodology of self-study and external visits, although each country could reorganize the process, to maintain any idiosyncratic national characteristics. This European proposal had an important impact in Spain as it convinced some sceptical people, especially politicians from central and regional governments, to support quality assessment in universities.

After this short but intensive experience, several points became clear to people involved in the process: a) universities needed to control the quality assessment effort, but some kind of agreement and cooperation with governments had to be reached, especially in relation to the consequences of assessment; b) the basic *methodology employed* (self-study, external visits, and a final report) was adequate; c) research and management needed to be evaluated using similar processes; d) the importance of *overcoming the reluctance* of some people towards assessment -- and to have the *support of the university leaders for the project, and* e) *the results of the process needed to have internal and external consequences*. Although the main consequence of the assessment process had to be the improvement of quality, universities and participating departments needed to be provided with some kind of incentive to participate and implement the recommendations.

3.2 The Program for Institutional Assessment of Quality in Universities

In 1995, the Council of Universities approved the *Program for Institutional Assessment of Quality in Universities,* hereinafter referred to as the PNECU (CU, 1995). The PNECU formally institutionalised quality assessment in Spanish universities as an extended and continuous process for the entire university system.

Objectives

The stated objectives of the PNECU were four:

a) promoting quality processes in Spanish universities;

b) providing methodological tools to universities for this assessment process that would be homogeneous throughout the country and similar to processes used elsewhere in Europe;
c) providing society, and especially students, with relevant and reliable information about the quality of the institutions, their programs, services and scientific levels; and
d) providing accountability to regional government.

Organizational structure

The PNECU was headed by the Council of Universities, a national organization composed of representatives from regional and national government and the rectors of all universities. A Technical Committee comprising officials from the Council of Universities and assessment experts was in charge of the process. The PNECU evaluated teaching (in programs), research (in the departments related to programs assessed in teaching), and management (in services also related to the programs).

The PNECU lasted six years (from 1995 to 2001). Although the program was not compulsory, almost all universities participated in its first year. The universities which had taken part in the previous pilot projects participated more with an extensive assessment of programs. Universities without such experience took part on a more basic level.

Methodology

The methodology was the same as that which had been used in former Spanish projects. The first step of the process was a *self-study* made by the Assessment Committee of each university. This report had two purposes: to provide reliable information on the evaluated unit and promote awareness of quality issues in the university community. The second step was a *visit* by an External Committee composed of experts in the field (academic and non-academic). They interviewed leaders, staff, and students in each evaluated unit and compared their findings to the self-study report. This External Committee sent a report following each visit to the Council of Universities. Thirdly, the universities issued a published *report synthesizing* the self-study and the External Committee report. A general report concerning the program's activities was published every year by the Council of Universities.

The Technical Committee prepared written guidelines to standardize the process in participating universities. These guidelines defined criteria and procedures, and established the main points to be assessed and summarized in the committee reports. Nevertheless, the reports had the option to use a different structure. Some universities with more refined internal quality procedures used the criteria provided by the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) for their self-study report.

Criteria for report structure. All the reports had to use reliable data but also had to focus on the analysis, opinions, and judgments of the people involved in the evaluated units. The reports had to contain recommendations for improvement. The reports included the following sections: description and context of units evaluated; information on aims and objectives; information on resources, structure, and results; judgments by the Assessment Committee about the strong and weak points of the unit; proposals and recommendations for improvement; and relevant quantitative indicators.

Criteria on teaching assessment. The instruction assessment report had to include the following: the program structure, teaching procedures, student and staff characteristics, and resources and outcomes.

Criteria on research assessment. Research was assessed in the following areas: the department's research objectives, human and material resources, research activity, productivity, quality indicators (see García, et al., 1995, where these indicators were defined), and research outcomes.

Criteria on assessment of the management of units and services. The assessment of management had to focus on the following: economic and administrative efficiency, decision-making procedures, student services structure, and facilities in general.

3.3 The final assessment of the PNECU

When the PNECU came to an end after six years, a final report was drawn up (CCU, 2002). Some of the most noteworthy conclusions of this report are set out below.

Organizational aspects

The majority of universities took part in the assessment process. Only recently-established universities, which were advised to participate at a later date, did not take part.

The Autonomous Regions of Andalusia and Catalonia reached agreements with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport that allowed them to organize and carry out the university quality assessment programs in their regions (assessment, decision-making, funding and follow-up).

The assessment process used in the PNECU permitted various different units, such as programs, departments and services, to be assessed. In total, 939 programs, along with their corresponding departments and services, were assessed by the PNECU. In addition, 30 departments and 46 service units were independently assessed. Throughout the whole programme, approximately 64% of all programs which fulfilled the requirements (age of institution or programme) were assessed.

In addition to the above-mentioned agencies, others are now operating or currently being created, such as the „Axencia para la Calidade do Sistema Universitario de Galicia" (Agency for the Quality of Galicia's University System), the Agencia de Qualitat Universitaria de les Illes Balears (Agency for the Quality of the University System in the Balearic Islands) and the agencies for the Quality of the University Systems in Castile and Leon, the Valencian Region or the Madrid Region.

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport provided the PNECU with 4,5 M€ to fund the program. However, the total cost of assessment was greater since there were two other sources of funding. On the one hand, the universities themselves covered most of the expenses and on the other hand, some autonomous regional governments had supplementary funds at their disposal specifically for the PNECU.

Methodological aspects

The independent nature of the process and the fact that neither the government nor the institutions under assessment had any influence on the results was an important feature inherent in the PNECU.

In general, more emphasis was placed on teaching than on research, and more attention was given to both teaching and research than to services. To a certain extent, this bias is due to the methodology itself, which takes the program as the basic unit of analysis. This explains the struc-

ture of this report, in which greater attention is paid to teaching than to the other two aspects. This is partly justified by the fact that teaching processes in Spanish universities are in greater need of assessment.

Most of the program's self-assessment reports concurred that the institutional assessment process was useful insofar as it helped to clarify the strategic objectives of the units assessed, to obtain systematic knowledge of how they worked and to formulate improvement proposals. In this respect, the most highly valued methodological aspect was the fact that the university community was enriched by the experience of carrying out the self-assessment report.

One of the most obvious strengths of the assessment process was the fact that both the external assessment reports and the final program reports put forward improvement proposals. This aspect has been strengthened by significant technical advances in formulating improvement actions in the successive rounds of the PNECU. These are becoming more and more accurate when it comes to prioritising, establishing deadlines, implementing means of assessment and assigning responsibility. In addition, the programs suggested formulating specific plans of action based on their improvement proposals.

One of the main problems faced by the units assessed was the lack of information and the unreliability of the data required for assessment. Throughout the PNECU, there have been general improvements in this type of information and an increase in its use in the internal administration of the institutions. However, more work needs to be done along these lines and agreements need to be reached between all administrative departments in order to improve the flow of information required (in institutions as well as in public administration departments) for internal decision-making and above all, to provide increasingly relevant information to the general public.

Despite the fact that the assessment of services has had the smallest impact due to its scope, it has been important because of what it implies in terms of knowledge and behaviour in line with the EFQM excellence model, so closely followed in the business world and in public administration. However, it is important that efforts be maintained in order to adapt the new assessment models to the specific needs of university administration.

The methodology used in the PNECU was sound, but improvements must be made in terms of writing reports and training all the participants in order to increase the credibility of the process.

Results

The PNECU has increased the university community's awareness of quality and quality assessment. This increased awareness has resulted in the direct creation of administrative support bodies, but a quality culture has not yet developed among university staff in general. Such a quality culture must be introduced from top to bottom, however, a bottom-up approach is required if it is to develop effectively. For this to produce visible improvements, the university needs to operate and be organised according to processes, in which objectives, customers, products and services are the common denominator. It should be remembered that any change in the culture of an organisation is a long-term process.

The PNECU has made a considerable impact if we consider the number of institutions and people involved. However, emphasis must be placed on linking assessment results to the proposed improvements and on promoting such links, considered to be one of the weaknesses of the process. This aspect must be worked on by the universities themselves and by those responsible for higher education policy. The positive attitude created could easily turn into one of rejection if work is not carried out along these lines.

The creation, participation and coordination of Autonomous Agencies in the whole process has been one of the most prominent features of the PNECU. This has helped to bring assessment closer to the decision-making process, which is largely the responsibility of the Autonomous Regions. As a result, the LOU (Organic Law on Universities) has been decisive in encouraging the existence of these agencies all over Spain by giving them new and important responsibilities. Coordinating all these new units will be one of the main challenges of assessment processes over the coming years.

As a result of the PNECU almost all Spanish universities have the infrastructure required for quality assessment (technical units, rectors' offices etc.). This allows them to deal with the challenges posed by the creation of a single European space for higher education foreseen in the Bologna Declaration and the accreditation of academic programs foreseen in the LOU. In addition, it will allow them to deal with other challenges regarding institutional quality, adaptation and improvement policies.

Assessment has helped to bring courses into closer contact with their socio-economic environment in two ways. Professionals have been made members of external assessment committees, an aspect which has always been viewed positively.

In summary, several important goals have been reached over a relatively short period of time. Firstly, university leaders and staff now accept the assessment process. Secondly, many of the improvement proposals are being implemented, especially in the fields of teaching and management. Thirdly, new offices are being established very rapidly in the universities to support these processes. Finally, the publicity given to the whole process is promoting and stimulating a *„quality culture"* in Spanish universities.

These consequences are encouraging all institutions to develop more strategies for change and to provide clear support for improvement proposals. The main question now being raised by all participants is *what is the purpose or the tangible results of these activities?* If they do not find a satisfactory answer to this question soon, their interest and collaboration -- which are crucial in this internal-external assessment methodology -- will soon diminish. Since the required reports contain improvement proposals, they must soon result in some discernible consequences and rewards. Once needs are detected, institutions need to develop and implement improvement strategies, but it is difficult to go ahead with improvements and additional assessment if in this first stage, which is where we are now, no tangible results or rewards can be seen.

This situation has led some universities to move from Quality Assessment to Quality Assurance. Assessment Committees have now turned into permanent Quality Committees, and assessment processes are being included in the annual agenda of many institutions. This process is in its initial phase and there are already many differences in approach among the institutions. The involvement of institutional leaders in the movement for quality assurance is the main factor that determines the speed and intensity of these changes.

3.4 The Second Plan for the Quality of Universities

In the light of the previous experiences, the Second Plan for Quality of Universities (Plan de Calidad de las Universidades, PCU) was established in 2001 in order to continue improving the assessment process. The general objectives of the PCU are to develop and improve systems for quality assessment of Spanish universities, including aspects of transparency and relevant information on the standards reached by each university that can serve as a basis for program accreditation. Special attention should be paid to designing methodologies for quality assessment and

accreditation in order to provide objective information that can be used by different bodies, departments, universities, public administration and citizens in general as the basis of decision-making in their own areas of responsibility.

While institutional quality assessment is developed and improved in higher education institutions, regional governments must assume a leading role in the management of the PCU in conjunction with the Council of Universities, providing resources and facilities for the management of assessment processes to be carried out adequately and encouraging planning processes as an essential strategy to promoting change and improvements within universities.

Objectives

The general objectives of the PCU are:

- To encourage institutional assessment of higher education quality.
- To promote and consolidate a legal framework in which regional governments assume a leading role in the management of the PCU, in order to encourage regional Assessment Agencies and establish a Network of Agencies coordinated by the Council of Universities.
- To develop homogenous methodologies for quality assessment integrated in the current practise of the European Union in order to guarantee standardization of assessments.
- To provide objective information on the standards reached by each university that can be used by different bodies as the basis of decision-making in their own areas of responsibility.
- To devise an accreditation procedure and an indicators system that can provide quantitative and qualitative information on the assessment of programs, departments and universities and to inform the entire society and the institutions themselves.

Organizational Structure

The PCU will be carried out over 6 years and its modality, conditions and requirements will be revised annually. The Council of Universities is responsible for the management and the coordination of the PCU. The Autonomous Regions, in conjunction with the Ministry of Education, will be able to set up and consolidate Assessment Agencies to carry out the PCU independently.

The Council of Universities, which is responsible for the management and coordination of the PCU, performs its tasks with the aid of a Technical Committee and a Management Office. The Technical Committee is composed of Council of Universities' officials, a representative from each of the regional agencies and several experts in quality assessment.

The Assessment Process

The assessment process, as is current practice in most European countries, follows a mixed methodology of internal assessment (or self-assessment) and external assessment. A report is drawn up for each phase of assessment, and then a final report is produced summarizing strengths and weaknesses and the improvements proposed for institutional assessment.

The units to be assessed are the study programs, departments and services that the university offers. In some cases, very similar programs or services can be assessed as a whole.

Internal assessment or self-assessment is carried out by the Assessment Committees of the respective universities and gives rise to a self-assessment report which describes the objective situa-

tion of the unit assessed as well as the opinion of the university itself of its strengths, weaknesses and ways to improve the services it offers.

The external assessment phase is carried out by the External Assessment Committee. This External Committee draws up a report, called the External Committee Report, from the information provided by the Assessment Committee and also from the information they collect *in situ* from interviews with representatives of the different groups involved in the assessed unit.

The report of the External Assessment Committee, with any observations that the Assessment Committee wishes to add, is submitted to a wide public audience for assessment programs, before drawing up the Final Report. The fundamental aspect of the Final Report consists of establishing an action plan for improvement. The Final Report will be divulged more widely in the unit assessed, i. e. in the Quality Committee of the University assessed.

Follow-up systems of the assessment process and results need to be set up. This should be carried out between the third and the fourth year, after the end of the first assessment process.

Teaching Assessment

Assessment of the teaching includes the study program along with adequate planning which takes the real situation of the institution into consideration as well as its social and economic relevance and the cohesion with the teaching-learning process. A guide is produced in order to establish the standard guidelines and formulae for the collection of data and opinions on the following points:

- Context of the program.
- Aims and objectives.
- Training programs.
- Human resources.
- Facilities and resources.
- Teaching development.
- Academic performance.
- Improvement proposals and self-assessment.

Research Assessment

The basic units of research assessment are the areas of knowledge or departments. This assessment includes the following:

- Context
- Objectives formulated
- Institutional structure
- Available resources
- External and internal relations

The final assessment results should be suggested and the strengths, weaknesses and proposals for improvement found in the unit assessed need to be defined. Standard guidelines for the collection of data include the structure and characteristics of teaching and research staff, obtaining of funding (projects, contracts, etc), participation in national and international research programs, conferences, etc and publications in scientific journals, books, patents, technical reports, etc.

Service unit assessment

In addition to elements directly related to teaching and research, the assessment of the other services and management offered by the University is also considered in the PCU. Guidelines for the assessment of other services are based on the EFQM (*European Foundation for Quality Management*). A needs analysis and a look at the current situation are carried out in this assessment process.

- To encourage strategic planning in the development of management and the setting up of well-defined objectives in this domain.
- To establish mechanisms to evaluate, offer incentives and motivate the non-academic staff responsible for governing the development of services management.
- To acknowledge a commitment towards improving services. This commitment is more noticeable, due to the staff profile in terms of youth, human values, experience, dedication, effort and above all a positive attitude towards change.
- To establish mechanisms that evaluate the coordination between the centers and Central Services and the users and staff.
- To set up mechanisms that measure the degree of user satisfaction with the services provided and to collect suggestions for improvement.

System of indicators

The Council of Universities defined and approved a catalogue of indicators in order to improve the information and to establish mechanisms for emulation among institutions (*benchmarking*):

- Supply
- Distribution of study programs
- Demand
- Percentage of new entrants (first option) out of all new entrants
- Average grade of access of the 80th percentile
- Average grade of access
- Human resources
- Percentage of full time academic staff (tenured teachers, associates and assistants at full time, excluding scholarship holders).
- Percentage of academic staff with a doctorate.
- Percentage of tenured academic staff.
- Non-academic/academic staff ratio
- Financial resources
- Distribution of personnel expenditure as a percentage of total expenditure
- Distribution of expenditure per enrolled student
- Distribution of expenditure per corrected enrolled student
- Physical resources
- Vacancies in libraries
- Vacancies in computer laboratories
- Processes
- Lecturing time
- Student/teacher ratio
- Practical offers in the program
- Percentage of students in large groups in the program (greater or equal to 80 students)

- Percentage of students in small groups in the program (less or equal to 20 students)
- Percentage of tenured staff involved in courses given to new students.
- Results
- Dropout Rate
- Graduation Rate
- Return Rate
- Success Rate
- Average duration of studies
- Average number of research bonuses of academic staff in the program

3.5 The new accreditation scheme

The PCU considered the possibility of initiating accreditation and certification processes as pilot projects. However, the promulgation of the LOU was what formally brought about obligatory accreditation for all official degrees and voluntary quality certification for the services and programs that wished to be included. The LOU pays special attention to quality assurance in Spanish universities. A whole section of the law is devoted to issues concerning quality. In addition, the LOU has set up ANECA, as the body in charge of accrediting official degrees throughout the whole country. Moreover, ANECA is responsible for quality assessment in Spain (in association with the agencies of those autonomous regions which have them). ANECA is therefore responsible for the PCU, which does not necessarily imply that the way it is currently organized shall remain unchanged. In any case, the most innovative aspect of the new situation is accreditation, which shall be examined in the following sections.

The concept of accreditation

The definition of „accreditation" is firmly established in the world of industry: a process by means of which an accreditation agency „accredits" that another certifying agency meets certain set quality standards in procedures to award quality certification. In the world of higher education, the word accreditation may be regarded in a similar light if we consider universities as agencies which award academic qualifications to individuals. In this respect, university accreditation aims to ensure that the qualifications awarded by universities (in fact by the degree programs) comply with minimum quality requirements. Thus, accreditation is basically a means of assessing results which demands the existence of quality criteria and standards. These quality levels are previously established by setting up quality criteria and standards for each type of program. In principle, there can only be two possible outcomes (a degree is either accredited or non-accredited), although other possibilities do exist: Non-accredited, not yet accredited, accredited and accredited with excellence.

The objectives of accreditation

The main objective of accreditation is the assessment of educational programs (all types of programs taught by universities) in order to guarantee all citizens that each qualification fulfills certain quality criteria.

In addition to this fundamental objective, there are two other main objectives:

1. To inform citizens: to provide information on the quality levels and other features of the programs which are required to make decisions.
   - To inform public authorities: to provide information to the public authorities, in the case of public institutions, about the correct use of whatever resources they receive.

In addition to these three obvious objectives of accreditation, there are other implicit objectives which are also important elements when it comes to explaining the current interest in accreditation. These are:

1. To encourage university institutions to take an interest in quality. Experience shows that assessment processes have not gone far enough to bring about a real interest in quality in all institutions and in all the different bodies of these institutions. Assessment which brings consequences with it as is the case of accreditation, will help make everyone take a greater interest in quality.
2. To improve the quality of the degrees themselves. Assuring accreditation, above all if it is possible to obtain accreditation with excellence, will be a means of maintaining interest in the quality of the programs.
3. To promote the mobility of students and professors. In some European countries (Spain, for example), students' domestic mobility is very low, but mobility between different European countries is even lower. In order to encourage mobility and to attract students from other countries, an accreditation system which provides information about quality levels and guarantees them would be a very useful tool.

The ANECA plan of action

ANECA's accreditation program will be responsible for implementing all aspects of the LOU which must be fulfilled by all official degrees. More specifically, it will be in charge of re-accrediting official degrees specified by the LOU. The degrees shall be re-accredited when they fulfill the minimum requirements set out by ANECA.

This has three important consequences:

- The administrative criteria currently required for accreditation cannot be the same as those required for re-accreditation. Re-accreditation must be much more ambitious and be used as a powerful tool to improve the university system. In addition, re-accreditation must help to bring the Spanish university system in line with the European higher education space. In order for this to be possible, it is necessary to define accreditation criteria and make them public in advance.
- In addition to this system of accrediting minimum quality requirements, another system could be developed which accredits excellence. This could be a simple procedure if it used the same instruments as those for accrediting minimum conditions.
- According to the LOU**,** re-accreditation does not necessarily need to be repeated, whereas accreditation is basically a decision which has limited validity. It is therefore essential that there is a legal mechanism making it obligatory for re-accreditation (understood to be the accreditation of minimum requirements) to be repeated after a certain length of time.

Implementing the ANECA accreditation process requires the following three consecutive steps:

a) A full definition of the concept of accreditation, of its objectives and its results.
b) Once accreditation has been clearly defined, the objectives each degree will have to attain need to be specified. Although these will be generic objectives, they must be explicit enough for degrees to recognize them as feasible goals which they can adapt to.

c) These objectives must be given the status of regulations, so that universities are legally obliged to reach them.

In order to reach these objectives, a design group has been set up and is in charge of proposing definitions and deciding on the basic criteria which should characterize the accreditation process. In addition, the National Accreditation Committee has been established and includes renowned academics and professionals. In this initial design phase, it aims to validate the process and the accreditation criteria.

Pilot experiences in accreditation

It is essential to set up accreditation pilot schemes in order to determine the model to be used, fine-tune the methodologies and discover any logistical problems which may arise. Groups of experts will be in charge of the design and implementation of these pilot projects. To carry out these projects, we already have the experience of a pilot project in Computer Engineering which was started under the PCU. Using this project in the field of engineering as a referent, a pilot project will be started in each of the other four fields of study (experimental sciences, social sciences and law, humanities and health sciences). The corresponding work groups will need to have access to experimental accreditation instruments so that a limited round can take place in order to „experimentally" accredit one or two degrees in each of the fields of study during the 2003-2004 academic year. Once this experimental phase is over, a formal accreditation process could be started as from 2004-2005, although there may be certain restrictions. It seems unlikely that obligatory accreditation will commence before 2005 or 2006.

4. The underlying forces in the accreditation process

The move towards quality assurance in Spanish universities is recent but extremely positive and hopeful. In just a few years quality has been formally implemented in the higher education system and in the daily dealings of a growing number of institutions. Nevertheless, quality assessment for all its success is threatened by two dangers: bureaucratisation and frustration.

First, a process of this nature that is centrally organized could be considered by some people as an additional formal, and perhaps unnecessary, requirement. The danger is that the process may become too bureaucratic if it is not well explained and motivated. The capacity of the ANECA and other regional agencies to develop a dynamic structure to overcome these problems is crucial to circumventing this threat. Universities must incorporate quality assurance as an internal tool for continuous improvement.

Secondly, the implementation of the recommendations and follow-up of the process are also essential. If people involved in the assessment and the university community in general do not feel that this is a worthwhile process with matching consequences and rewards, growing feelings of frustration with the process could be a danger for the future.

A mechanism to keep positive pressure on the quality assurance movement, albeit not the only one (accreditation could be the other), is to connect assessment results directly to funding. This is a very controversial issue that many policy makers and researchers do not recommend because it is regarded as a threat to the fairness of a process and system that should be solely „improvement focused" (Vroeijenstijn, 1995). Nevertheless, if universities are not compensated or rewarded in some way for attaining high standards of quality and performance, their commitment

to quality assurance processes could be cut short. The biggest challenge, however, is to determine how to connect the results of these programs with funding. To this end, there are several local initiatives that could serve as examples. One, adopted in several regions, is the application of funding formulas that incorporate a variable related to quality in the allocation of public funds among universities (Mora and Villarreal, 1996). Another promising approach, adopted in other regions, is the use of *contract-programs*. This approach involves a contract between the regional government and each institution whereby universities are funded to achieve a set of specific goals. Such contracts are designed to reorganize the whole institution from a quality perspective. Whatever the method employed, a system of rewards and consequences are now needed to incorporate a quality assurance program firmly into Spanish universities in the new millennium.

On the other hand, the accreditation process which will soon be underway might prove to be a significant incentive to convince institutions and their employees of the need to improve. The objectives set out in the accreditation process must be an instrument which can be used to put pressure on institutions in this search for efficiency.

5. The influence of internationalisation on the current process of accreditation

Certain factors will have an enormous effect on the development and on the definition of the accreditation process and must therefore be taken into account. They are:

- The influence of the Bologna process
- The internationalisation of accreditation
- The definition of the skills to be accredited
- The following proposals have been put forward to deal with these three issues:
- To define accreditation exclusively for programs which have been adapted to the new designs. This must be flexible in order to allow the experimental accreditation process to begin as soon as possible (even if the programs are not fully adapted).
- To establish and maintain a work group with representatives from other European countries which have already started accreditation processes. This action aims to develop compatible methodologies which may in the future lead to systems of mutual accreditation recognition.
- To carry out studies on the professional skills required by graduates. These could then be used as a point of reference for demanding skills in the accreditation process. Such studies would mainly be based on detailed questionnaires on skills carried out by students, graduates and employers.

Approaches to accreditation

The accreditation process in Spain is strongly affected by the last European developments. It is accepted that methodology needs to transcend national boundaries. It is not logical that issues affecting the whole of Europe (mobility, transparency, international recognition, etc.) should be resolved by independent, national accreditation systems. At present, the idea of a European accreditation agency is not considered feasible because of the considerable differences which exist between the various education systems. Perhaps the most widely accepted principle would be that of

national accreditation systems based on similar criteria which could be mutually acknowledged by different countries.

The criteria being considered in order to take the first steps towards degree accreditation appear in a document drawn up by the work group of the *Joint Quality Initiative* on shared descriptors defining the characteristics of a degree (JQI, 2002). This document describes the common objectives which must be reached by any type of program which awards *Bachelor's* and *Master's* degrees. There is the possibility of adding other specific characteristics unique to each country and each area of knowledge, but the characteristics defined are generic and should be common to all countries and all fields of study. The shared descriptors state that:

Bachelor's degrees are awarded to students who

- have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon and supersedes their general secondary education, and is typically at a level that, whilst supported by advanced textbooks, includes some aspects that will be informed by knowledge at the forefront of their field of study;
- can apply their knowledge and understanding in a manner that indicates a professional approach to their work or vocation, and are demonstrably competent in the sense that they can devise and sustain arguments and solve problems within their field of study;
- have the ability to gather and interpret relevant data (usually within their field of study) to make informed judgments that include reflection on relevant social, scientific and ethical issues;
- can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences;
- have developed learning skills that are necessary for them to continue to undertake further study with a high degree of independence.

Master's degrees are awarded to students who

- have demonstrated knowledge and understanding that is based upon and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with Bachelor's degrees, and that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context;
- can apply their knowledge and understanding, and problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study;
- have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgments with incomplete or limited information, but that include reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgments;
- can communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously;
- have the learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous.

It is important to emphasize that the principles which define the programs in all European initiatives are not based on course length or course content (which is something that must be decided independently by the universities themselves). Instead, a degree's worth is determined by the skills acquired by its graduates (regardless of how or when they are acquired). According to this procedure, as long as it produces results, an educational program will be assessed positively.

6. Other assessment schemes

The individual activity of academics is evaluated through several mechanisms with differences for teaching or research activities with repercussions or with no repercussions on earning, and with direct or indirect effects on promotion (Mora and Vidal, 1998). These are the different assessment processes for academic staff:

a) *Assessment for teaching productivity bonus (tenured staff).* The teaching activities of tenured professors are evaluated by their universities each five years. Because of the lack of reliable standards in the assessment of teaching, all professors (with extremely rare exceptions) are positively assessed. Only in cases of clear misbehaviour is evaluation negative. This mechanism has become an additional method for rewarding seniority since, professors receive a permanent increase in their salaries for each positive assessment.

b) *Teaching activity assessment (all academic staff).* In most universities, students carry out a yearly survey on each teacher and each course. Overall results of the survey are published, but only the assessed teacher and the university itself have access to individual data. This survey has two positive effects: a) universities detect problematic cases motivated by teachers' lack of pedagogical abilities or by some type of conflict between students and teachers; b) this survey affects teachers' attitudes, and at least stimulates the fulfilment of basic teaching duties, and in many cases, how teachers handle these duties. Apart from these positive effects, whether the results of these assessments should influence promotion or working conditions of academic staff is an issue largely debated that has not yet reached a consensus, though some universities take these results into account in promotion procedures.

c) *Assessment for research productivity bonus (tenured staff).* National panels composed of experts for each group of disciplines are in charge of the assessment of individual research activity. For each period of six years, professors can present their most relevant publications to the corresponding panel in the hope of receiving positive assessment. Contrarily to the evaluation of teaching activities, this evaluation is relatively strict, and „research periods" are frequently evaluated negatively. Consequently, positive assessment has become an internal symbol of prestige among academics, even over formal categories of professorships. Nevertheless, the most important effect is that many universities have established a certain number of positive assessments as a pre-requisite for promotion to higher positions among tenured professors.

d) *Accreditation of contracted staff.* The LOU has established a formal system of „accreditation" for those who are applying for some contractual position in any university. The ANECA and other regional agencies are carrying out this procedure at this moment based in panels of experts that are reviewing CV's of the candidates. First results are not public yet.

e) *Assessment of teaching, research and managerial activities for regional productivity bonuses*. Some regional governments have established systems of global assessments of activities of academic staff for granting their specific productivity bonuses. These procedures are too recent (or are in process of implementation) for being deeply analysed.

As we can observe, academic staff in Spain are frequently assessed through several diverse mechanisms. It is feasible that accreditation will take some results of the assessment of the academic staff as criteria for accrediting programmes. Nevertheless, only research assessment are enough reliable to be taken in account.

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Country Report Sweden

Staffan Wahlén

1. The National System of Higher Education in Sweden

1.1 Size of the higher education system[1]

The higher education system in Sweden has grown considerably in the last 10 years. The number of students has increased by over 60 per cent. In the academic year 2000/2001 there were 330,200 students (268 100 full time equivalent students) in undergraduate education. 72,100 of them were new students. This is the highest number of beginners yet recorded, and in the current year (2002/3) numbers are still growing. It might be added that the major rise in enrolment has been among students in somewhat higher age groups than previously. Three out of every five students are women. Generally speaking, students in higher education are older in Sweden than in many other countries. Over 50 per cent are 25 years of age or older.

There were 18,100 active postgraduate students, 3,200 of whom were beginners. This is an increase of more than 30 per cent compared to 10 years ago.

Like in most other countries the participation rate has gone up considerably during the last two decades. The Government established a goal in the year 2000 expressed as 50 per cent of 25-year-olds having participated in higher education. This goal was to be reached „in a few years". In these terms, the rate was 20 per cent in 1981/82 and well over 40 per cent in 2001/2002.

1.2 Higher education institutions

As a result of the 1977 higher education reform a number of new government funded higher education institutions were established. Today the higher education sector consists of the following institutions:

The state-run part of the sector comprises 11 universities plus the Karolinska Institute (medicine and health educations) and the Royal Institute of Technology, seven independent colleges of visual and performing arts and 16 university colleges including the Stockholm Institute of Educa-

1 Data are from Swedish Universities and University Colleges. Annual Report 2002. National Agency for Higher Education and refer to the year 2001, unless otherwise indicated.

tion and the Stockholm University College of Physical Education and Sports. Most of these have the right to award Masters' degrees, and a few are allowed to award doctors' degrees in certain fields. In all, there are 36 state-run higher education institutions.

Chalmers University of Technology, the Stockholm School of Economics and the University College of Jönköping are run by private sector governing boards. There are also nine smaller private institutions of higher education specialized in certain areas (health science, theology, music education) with the right to award certain degrees of undergraduate education.

1.3 Main degree-types

Sweden has a system of credit points, one week of successful full-time studies is equivalent to one credit point. One academic year usually yields 40 credit points.

The Government has laid down which degrees may be awarded by higher education institutions. Undergraduate degrees are divided into general and professional degrees.

General degrees

A University diploma ('högskoleexamen') is awarded after at least 80 credit points.

A Bachelor's degree ('kandidatexamen')is awarded after studies totalling at least 120 credit points, of which 60 must be in the major subject. The major subject must include a thesis comprising at least 10 credit points.

A Master's degree is awarded after studies totalling at least 160 credit points, of which at least 80 credit points must be in the major subject. The major subject must also include a thesis comprising a total of 20 credit points, or two theses of 10 credit points each.

Professional degrees

There are some sixty professional degrees of varying length with specific objectives stated in the Degree Ordinance. Medical degrees (220 credit points), engineering degrees(180 credit points) and law degrees (180 credit points), teaching degrees (from 140 to 220 credit points) are some examples.

Postgraduate degrees

A Doctor's degree is obtained after studies totalling 160 credit points after a Bachelor's, or more commonly, a master's degree. The most important part is the thesis, which must comprise at least 80 credit points, but in most cases yields between 100 and 120 credit points.

1.4 Main types of programmes

Programmes are usually professionally oriented leading to a professional degree (see above). They vary in length from two years (rare) to six years. Most such programmes are in engineering, teach-

ing and health care including medicine and different specialities of nursing. Many institutions also develop their own local programmes.

For general degrees (see above) students may combine different courses to design their own degree, provided they follow the general principles regarding the number of credit points and theses. Two-thirds of the total number of students follow this track.

1.5 Transition of students from higher education to work

The majority of students leave higher studies with (the equivalent of) a Bachelor's degree. However, it is difficult to say what proportion continue to the master's level, since it is possible to go straight for a master's degree without the intermediary step of a bachelor. In fact, only 31 per cent of those who earned a master's degree in the year 2001 had a previous degree according to figures from Statistics, Sweden. 16 per cent of those who completed a bachelor's degree went on to further studies in the year 2000.

Recent statistics show that 94 percent of those who completed undergraduate education in 1998/99 were working in March 2002. The corresponding share for postgraduate education was 95 per cent. This is an increase of six percentage points compared to four years earlier. Individuals with undergraduate or postgraduate degrees were reasonably successful at finding work within an occupational field that corresponded to their education. Approximately 90 per cent of people with degrees were working in the „right" occupational field.

22 per cent of women and 18 per cent of men had been unemployed at some point after their education ended. This share has decreased over the past four years, and long-term unemployment among graduates is low. In late 2002 it was 2.3 per cent compared to the overall rate of 4.2 per cent.

There are no reliable statistics on labour market acceptance of different degree-types, but it seems clear that especially graduates with professional degrees find it reasonably easy to get employment.

There is no professional accreditation of graduates. However, those who are going to work in the health professions require a licence. Those who graduate from health programmes (medicine, nursing, etc.), usually obtain their licences automatically after having finished their degrees. For physicians, however, an internship of eighteen months is required, and a few other professions have similar demands.

1.6 Governance and steering of higher education

Higher education is state financed. Students do not pay tuition fees, nor does the Government have any plans to introduce such fees. Higher education institution boards are appointed by the Government, and the majority of their members, including the chairpersons, are external to the institution and usually represent industry, government agencies, trade unions or other organizations. The Government also appoints the rector. Parliament (The Riksdag) allocates funding for undergraduate education and, where applicable, for postgraduate education and research. The institutions' allocations also include funding for premises. Allocation for undergraduate education is based on the number of students *and* their academic performance.

Each institution is an autonomous government agency reporting directly to the Government. The main legal framework regulating the activities of the institutions is contained in the Higher

Education Act and the Higher Education Ordinance. On the basis of these documents each institution develops its own rule system in accordance with its special needs.

The National Agency for Higher Education was established in 1995 as the national agency for matters relating to institutions of higher education. Its tasks include quality assessment, supervision, research and analysis, evaluation of foreign education and provision of study information. It has no role in the allocation of funding.

2. Accreditation, approval and evaluation

2.1 General background

In Sweden, accreditation, approval and evaluation processes and procedures are linked very closely together. It is thus appropriate to begin by briefly describing evaluation schemes and then approval and accreditation schemes.

The major task of the National Agency for Higher Education is evaluation and accreditation (approval). From 1995 it has carried out two major types of evaluations: institutional audit and programme (subject) evaluation. In 1992 a system of validation (approval) of academic professional programmes and degrees was introduced, which was taken over by the Agency in 1995. Since 2001 the Agency has been responsible for a major programme and subject evaluation scheme, which includes accreditation elements.

2.2 Description of evaluation and accreditation schemes

Institutional audit

Types of units:

The national academic audit scheme involves all public institutions of higher education in Sweden i. e. the 11 universities plus the Karolinska Institute and the Royal Institute of Technology, the seven independent colleges of visual and performing arts and the 16 university colleges. It also covers the privately run Chalmers University of Technology, the Stockholm School of Economics and the University College of Jönköping.

It includes teaching at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels and research as well as areas like leadership, administration and decision-making processes and student participation in these processes. Individual subjects and disciplines are not part of the scheme, except as indications of how the institutional quality systems function at that level.

The Actors

As indicated above, it is the National Agency for Higher Education that owns the evaluation process. It may be discussed to what extent the Agency is an independent unit. In the Swedish political context, agencies are funded, its tasks are defined, and their directors are appointed by the Government. The Government also determines the general orientation of the tasks the

Agency is expected to do. However, it does not control the results of investigations and reports prepared by agencies. Nor can it control the way agencies work or are organised. It can, thus, reasonably be argued that the evaluations of the National Agency are politically independent and that, in fact, it both controls and is in charge of the evaluation scheme.

The review teams usually have five or six members. They are academics who hold, or have recently held senior posts, such as rector or dean. At least one member is a representative of external stakeholders. In the case of technological universities, it may be the CEO of an industrial enterprise, in the case of an ordinary university, it may be a the head of a public organization. A student is always included in each team.

The Government is a stakeholder of the process. There, are no financial consequences attached to the audit reports, but the Government, naturally, can draw its own conclusions and use the results as it sees fit. It is clear, also, that students can use the outcome to make decisions about his/her choice of university, in the same way as enterprises may make decisions to support or not support a university on the basis of a report. It is, however, unclear, whether this last consequence has actually happened.

Rules and regulations and their implementation

So far there have been two three-year cycles of audits of Swedish institutions of higher education. There is currently a moratorium while a six-year evaluation cycle of programmes and subjects is taking place (see below).

The general legal regulations governing evaluation are included in the Higher Education Ordinance. Decisions regarding procedure, the stages of the processes and information on outcomes are left to the National Agency. There is no appeals or objections procedure.

The process is planned over a three-year period, with 13 – 14 institutions audited each year. The overall timetable is worked out together with the institutions. The audit of a particular institution is then initiated by the Agency officer in charge, who contacts the management and organises a meeting to set the process going. The institution prepares a self-assessment during about six months. In the mean time an audit team is appointed by the Agency, which reads the self-assessment report and prepares a site-visit, which takes place about two months later. During the site-visit, which lasts between two and five days depending on the size and complexity of the institution, the teams meet with various groups within the institution. These groups include the rector and the board, student representatives, faculty representatives, selected departments and units. The main objective is to ascertain the extent to which the institutional quality system functions at various levels. After the site-visit a report is prepared over a period of two months, which is approved by the Head of the Agency and then made public. The whole process thus takes about 10 months up to a year.

The printed report is distributed widely: to the Government, to all higher education institutions, student organizations and the media. It is also published on the Agency's web site.

Accreditation schemes

In order to facilitate an understanding of the accreditation processes in Sweden it is necessary to describe further the degree-awarding rights of universities and university colleges. The 1993 Higher Education Act gave universities the right to award all degrees including doctoral degrees, whereas the university colleges were allowed to award Bachelors' degrees. The right to award professional degrees is limited to specific universities and university colleges.

There are two major kinds of accreditation schemes carried out by the National Agency for Higher Education. One, which was introduced in 1992, is initiated by an institution wanting to upgrade its right to award degrees from a Bachelor to a Master or to award a professional degree. Both kinds involve a yes-or-no decision by the Agency. For questions concerning the right to award doctoral degrees and the upgrading of a university college to university status, the evaluation is made by the Agency and the decision is taken by the Government. It should be noted that the purpose of this kind of accreditation activity is to establish whether the institution in question provides education of at least a minimum standard for the degree in question.

The other scheme is included in a six-year cycle of programme and subject evaluation beginning in 2001. For each programme evaluated, a decision is made as to whether the institutions in question will be allowed to retain the right to award degrees in the specific field.

Accreditation on the basis of application

Since 2001 all university colleges barring those of visual and performing arts, two others and the private colleges have been granted a general right to award masters' degrees. Thus, most applications today are for the right to award professional degrees, the right to award doctoral degrees in certain areas or being granted university status. In the latter two cases research and postgraduate training naturally constitute a large part of the basis for evaluation. When it comes to accrediting undergraduate programmes the level and extent of research activities is also a criterion, besides teaching and infrastructure.

This scheme applies to any subject/discipline or programme, depending on the needs and ambitions of the specific institution.

The stakeholders are the institution applying for the right and the students wishing to obtain the degree in question. Also the (local) employers are an interested party. It is taken for granted that the institution investigates the needs of the particular programme before initiating an application process.

The reviewers are appointed by the Agency, which owns, controls and is in charge of the implementation of the scheme. Thus, the reviewers are appointed by the Agency. They consist of subject experts, from Swedish higher education institutions other than the one applying. In some cases a student is also a member of the review team.

It is clear that the government is a customer. In cases of applications for postgraduate degrees and university status, a positive outcome will also lead to costs which have to be met by the state. Again the students and local employers may be beneficiaries of a new degree.

The Higher Education Ordinance states which degrees are awarded at which institutions. Any institution that wishes to award a degree which it is not eligible to award must apply to the National Agency, and once the degree has been accredited, it will be included in the Ordinance. The procedural rules were established by the National Agency first in 1992 and have been revised gradually since then. They include the following stages:

a. Application by institution
b. Appointment of evaluation team
   - Site visit to confirm (or not) the impression of the application
   - Report including decision by the Chancellor of the Swedish Universities.

There are no formally established rules for the duration of the process, nor is there any formal way of appeal against the decision. The information is publicly available in a report, available on the Agency website, and sometimes in a printed version.

It is one of the tasks of the Agency to carry out evaluations leading to accreditation of programmes and subjects/disciplines. Thus, the costs of experts including their fees and travel expenses are met by the Agency. Other costs, e.g. preparing the application, arranging the site-visit, have to be paid for by the institution.

Over the years the practical application of these principles has changed somewhat. For example, today there is usually not one group for each evaluation/accreditation, but a single one for each broad subject area (e.g. teacher education), which is summoned whenever a specific application is submitted. The time frame is generally about three-four months from application to decision. That, however, varies with the complexity and size of the task.

Application for university status

Since 1995 university colleges have had the right to apply for full or partial university status.

As in the previously described process the institution applying for university status and its students are the most important stakeholders. Also the (local and regional) employers and business and industry are interested parties. The Government, too, has a legitimate interest in developing advanced research and higher education across the country. At the same time, the Government is aware that a positive outcome leads to additional costs which have to be met by the state. So the Government has to balance the ambition to develop research and higher education and the need to keep within the budgetary frames.

A number of university colleges have adopted a vision stating that they intend to attain university status by a certain year. This means that they base their development plans and action plans on this vision and strive to achieve the research excellence needed.

The process as a whole is owned by the Government to which the institution submits its application. The Government also makes the final decision. The evaluation process is owned by the Agency, which controls the scheme and is in charge of its implementation. Thus, the reviewers are appointed by the Agency. They consist of Swedish and international experts, from Swedish higher education institutions other than the one applying. In some cases a student is also a member of the review team.

Accreditation as part of program and subject evaluation

In the year 2001 a new model of national reviews of higher education was introduced. All undergraduate subjects/disciplines and national programmes of higher education at all higher education institutions in Sweden were to be evaluated over a period of six years in a comparative perspective. The corresponding postgraduate programmes were also to be included in this process. Research was not, however, to be included in the exercise, partly since evaluation of research is the task of another organization, the Swedish Research Council.

The general ideas behind the exercise as well as the general structure was developed by the Government and presented in a Government Bill (Government Bill 1999/2000:28). The purpose was to provide a thorough picture of the quality (as opposed to quality assurance and quality enhancement activities) of Swedish higher education institutions. The scheme was partly a result of student pressure and student needs. Students had complained that the quality audits provided information on what measures higher education institutions take to assure the quality of their activities but not on the quality of the various subjects. Other interested parties in this debate were Government itself and other stakeholders such as employers.

There are no specific legal regulations governing the evaluations/accreditations, other than the government bill stating that there should be a programme/subject evaluation system with an accreditation element.

The details of the scheme were worked out by the National Agency in co-operation with the institutions, but it is the Agency that owns the procedure and makes the decisions and is in charge of the activities. Thus, the Agency appoints the reviewers after consultations with the institutions. The reviewers are subject experts from Sweden and, to a large extent, from other Nordic countries.

The costs of the review teams are met by the Agency. The institutions and departments have to foot the bill for the self-evaluations (see below) as well as for the time the staff spend on various preparatory meetings and meetings with the review teams. This has caused a certain amount of irritation on the part of some institutions and departments, who maintain (in vain) that this is an extra burden added to their already heavy workload, and that it should be financed by supplementary funding.

Formal procedures

The procedure follows a familiar pattern:

- Self-assessment by the department (or other unit in charge of the subject/discipline/programme. The self-assessment is supported by guidelines prepared by the Agency in consultation with the institutions. The guidelines outline quality aspects considered to be especially important for higher education provision (see below). The self-assessment phase results in a report submitted to the Agency.
- An external review team is appointed by the Agency. There are consultations with the institutions to ascertain that there are no conflicts of interest. Each team must include prominent teachers/researchers, a student, a postgraduate student and, in relevant cases, a representative of stakeholders (employers etc.). A chairperson is appointed for each team, and an Agency official functions as project leader and secretary.
- The review team reads the self-evaluation report and conducts an on-site visit in order to check the impressions given by the self-evaluation report in discussions with members of staff, students and faculty administration.
- A report containing a formal decision by the Chancellor of the Swedish Universities on each institution's right to award the relevant degree (accreditation decision). It is not possible to appeal against the decision. The report also provides recommendations for the further development of the subject. It is printed and widely distributed and also put on the Agency's website, with an English summary.
- After three months a national conference on the review with the participation of the institutions involved in the review and the accreditation procedure. After another two – three years there is a follow-up.
- The formal duration of the whole process is one year.

2.3 Actual implementation of process

The actual process is to a considerable extent carried out in consultation with the institutions. As has been pointed out above, this applies to the practical application of the model, such as the timetable for the exercise. Before the review process was initiated, the Agency identified the vari-

ous programmes/disciplines/subjects offered at the various institutions. The great variety of nomenclature and structure necessitated close co-operation between the Agency and the institutions in this task. Thus, similar programmes are offered at different institutions under different names, and similar names are sometimes used for different programmes. An entity reviewed could be a subject or discipline (History or French or Computer Science). It could be a programme or set of programmes such as engineering or teacher education. Before the evaluation process of a particular area is initiated there is a renewed check that the programmes etc. involved are actually comparable.

In the six-year programme each programme/subject/discipline is evaluated in the same period at all the institution providing it to allow an overall picture of that area at a given time. The overall timetable for the process, i. e. which programme is to be evaluated/accredited which year has been prepared in co-operation between the Agency and the institutions and is revised, whenever necessary. There will typically be 10 – 12 programmes etc. (defined broadly) reviewed each year.

The process begins each year in October/November with meetings between the Agency officers and the departments from the various institutions responsible for the specific programmes under review. At these meetings, the various parts of review process are described and discussed, and the departments are given the possibility to influence the time frame (within reason) and the actual implementation, such as the order in which they are to be visited. The general guidelines are adapted to the special needs of each subject. The departments are also given the chance to provide names of suitable members of review teams, but it must be emphasized that it is the Agency that makes the final decision in this respect.

As a basis for the self-evaluations and for the review a set of aspects has been developed over the years, which are regarded as fundamental for higher education processes. These aspects, which are covered in each assessment, include:

- Prerequisites for educational programmes
  - Recruitment of students and different student groups: students' prior knowledge, competition for study places, composition of student body with regard to gender, age, social and ethic background.
  - Teacher competence including teaching skills, research expertise, leadership and administration; provision of opportunities for staff development.
  - Goals, contents and organization of programme or courses: development and renewal.
  - Library and other information support
  - Facilities and equipment
- Process of education
  - Teaching and learning and students' working situation: teaching methods adapted to student needs. Support and supervision of undergraduate and postgraduate theses.
  - Teachers' working situation and responsibilities with regard to teaching, research and administration.
  - Programme structure: links to current research, integration of theoretical and applied knowledge and relevance to future professional life. International aspects.
  - Examination modes.
  - A critical and creative environment for learning.
  - Departments' own quality assurance and enhancement. National and international networking.
- Results of education
  - The departments' system for the monitoring of courses and programmes and the results evidenced by the system. National and international benchmarks.

- Quality of examination results, especially undergraduate theses.
- The departments' system for follow-up of quality assurance activities, follow-up of former students and their professional success questionnaires to employers and the results evidenced by the system
- Pass rates.

The size of the review teams varies with the size of the undertaking. In the case of, for example, Archaeology it would consist of one chairperson, two other academics, one student, one postgraduate student, one other stakeholder representative and an Agency project leader. Other, larger, areas will have more several co-operating teams and a co-steering group.

The first two years of the six-year cycle have shown that one year is often not enough for the completion of a review. It is our experience that from the first meeting between the Agency and the departments, which may be described as the kick-off of the self-evaluations and the whole project, it is about 16 months to the decision and the publication of the report. In most cases it is the sheer number of site-visits that causes the prolongation. Often, one group will have to visit 20 institutions across the country, a process that in itself takes between two and three months.

Before the publication of the report it is checked with the departments for factual content. In the cases of institutions threatened with „deaccreditation" information is given to the rector three days in advance of the formal decision. A decision on „deaccreditation" gives the institution the chance of submitting an action plan within six months for the improvement of those conditions that are assessed to be unacceptable. In the case of Bachelors' and Masters' degrees the right to award the degree in question is revoked if the action plan is unacceptable or if measures have not been taken within a certain specified period of time. This has not happened in the present system. Only the government has the power to give or revoke the right to award doctors' degrees. That has not yet happened, and the rules for that eventuality are still unclear.

2.4 Accreditation by non-government affiliated accreditor

The subject of accreditation in higher education is discussed widely in certain educational sectors in Sweden. This is particularly true of business studies and engineering. So far, the only non-official organization that has been successful in gaining access to the Swedish higher education market is Equis (European Quality Improvement System), a European for-profit (?) organization accrediting business schools. The purpose of this kind of accreditation is rather to ascertain whether the schools (programmes) in question offer an internationally comparable high standard provision, and, if they do, to give them the distinction of accreditation. So far, three Swedish business programmes (schools) have been approved by Equis. Quite recently a Public Administration programme was accredited by the European Association for Public Administration Accreditation (EAPAA).

2.5 Approval schemes other than accreditations schemes

It is a matter of definition whether in Swedish higher education there are schemes involving approval of subjects, programmes or institutions without accreditation. One arrangement may pos-

sibly be described as involving such a procedure. It concerns the approval of foreign institutions for the purpose of giving Swedish students the right to receive state study assistance.

The scheme is a collaborative undertaking between the Swedish National Board of Student Aid and the National Agency for Higher Education. A student who wants to study abroad may apply for a state study grant for studies at a foreign institution. If it is a well-known institution already in the files of the Board, a positive answer will be given (provided that the student fulfils the other requirements for assistance). If the institution is not recognized by the Board, the National Agency for Higher Education makes an investigation, to find out whether it is recognised by the higher education authorities in its own country and what status it is considered to have. The decision on whether to accept the provision by the institution or not is based on that information.

3. Analysis of the relationship of the range, actors and rules and regulations of the processes

3.1 Accreditation on the basis of application

Driving forces

When the accreditation model was introduced in 1992, it was intended to provide an opportunity for the smaller university colleges to offer higher undergraduate, and, possibly, postgraduate programmes. It was thus an ambition of the *Government* to develop higher education in all parts of the country, and to improve the participation rate. It can thus be seen as an incentive to improve regional development.

It was also seen by the Government and the *National Agency* as a guarantee that programmes on higher undergraduate and postgraduate levels were not initiated unless there was a reasonable assurance that the quality was more or less equivalent to that offered at traditional institutions. Thus, the review teams were, and are still, mostly made up of representatives of such institutions, normally professors of high standing. This has been a matter of debate in some circles, since they are sometimes seen as preservers of tradition, sceptical of new structures of education and research, and it has been questioned whether the teams should not also always include academics teaching at the undergraduate level.

The political agenda

There is in Sweden, like in most countries a continual debate on (higher) education. When the university colleges were first built up in the late 1970's and the 1980's the discussion focussed on quality versus opportunity. The government had the goal to establish a unitary system, and it was thus necessary to assure that this system was reasonably consistent. In this light, it is rather to be wondered at that the accreditation model based on application was not introduced until 1992. However, the year 1992 saw the beginning of a major expansion of higher education coupled with increased institutional autonomy. Against that background, it was necessary to have an instrument to control the development of higher education institutions.

It can, in fact, be shown that the university colleges have contributed quite substantially to economic and social development in the regions. At the same time, there are, of course those

who have argued that the money required to develop the new institutions would have been better spent on developing further research and education at established universities. This, indeed, is an additional reason for developing a quality assurance system. As will be discussed below, the implications of the current QA system have had been different for universities and university colleges.

Consequences for higher education institutions, scholars and students

For the *university colleges* the possibility of applying for the right to award higher degrees has been important. The scheme has very clearly been seen as a means to develop teaching and research, thus leading to a higher degree of legitimacy nationally and possibly internationally and has thus been an important incentive for them. As has been pointed out above, the ambitions of many of the university colleges have gradually increased, and several of them have developed a vision to be upgraded to university status.

For these institutions it is also a means to attract more and better students. All higher education institutions are national, but to a considerable degree students are recruited regionally. With more attractive programmes accredited for higher levels of study there is every opportunity to recruit good students both from the region and from the whole country, and, possibly from other countries. It may also contribute to the possibility of establishing an academic environment which may attract good scholars and teachers. It may be added that not all large universities are happy about the competition offered by the new institutions. More resources to them means less money to the universities.

The accreditation scheme gives the *scholars* at the new institutions the chance of conducting more and better research and provides more research-based teaching in those areas that are accredited.

Students who are already studying at the university college get the advantage of being able to pursue studies at higher levels without having to transfer to a university. The drawback is, of course, that the system does not encourage academic mobility of those students.

Other stakeholders include regional authorities and regional business and industry. As has been mentioned above, they have benefited from the development of „their" university colleges by, for example, improved opportunities to recruit graduates with higher degrees.

3.2 Accreditation as part of subject/programme evaluation

Driving forces

There are three essential elements behind the establishment of the evaluation/accreditation system in the year 2001.

The first is the concern for academic quality, especially regarding undergraduate and graduate education (research has its own quality assurance system). This was, in fact, one of the most important reasons for introducing an audit system already in 1995. The argument, in Sweden like in other countries, is that if the higher education institutions are largely autonomous organizations financed by the government, there has to be an assurance that the tax-payers' money going into higher education is well spent and that the goals are met. At the same time the system must be sufficiently flexible to contribute to development. This dichotomous relationship is important, but difficult to maintain. It is argued, in particular, that an accreditation scheme applied similarly

to all institutions may lead to standardization in an environment that requires debate for development.

The second is concern for students. The academic audit model assesses the institutions' own quality assurance, which does not provide students with information on quality at the discipline/programme level in a comparative perspective. The decision to focus on the programme/subject level and to include an accreditation element was prompted by an enquiry on student influence and satisfaction. The report found, among other things, that students' need for information required a different evaluation policy. The National Agency for Higher Education was charged with developing and implementing such a policy.

The third is international legitimacy and student mobility. In particular, the accreditation processes in the United Kingdom and the United States have sometimes caused problems for Swedish graduates to find employment or even to conduct post-graduate studies in those countries with a Swedish undergraduate degree.

The political agenda

There is a domestic debate on accreditation and ranking of higher education institutions and programmes. Several professional organizations (see above under Accreditation on the basis of application), as well as a few political parties have argued that accreditation is a necessary tool for both graduates and employers and that it has to be carried out by „independent" organizations. The question is what is meant by „independent". There is a case for maintaining that neither professional organizations nor a government-financed institution such as the National Agency for Higher Education is fully independent.

Swedish magazines have conducted a few rankings of institutions, a few business schools have been accredited by an external body (Equis), and one school of public administration has undergone a similar process. These activities play a certain role in the debate, but there are no signs that they will develop into a major force (see also under *Sweden, Bologna and GATS*).

There is a national debate on the quality differences between universities and university colleges, and the need to establish that no degree programme is offered which does not provide minimum quality. Not least the universities have maintained that the quality of university colleges is not high enough and that the money spent on keeping them alive would be much better spent on improving the budgets of the large universities. This is to a certain extent also a political debate.

The introduction of the ambitious evaluation/accreditation system is meant to solve some of the problems raised in this debate. It is true that the evaluations/accreditation reports are not the basis of rankings of either institutions or programmes/disciplines. However, they can be used to gather information on the national level on several aspects that might be considered to be significant quality indicators. The reports also give assurance that degrees are not awarded in programmes that do not provide minimum quality. As is pointed out below, there is, however, not consensus on the question of quality indicators.

Consequences for higher education institutions, departments and scholars of the scheme

So far, in a total of about 200 degree programmes, the right to award degrees has been questioned in 14 cases. This has led to a debate and criticism of the method used and the criteria applied. But it has also resulted in hectic activity on the part of the universities concerned, and action plans have been submitted. In no case has the right to award a degree actually been revoked. In a few

cases the universities in question are now discussing whether to close them down themselves. Follow-up studies by the Agency also show that measures have been taken in other fields, too, as a result of the evaluations. In that sense, the scheme can be regarded as successful.

The general structure of the methodology as described in Chapter 2 above was established from the outset. The actual criteria and the implementation were, however, discussed in meetings between representatives of institutions and the National Agency. Similar meeting are still held annually in order to come to agreement about possible revisions. One debate concerns the standards by which programmes and disciplines are judged. University colleges maintain that they are evaluated according to standards applying to large universities and that the particular advantages applying to smaller institutions are not always considered. An example is the better chances to develop cross-disciplinary programmes and interdisciplinary research. The members of the review committees are also most often professors from well-established universities, who may (consciously or unconsciously) apply these standards. This is a consideration which will have to be resolved. It may be added that universities, too, sometimes offer education in small environments without always making use of the possibilities of the extent of their resources.

For higher education institutions the introduction of the scheme has in many cases resulted in additional work, and this is the subject of complaints from many quarters. It could be maintained that institutions ought to have their own systems to assure the quality of their educational provision. Some institutions have concluded that the establishment of the accreditation system has made such measures unnecessary. But all institutions have had to build up structures to support the departments' handling of the self-evaluations, to a smaller or larger extent, and, perhaps more important, to utilize the results of the accreditation/evaluation reports, whether they be negative or positive, and to include these results in their own overall planning. It is well worth noting that this has been done in a number of cases. It has also led to the universities and university colleges being able to compare their own provision with that of other institutions, which has not been possible to do systematically before.

The implementation of the model has in several respects been more problematic for the universities than for the university colleges. As has been discussed above, the latter have become used to similar processes over a period of ten years in addiction to regular academic audits. They have profited from the chance of offering higher degrees, and thus increasing their status in the system. The universities, on the other hand, have become used to being subjected to the audits once every three years, and to few other evaluation activities, unless they have initiated them themselves. And the internal administration of a considerable number of more or less simultaneous accreditation processes including self-evaluations, site-visits and follow-up is probably more cumbersome for them. It comes as no surprise that there is currently a discussion at the universities and some of the university colleges on a simplified model, focusing more on results than on processes.

For the departments the scheme has also meant additional obligations in a situation of diminishing resources per full-time student equivalent. Some departments have complained and demanded extra funding for self-evaluations and other tasks involved. A number of scholars have noted that the extra work involved has increased their workload. On the other hand, it has also been pointed out that the self-evaluations (more than the accreditation reports) have contributed to self-reflection and improvement of the educational programmes. The possibility of comparing their own provision and achievement with that of other departments is also seen as an added bonus.

Consequences for students and other stakeholders

Possibly the scheme has made it easier for students to make an informed choice of where to study. The information about accreditation decisions and quality judgments is publicly available in print and on the Agency' website, which has a special site for this purpose.

Currently, however, the Agency has no knowledge of the extent to which and how students actually use the information. But they have been given an instrument to contribute to the improvement of their own environment and study conditions by participating in self-evaluations.

Projections for the future

It has to be considered that reviews have an impact as soon as an evaluation is initiated, and that when the results are published things may already have changed considerably. The time between the initiation of an accreditation project and the publication of a report is often about 15 months. It is essential, therefore, that higher education institutions and the National Agency publish current data regularly. A projection is that institutions will take this responsibility and that in the future the Agency (or perhaps several organizations) might evaluate and accredit institutions on the basis of their ability to meet this responsibility.

Students (and other stakeholders) have maintained that the information they are given is still not sufficient, and that the reports are too bland. There is on the one hand, then, a pressure to intensify the process, and on the other to conduct the activities in a way that is less onerous for the institutions. Any future changes will have to take this conflict into consideration.

4. Accreditation and evaluation schemes in relation to Europe and globalisation

4.1 Sweden, Bologna and GATS

The accreditation and evaluation schemes in Sweden are clearly influenced by ideas regarding the development of higher education in Europe. As a member of the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), Sweden has participated in several projects concerning these themes. The most recent example is the development of a method for assuring the quality of quality assurance agencies (ENQA Occasional Paper no 4. 2002). The Dutch/Flemish Joint Quality Initiative is also part of the new debate on quality assurance. The European and international character of Swedish higher education is reasonably well developed and the evaluations/accreditations have international perspectives in several ways. The National Agency for Higher Education makes considerable efforts to recruit European members of evaluation teams, although for language reasons they tend mostly to come from other Nordic countries.

Further, the emerging Bologna degree system will no doubt also influence Sweden, although the changes which will have to be introduced are not of the magnitude that they will need special attention in accreditation schemes as is the case in other countries. However, the Ministry of Education is now conducting an enquiry into the degree structure, which may lead to an adaptation to the system now being developed across Europe.

The GATS agreements are being discussed at the moment, but it is unclear what consequence they will have for Swedish higher education and accreditation.

4.2 Sweden and European and international examples of accreditation/evaluatio models

When first developing its evaluation system in the mid-1990's, Sweden made an inventory of various models across Europe (in particular the Netherlands and the United Kingdom were sources of inspiration), the United States and Canada. Also, the European pilot project 1994-96, in which Sweden participated, was of importance.

It is obvious that the models applied in this country are now quite similar to those of many other countries and that they may be described as eclectic. Thus, the use of self-evaluation is a common feature; the peer review team has been used in the evaluation of research across the world for a long period of time. The public report is also common in many European and other nations. The current Swedish model is probably, however, unusual in that it is aims to cover the entire degree system in a comparative perspective. European co-operation within the framework of ENQA has contributed to further co-operation among agencies. This co-operation does not necessarily lead to the adoption of exactly the same types of evaluation models, as can be seen from, for example, the different approaches applied in the Nordic countries. But it does contribute to mutual understanding and partial adoption of the methodology of other countries.

5. Other quality assessment activities in higher education

There are a number of examples of different kinds of assessments carried out locally by the higher education institutions. Besides local quality assessment of subjects or programmes, they may concern for example staff policies, student satisfaction or teacher satisfaction. On the national level there are few other assessment activities within the sphere of higher education. Two examples might be mentioned here.

The first is a national student survey based on questionnaires distributed to a large number of students at all the higher education institutions: Through Student Eyes. It is a survey of various aspects of quality in higher education, including the extent to which higher education promotes learning and personal development. Other characteristics of teaching and learning are also examined, such as critical thinking, analytical capacity, examinations, oral and written fluency and degree of commitment to studies. The survey will be repeated every second year, in order to follow trends and developments. A similar study of the working conditions of academic staff will be published shortly and one on postgraduate students is just being launched.

The second is thematic evaluations of aspects of teaching and learning and conditions in higher education institutions. They concern for example internationalisation, gender equality, social and ethnic diversity and the ways in which these aspects are considered. Such evaluations are carried out in a manner similar to academic audits. Thus, institutions write self-evaluations on the basis of instructions issued by the Agency. An expert review team is appointed by the Agency after consultations with the institutions. They go through the self-evaluations and visit all institutions over a limited period of time, so as to obtain a comparative view of the state of affairs. The team writes a report which is published and discussed at a conference to which institution representatives are invited. On one occasion the three institutions which have been considered to be most successful have been specially commended.

Country Report United Kingdom

John Brennan, Ruth Williams

1. UK Higher Education

There are currently nearly 2 million students studying in the UK's 167 higher education institutions. This reflects substantial growth and diversification during the 1990s. Of the more than 160 institutions, 132 are in England of which 77 are universities, 14 are general colleges and 41 are specialist colleges, e.g. in music or art and design. There are 14 universities in Scotland and four higher education colleges. Wales has a federal university with eight constituent colleges, one other university and four colleges. Northern Ireland has two universities. The UK universities include the former polytechnics and some higher education colleges 'upgraded' to university status in 1992/3. Of the two million students studying in UK higher education in 2000/2001, 1.5 million were undergraduates (mainly bachelors programmes) of whom just over one million studied full-time. Of nearly half a million postgraduate students, 172,000 were full-time and 276,000 were part-time. Over 100,000 of the postgraduate students were from overseas. Participation of the age cohort stands at 43% and the government target is to reach at least 50% by 2012.

The status of UK universities is of private institutions that are funded substantially by public funds. (Only the small University of Buckingham is fully private.) As such they have traditionally enjoyed high degrees of institutional autonomy with funding being the major regulatory tool available to government. Other higher education institutions have traditionally had closer ties with local tiers of government although these were loosened in the late 1980s as part of the more general Thatcherite attack on local government. The post 1992 universities (former polytechnics) have governing bodies that must accord with certain statutory requirements but these, as with the councils of the older pre-1992 universities, are self-reproducing and not subject to any direct state control. Additionally, more than 10% of higher education is conducted in colleges that are formally part of the 'further education' system. This is the terminology used to refer to post-school education below the level of higher education. But many colleges contain a mixture of 'further' and 'higher'.

The main degree types are the 3 or 4 year bachelor's degree (the normal first degree), the masters degree and the PhD. There are differences in Scotland (see below). Masters degrees have typically been of two sorts: the one year 'taught' masters degree and the two years 'research' masters

degree. The doctorate would normally be 3 years following a bachelor's degree although initial registration for a masters would be the normal route to a doctorate. These are all full-time durations and all degrees are also available by part-time study over longer periods. In Scotland, reflecting a different education system at school level and the fact that traditionally Scottish students entered higher education a year younger than those elsewhere in the UK. Initial study of four years to an honours bachelors degree has been the norm although there is also a three year 'ordinary' bachelor's degree. This contrasts with the 'honours' bachelor's degree after three years in other parts of the UK. The honours classification of the UK bachelor's degree is an important element as it is a crucial indicator of academic achievement and subsequent employment opportunities. Recently, considerable emphasis has been given to a new two-year qualification: the Foundation degree. Two year higher education qualifications are not entirely new. Higher National Diplomas and Certificates have existed for a long time as has a two-year Diploma in Higher Education. Most of these qualifications have a vocational emphasis and are meant to provide direct routes into employment as well as entry routes into higher level programmes. An attempt to bring a greater degree of order into the qualifications structure has seen the creation of a 'national qualifications framework' (see section 2.5).

It is important to emphasise that matters of programme type and content are left to the judgements of individual institutions although attempts to introduce some degree of conformity have recently been made with the introduction of 'subject benchmarks'. That said, programmes may be organised along academic subject lines or professional/vocational lines. A very common development during the 1990s was the introduction of modular degree programmes (along with semesterisation) that afforded individual students considerable choice over what to study and the possibility of constructing unique programmes reflecting personal interests and aptitudes. There may be a shift away from this approach following criticisms of its consequences for both the academic and the social aspects of the student experience.

Around 60% of students go straight into the labour market after the bachelor's degree. Many of the rest take postgraduate courses of one sort or another. Particularly common are diplomas linked to entry to professions such as teaching or social work where possession of a diploma is a pre-requisite for entry. Other postgraduate courses (e.g. in areas such as law, accountancy and engineering) are linked to the entry requirements of particular professional and statutory bodies (PSBs). Some would regard these courses as postgraduate 'in time' rather than postgraduate 'in level'. Other postgraduate courses may have less clear labour market links but may still possess considerable vocational relevance, for example courses in information technology or in aspects of business management. There is very little long-term unemployment of graduates although the transition from higher education into suitable graduate-level employment can take a few years for some. The higher education – labour market linkage in the labour market is a looser one in the UK than in many European countries. Many labour market opportunities for graduates are not regulated by specific qualification requirements and employers regard degrees as evidence about the broad levels of ability and competence of the holders rather than a specific occupational competence. That said, there has been considerable emphasis in recent years on making graduates 'more employable' through a variety of curriculum and other initiatives.

As stated above, UK higher education institutions have traditionally enjoyed much greater autonomy from the state that has been common in other parts of Europe. It follows therefore that considerable powers rest with their governing bodies. These differ between the old (pre 1992) and new (post 1992) universities. In the case of the old universities, the constitution of the governing body or council is defined in the university's Charter and Statutes. These differ between institutions. The University Commissioners (a government body) reviewed these around 1990

and produced a model statute. The aim was to remove excessive variation between university governing bodies on matters such as size, powers, membership etc. But its recommendations were only advisory. One important symbolic (and rarely practical) aspect of old university statutes is the role of the 'visitor' (often the Queen). The visitor is the ultimate authority on matters of complaint and appeal by members (staff and students) of the university.

In new universities, the authority of the visitor is vested in the governing body itself, i.e. they must resolve matters of appeal and complaint within the university. (There may of course be ultimate recourse to a court of law.) The powers and composition of the governing bodies of new universities were defined in the 1992 Education Act, building on the 1988 Act which gave the former 'public' local authority run polytechnics the status of independent (private) corporations. A major difference between them and the pre-1992 universities lies in the absence of senates, or bodies of equivalent authority, in the latter. The equivalent advisory boards of new universities ultimately only have advisory status.

However, most people working in higher education would claim that it has been steadily eroded in recent years. The introduction of new national quality assurance arrangements is widely considered to be an important aspect of that erosion. Greater accountability in state funding arrangements would be another. Although high levels of institutional autonomy have been a traditional feature of higher education in the UK, this should not be confused with the autonomy of the individual academic. While this is also generally regarded as high, it is also the case that institutional power is greater than in many HE systems, and the individual professor will be constrained by the collegial, and increasingly managerial, authority of his/her institution.

2. Accreditation and Other Schemes

2.1 Accreditation

'Accreditation' is not a widely used term in UK higher education, being mainly associated with the work of (some of) the professional bodies and (some of) the university arrangements for approving courses in non-university institutions without their own powers to award degrees. Professional bodies evaluate programmes in their particular fields and this leads to an approval by the professional body. This approval relates to the labour market status of the qualification awarded, in particular whether a 'licence to practice' is involved, in whole or in part. It does not relate to the programme itself. Non-university institutions without the power to award their own degrees must seek 'validation' from a university or other degree-awarding institution. Universities are both responsible for the evaluation and the subsequent formal approval of their own degrees. These responsibilities and evaluations by individual universities also extend to the degrees of any higher education colleges or other organisations which prepare students for the degrees of the 'accrediting' or 'validating' (the more commonly used term) university. Thus, university x will review the programmes in college y prior to their formal approval by the university.

Accreditation of Programmes by Professional and Statutory Bodies (PSBs)

Professional and statutory bodies are organisations that approve or recognise specific programmes which lead to a professional qualification or licence to practise. Many such bodies receive their authority from the Crown on the advice of the Privy Council. Accreditation of programmes of

study that lead to a professional title (for example, law, medicine and the various branches of engineering) is carried out by PSBs. Accreditation is intended to ensure that a programme of study provides some, or all, of the competencies needed for professional practice. This leads to an approval decision and recognition that in some cases carries statutory weight. However, it is important to understand that this does not affect the course's right to exist. The university's right to offer courses as it thinks fit is not limited. Qualifications awarded to students on completion of courses not recognised by the appropriate professional body might well be of limited value in the labour market but the situation varies between occupational areas. Such a qualification (i.e. not recognised by the professional body) might well be sought after, especially if it was awarded by a prestigious university.

PSBs have a number of roles which will vary according to the individual PSB. Among the roles are the following:

- specifying the nature of the education and training required for entry to the profession
- assessing required knowledge, competence and values
- ensuring the suitability of providers of professional education and training
- specifying continuous professional development.

PSBs will vary in terms of their involvement in higher education and the accreditation of programmes of study. Most PSBs accredit programmes of study while others, to a much lesser extent, will accredit centres or schools of higher education institutions.

PSBs are concerned with curriculum content of both initial and professional education and training. Many, however, will also take into account the wider institutional environment, such as resources and internal quality assurance processes. Minimum standards are specified at the initial level whereas more detailed specifications are made at the professional level. Over the last decade or so there has been a growing tendency for PSBs to delegate the provision of 'suitable' initial level education to higher education institutions. However, most will undertake initial accreditation visits (while a minority will limit their involvement to desk exercises). Re-accreditation reviews take place from anything between two to 10 years depending on the PSB, although the common time frame is five yearly. Most reviews take the form of a visit and these make use of peer review procedures.

Professional bodies are different from statutory bodies. Statutory bodies (e.g., General Medical Council and English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting) are established by the government, mostly through statute, to exercise control over a particular profession. Unlike professional bodies (e.g., the Royal Institute of British Architects), they do not offer membership to professional practitioners, although some maintain a register of practitioners. Professional bodies are of two sorts: 'those for which membership is compulsory for practice within the profession (such as solicitors) and those where membership is advantageous but where it is possible to practice without being a member of the professional body (such as electrical engineers)'. Professional bodies have authority to withdraw accreditation whereas statutory bodies must recommend to the Privy Council that a qualification from a higher education institution should no longer be registered.

In the recent past, some PSBs conducted their reviews in conjunction with subject review undertaken by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). The recent changes in QAA procedures from subject review to institutional audit (see section 2.5) imply that some PSBs that relied on QAA subject review will now need to involve themselves in their own review visits. What form this will take remains to be seen – the following statement was made in a HEFCE document regarding the new arrangements:

It will be for each PSB to determine, in consultation with higher education institutions and the QAA, whether it undertakes such reviews separately from the arrangements covered by this paper, or as reviews undertaken jointly with the QAA. Opportunities for collaborative arrangements between individual PSBs and the QAA will continue to be explored and encouraged. Where such reviews are conducted in accordance with the QAA method, they could form part of – rather than being undertaken in addition to – other separate reviews.

The approach taken to accreditation varies from PSB to PSB. Two examples are provided below, one for law and the other for engineering.

The Law Society and Bar Council:

The law profession comprises two bodies, one for solicitors (The Law Society) and the other for barristers (The General Council of the Bar). Both are responsible for laying down the qualification regulations governing those seeking to qualify as a solicitor or barrister.

To qualify as a solicitor or barrister, there are two stages: i) the academic stage and ii) the vocational stage[1]. One of the main routes for completing the academic stage is through the law degree where the 'seven foundations of legal knowledge' must be studied and passed. (The other routes are via a non-law degree supplemented by the Common Professional Examination or a Postgraduate Diploma in Law, and the non-graduate route.) The law degree must be of a standard, which has been approved by The Law Society.

The Law Society and Bar Council act jointly in respect of the initial or academic stage of training. In a joint statement of 1999 (effective from 2001), the two bodies will recognise a programme of study as satisfying the requirements of the academic stage, if a number of conditions are met by a higher education institution. These condition include the following

- are adequate learning resources provided
- does the institution have degree awarding powers conferred by the Privy Council
- do the standards of achievement expected of students conform to or exceed the QAA benchmark statement for law
- are the external examiners satisfied by the programme of study.

In addition, information must be supplied by the institution to the professional bodies about the programme to permit a visit to discuss the programme with the institutional representatives, the programme team and the students. Recognition can be withdrawn from a programme that fails to comply with the conditions set out in the joint statement of meets the minimum standards prescribed by QAA.

Engineering Council:

The Engineering Council (EC) promotes and regulates the engineering profession in the UK and is responsible for the Register of Chartered Engineers. The EC is established through a Charter and has Bye-Laws which set out its governance and obligations. Regulation of the profession is achieved through the professional 'Engineering Institutions', of which there are 35 (e.g., civil, mechanical, structural etc). Engineering Institutions undertake assessments of individuals and of education and training programmes in higher education institutions.

The Institutions, subject to the licenses they hold from the EC, may place individuals on the Register. Entry to the Register means satisfying the appropriate membership requirements; these are determined through the EC's Standards and Routes to Registration whose application by the

1 The vocational stage comprises the Bar Vocational Course for barristers and the Legal Practice Course for solicitors. Both are one year full-time or two part-time. The purposes of the courses are to prepare trainees for practical experience in the areas of law and for the more specialised training in the year long 'pupillage' for barristers and the training contract with a firm of solicitors.

Engineering Institutions is regularly audited by the EC. Registration requires a satisfactory educational base (preferably through an accredited course), initial professional development and a professional review. This paper is concerned with the educational base.

To become a Chartered Engineer (CEng) or member of another professional Engineering Institution, engineering students are required to follow a framework of educational preparation – the educational base – as defined by the EC. The requirements for CEng are:

- The four year full-time undergraduate programme (MEng) fully accredited for CEng
- The three year full-time undergraduate programme (BEng) accredited for CEng *plus* an accredited or approved 'Matching Section' (one year full-time or equivalent) to achieve equivalence with MEng graduates.

The Engineering Council normally licenses the Institutions to accredit or approve programmes of study leading to BEng or MEng qualifications. *Accreditation* involves 'periodic quality audit' through a peer review process comprising a panel made up of members of academe and industry. The process involves scrutiny of documentation and a visit to the higher education institution. The panel will focus on entry to the programme, the process of teaching and learning, resources, the assessment strategy and the outcomes achieved. *Approval* processes relate to educational provision which is short of full accreditation such as Matching Sections. Accreditation and approval are undertaken in recognition that the processes rely principally upon the internal quality assurance systems of higher education institutions.

A programme of study should only require one accreditation visit either by one or more professional engineering institution. Amongst other things, the Engineering Institutions are responsible for

- Selecting and training members of accreditation panels
- The constitution of panels
- The form of submission from the higher education institution seeking accreditation of its programme(s)
- The criteria against which an accreditation judgment will be made.

Accreditation judgements are valid for five years when 'further consideration' is required. This can take the form of a formal re-accreditation process, an arrangement for continuing periodic audit and review, or evidence obtained by other bodies – it is up to the higher education institution to decide.

University Accreditation of Higher Education Outside the University

Partnership arrangements between higher education institutions and between higher education institutions and public or private non-academic organisations, both in the UK and overseas, have been developing since the 1980s. They are seen as providing a means of extending opportunities for large numbers of students. Arrangements will vary, but the main partners will be the awarding institution (i.e., with degree awarding powers) and the providing institution or organisation (i.e., providing the higher education programme, but without degree awarding powers). In all cases, accreditation (or validation, terminology varies between universities) is the result of an evaluation process conducted by peer review.

The awarding institution is responsible for the quality and standards of all the awards that are granted in that institution's name. Partnership arrangements are subject to institutional audit by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), the national quality assurance body (see below). The QAA will examine i) the way in which the institution manages the quality of programmes offered in its name by a partner organisation, and ii) the ways it ensures that the aca-

demic standards of its awards gained through study with partner organisations are the same as those gained through study with the institution itself. If the partnership is overseas or is on a large scale, the Agency has in the past undertaken separate reviews to the institutional audit. The QAA's code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education includes a section on 'collaborative provision' – the term used by QAA for such partnerships. The code outlines a set of precepts (key issues) with accompanying guidance. The code is meant to cover various forms of collaborative provision, although the word 'collaborative' is not defined more widely than those arrangements 'involving the provision of programmes of study and the granting of awards and qualifications'. The code comprises 38 precepts arranged around the following headings

- Responsibility for, and equivalence of, academic standards
- Policies, procedures and information
- Selecting a partner organisation
- Written agreements
- Agreements with agents (a third party employed by the awarding institution to facilitate a collaborative arrangement)
- Assuring academic standards and the quality of programmes and awards
- Assessment requirements
- External examining
- Certificates and transcripts
- Information for students
- Publicity and marketing

Arrangements for accreditation vary within the above framework between institutions. Some colleges and organisations receive accreditation from several universities, relating to different programmes. Below are two examples of university accreditation arrangements. The first, the Open University, is the largest but not a typical accreditor. The second, the University of Sussex, is more typical of university accrediting.

Accreditation by the Open University:

An organisation that wishes to offer a programme of study leading to a validated[2] award of the Open University (OU), must first be approved at institutional level as being suitable to do so – this process is called 'accreditation'. To become accredited an organisation must meet a set of principles which cover the following:

- A suitable environment
- Independence of institutional ownership from the exercise of academic authority
- Clear academic structures
- An effective quality assurance system
- A challenging learning environment
- Relationships with the wider academic community.

Organisations will be required to show how they meet these principles through documentary evidence – the 'submission'. Often the validation of a programme of study will be combined with the institutional accreditation. The process involves initial dialogue between the OU and the organisation which may or may not lead to a formal submission for accreditation. Once the formal submission has been received, a visit will be made by a panel of expert advisors with knowledge of quality assurance, senior management and teaching in higher education (these are drawn from

2 'Validation' is the process by which the programmes of study of accredited organisations are approved to lead to an OU award.

across the higher education sector rather than from its own academics). The purpose of the visit is to explore and clarify the information provided in the documentary evidence. A report is produced which, if successful, will recommend accreditation and an Accreditation Agreement will then be negotiated. This agreement will outline responsibility for the validation and review of programmes, the approval of external examiners, maintenance of quality assurance records, and the provision of information to the OU.

All accredited institutions and their programmes are re-accredited or re-validated within six years. However, peer review panels may limit approval to a shorter term – whatever they deem appropriate. Additionally, an interim review to follow up a limited agenda of issues, often carried out by a smaller panel comprising the chair and an officer from the University, is sometimes required.

Accreditation by the University of Sussex:

The University of Sussex has a set of criteria and procedures for partner institutions that wish to seek accredited status. Through accredited status, the University recognises the partner institution's own internal processes for the approval of new programmes of study leading to an award of the University and the review and modification of existing programmes leading to an award. In other words, unlike the OU, the University of Sussex, once accredited status is conferred, will not conduct validation or re-validation events, but will delegate authority for the approval of the curriculum to the partner institution. However, the University will remain responsible for the academic standards of all awards granted in its name.

To become accredited, a partner institution must meet a number of criteria:

- Have a commitment to quality assurance and operate an effective system
- Operate as a self-critical academic community
- Have experience of delivering programmes leading to a University of Sussex award
- Understand and comply with the University's policies and practices
- Have a well developed administrative structure and professional staffing
- Have effective systems for identifying and disseminating good practice
- Have processes and procedures that are subject and responsive to external academic points of reference
- Have the University as its principal validating authority.

To become accredited, partner institutions are required to submit an analytical account outlining the institution's case based on the above criteria. If successful the institution will undergo an audit conducted by the University to establish that the functions for which the institution is seeking accredited status are being discharged effectively. If successful at the end of this stage a visit to the institution will be undertaken by an accreditation panel comprising internal and external members. Once all stages have been completed and accredited status conferred, an agreement in entered into which sets out a number of obligations that the partner institution must fulfil, including the provision of reports of programme approval and review events, nominations and appointments of external examiners, the provision of annual monitoring reports, and an annual statement that the obligations have been discharged properly.

Renewal of accredited status will be at intervals no greater than five years and will comprise a self-evaluation report submitted by the partner institution followed by and accreditation panel visit.

2.2 Approval of Institutions, Degree-Types, Programmes

The institutional 'right to exist within the system' has two elements in the UK context. The first is the right to a university (or university college) title. The second is the right to award degrees. The latter can be separated into the right to award degrees for taught courses and the right to award research degrees. The important point to note is that both rights, once awarded, cannot be removed without a special Act of Parliament. (This is the case in England. There are no such powers referred to in the case of Scotland.) It follows therefore that many universities received these rights quite long ago and according to the procedures in place at the time. But essentially these would be by the authority of the Privy Council (i.e. the Queen in Council) on the advice of the relevant department of Government. (The Privy Council is responsible for the award of royal charters and restricted titles. The powers of certain professional bodies also derive from the Privy Council. See above.) Currently, such advice regarding the award of university titles or degree awarding powers would be made on the basis of very thorough evaluation and review procedures by the national Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education and, in the case of university titles, an evaluation of the financial stability of the institution by the relevant higher education funding council. (Separate councils exist for England, Scotland and Wales.)

Applications are considered against criteria agreed between the QAA and government, and are applicable throughout the UK. The criteria cover such issues as governance and management, quality assurance, administrative systems, and other specific criteria relating to the type of application (i.e., taught or research degree awarding powers or university title). Applications for degree awarding powers or a university title can only be made if an institution is able to demonstrate that its provision or institutional audit has not been subject to an unsatisfactory outcome as a result of a review by the quality assurance body in the last five years (see below for details of these processes). The 2003 Government 'White Paper' on *The future of higher education* has indicated that the criteria for degree awarding powers will be examined and modernised to reflect the increasing diversity of higher education, although 'there will be no relaxation of the high standards that have to be reached before taught degree awarding powers are granted'.

It should be noted that recent applications for the award of a university title have mostly ended in failure. For example, the Bolton Institute, a large well-established institution in the north-west of the country already possessing degree-awarding powers, had its application for a university title turned down in 2001 following a special institutional audit by the QAA. The conclusions of the report, and therefore the reasons why the Institute was turned down, are not public. The most recent successful application for the award of a university title was the University of Gloucestershire in 2001. Again, the report is not a public document.

At the level of degrees and programmes, approval is the responsibility of the individual university. Procedures vary but are subject to periodic audit by the QAA. Procedures include arrangements for regular monitoring and periodic review, often involve external inputs. But they are formally a matter for the individual university.

2.3 Approval Outside the Accreditation Scheme

There are hardly any examples of this in the UK case. The Archbishop of Canterbury is one of a small number of bodies and individuals who have a traditional authority to award certain specific degrees. Concerns about 'bogus degrees' surfaced at the end of the 1980s and the government department (DfES) issued 'recognised and listed body orders' to attempt to regulate new providers.

A specific case was the creation of an American institution – now Richmond College – which attempted to establish itself as Richmond University. This was prevented – it would have been acceptable if there had been a parent Richmond University in the USA. The solution was for the institution to be renamed Richmond College and to seek accreditation from the UK Open University, whose degree awarding powers were used for Richmond students. This example illustrates the UK arrangement well. Anyone can establish a college or institute. But the title of university is protected as is the authority to award degrees.

2.4 Evaluation schemes: The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

Evaluation of universities and other institutions with degree awarding powers is the responsibility of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). It was created in 1997. The role of the QAA is 'to promote public confidence that quality of provision and standards of awards in higher education are being safeguarded and enhanced' (document on the QAA website: The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education: an introduction). Consistent with the UK emphasis upon institutional autonomy, the focus of QAA evaluation is the way in which an institution safeguards and ensures quality and standards. It is not attempting to make a direct judgement about quality or standards. The Agency will express varying degrees of 'confidence' in the institution and although such judgements have no formal status for the recognition of the institution or its programmes, they may affect the institution's reputation and the funding decisions of the relevant higher education funding councils. The QAA covers the whole of the UK although it works on behalf of different national higher education funding councils for England, Scotland and Wales and there are some differences in procedures between the three countries.

The QAA is formally 'owned' by the higher education institutions, who pay a subscription, but much of its funding and 'powers' are effectively delegated to it by the higher education funding councils. The Governing Body of the QAA has a 'controlling' external (non HE) membership in the majority. Thus, the QAA is intended to be independent although its owners could theoretically decide to close it down. The QAA has around 50 staff. Its reviewers ('auditors') are drawn from higher education institutions and receive training from the Agency. QAA reports are published and therefore have potential to influence all 'customers' and stakeholders. However, generally they have received little attention outside the higher education institution concerned, except for a few celebrated critical cases. New arrangements being introduced in 2003 place greater emphasis on the publication of information on quality and standards. Although this will be the responsibility of individual higher education institutions, the QAA will have a role in 'auditing' the information provided.

The main procedures operated by the QAA are institutional audit, qualifications frameworks, subject benchmark statements, programme specifications and codes of practice.

2.5 Institutional Audit

The new approach, introduced in 2003, focuses on institutional audit – a review of the way in which an institution safeguards and ensures quality and standards. Where areas of concern are identified, the audit will be followed up by reviews at subject level.

In addition, institutions are now expected to collect and make publicly available information about the quality and standards of their programmes. This includes summaries of external examiners' reports, results of student feedback surveys, internal programme reviews and so on.

Audit aims to examine three areas:

- The effectiveness of institutions' internal quality assurance processes and with reference to the QAA's Code of Practice (see below)
- The accuracy, completeness and reliability of the information published about the quality and standards of its programmes, and with reference to programme specifications (see below)
- Examples of the institutions' internal quality assurance processes in operation at programme level or across the institution as a whole (covering some 10% of the institution's provision), and with reference to the qualifications frameworks, the Code of Practice and subject benchmark statements (see below).

The audit visit normally lasts about five working days and covers the overall management of an institution's quality and standards and more specific areas of enquiry. In particular, the audit will focus of the following aspects relating to quality and standards:

- Publicly available information
- Internal systems for the management of information
- Internal reviews and their outcomes
- Students' experiences as learners
- The academic standards expected and achieved by students
- The use made of the qualifications framework, the Codes of Practice, subject benchmark statements and programme specifications (see below)
- The quality assurance of teaching staff

Judgements will be made by audit teams on the confidence in the 'soundness of the institutions management of the quality of its programmes and the academic standards of its awards' and the reliance placed on the 'accuracy, integrity completeness and frankness of the information that an institution publishes' about its programmes and awards. Auditors will be required to report any areas of concern, make recommendations for further consideration by the institution, and identify areas where a full subject review is necessary or where an action plan needs to be implemented by the institution.

After completion of the audit and the publication of the report, the Agency will follow-up areas of weakness through institutional progress reports. As with previous approaches to reviewing quality and standards at subject level, in extreme unsatisfactory cases, the Agency will revisit an institution; if again the outcome is unsatisfactory the Higher Education Funding Council for England would withdraw its funding (although there has yet to be case where this has occurred).

In helping to define clear and specific standards for higher education institutions, the QAA has established a number of points of reference for reviews and public information. These are the qualifications frameworks, subject benchmark statements, programme specifications and the Code of Practice.

2.6 Qualifications Frameworks

The frameworks – for England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and a parallel one for Scotland – have been designed to provide an easier understanding of higher education qualifications by ensuring a consistent use of qualification titles. The frameworks include qualifications such as

Bachelors degree with Honours, Masters and Doctorate degrees and describe the achievements and attributes represented by these main titles. The frameworks are intended to help students and employers understand the meaning and level of qualifications. They also aim to provide public assurance that qualifications bearing similar titles represent similar levels of achievement.

2.7 Subject Benchmark Statements

Subject benchmark statements set out expectations about standards of Bachelors degrees with honours in broad subject areas. They are intended to be an explicit statement of the conceptual framework that gives a discipline its coherence and identity. They define what can be expected of a graduate in terms of the knowledge, skills and other attributes needed to develop understanding in the subject. They are benchmarks of the level of intellectual demand and challenge represented by an honours degree in the subject area concerned. Benchmark statements are intended to help higher education institutions when they design and approve programmes and to help external examiners and academic reviewers to verify and compare standards. They also provide information for students and employers. However, benchmarks are not intended to be prescriptive. Institutions are merely required to take them into account in designing their programmes.

2.8 Programme Specifications

Programme specifications are standard sets of information that each institution provides about its programmes. Each specification describes what knowledge, understanding, skills and other attributes a student will have developed on successfully completing a specific programme. It provides information about teaching and learning methods, assessment, and career opportunities on completion. Specifications will also explain how a particular programme relates to the qualifications framework. In providing this information, it is intended that prospective students should be able to make comparisons and informed choices about the programmes they wish to study. Programme specifications also provide useful information for recruiters of graduates.

Code of Practice:

The *Code of practice* sets out good practice relating to the management of academic quality and standards. The *Code of practice* comprises ‘precepts or principles’ that institutions should demonstrate, together with guidance on how they might meet these precepts. The Code to date covers:

- postgraduate research programmes
- collaborative provision
- students with disabilities
- external examining
- academic appeals and student complaints on academic matters
- assessment of students
- programme approval, monitoring and review
- career education, information and guidance
- placement learning
- recruitment and admissions.

2.9 Other Evaluation Schemes

Internal review. Most evaluation is actually done within institutions on the authority of the institutions. Most have arrangements for the regular review of departments or programmes, usually involving inputs from external peers. These reviews are generally seen as part of quality enhancement activities although if major concerns arise out of a particular review, actions would probably be taken by the institution and these could include the closure of a department or programme. Until 2001, reviews at subject level were carried out by the QAA. These led to published gradings with reputational implications for the institutions and, in extremis, could lead to the withdrawal of funding by the funding council. This external review process has now been replaced by reliance on institutional review procedures and the publication of information based on them. From time to time, most institutions also review central services such as library and student support services.

External examining. Part of internal review procedures, external examining constitutes the most traditional aspect of quality assurance in UK higher education. Institutions appoint examiners from other higher education institutions to oversee the examining and the award of degrees on specific programmes. External examiners typically read a sample of the students' assessed work and provide written comments on the standards of achievement and the consistency of internal marking. They will normally attend the examination board within the awarding institution that determines the award of degrees on the particular programme. As part of the new quality assurance arrangements, external examiner reports (or extracts/summaries of them) will be published by the higher education institution.

Access to Higher Education courses are provided by further education colleges and other providers, including some universities. These courses are aimed at mature students, normally lacking formal entry qualifications, from under-represented groups to help them progress to higher education. The QAA manages the scheme that recognises these courses. Consortia are established who are responsible for developing, validating and reviewing Access to Higher Education courses. These are called Authorised Validating Agencies (AVAs). The QAA 'licenses' the AVAs to recognise courses and to issue awards to successful students.

Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) Public funding for research in higher education institutions is provided through the 'dual support' system that comprises two streams of funding:

- Funding for the research infrastructure (e.g., staff salaries, premises, computing and library costs) from the UK funding bodies
- Funding for the costs of individual research projects from the research councils.

The RAE is a means of rating the quality of research in higher education institutions and distributing the funding for the research infrastructure selectively across higher education institutions. The RAE, as well as being a tool for selectively distributing research funds, is used to promote high quality – the research submitted by higher education institutions is assessed against a benchmark of international excellence for each subject concerned. Since 1986 the process has been developed and refined. The process itself operates through peer review and subject 'experts' make up the panels for each of the 69 'units of assessment' (subject disciplines). Experts are nominated by research associations, learned societies, PSBs and other organisations, and selected by the funding councils.

Higher education institutions are able to make submissions in as many subjects as they choose. The submissions comprise information about research active staff and details of research output for these staff (up to four items – books, papers, journals – can be submitted for each researcher). Each panel defines its own criteria for assessing submissions and these are published in

advance. Panels do not visit institutions. Each submission is assessed and awarded a quality rating on a seven point scale ranging from 5* (quality that equates to attainable levels of international excellence in more than half of the research activity submitted and attainable levels of national excellence in the remainder) to 1 (quality that equates to attainable levels of national excellence in none, or virtually none, of the research activity submitted. Upon completion of the panels' work, the outcomes are published to provide public information on the quality of research in UK higher education institutions.

Financial audit Institutions also undergo systems of financial audit by the higher education funding councils. Although no approval decisions hang on the results, the continued flow of government money ultimately does.

3. Analysis

3.1 Overview

Until a Government Act in 1988, reference was often made to the 'public sector' of higher education in the UK. This referred to local authority run colleges and polytechnics and contrasted with the 'private sector' of the universities. Today it is formally possible to see virtually all UK higher education institutions as private, albeit substantially dependent on 'public' funding. (The OECD refers to UK universities as 'state funded private institutions'.)

The UK tradition has been to preserve an arms-length relationship between higher education and government in the interests of university autonomy and academic freedom. (And the separation of government from state – in the form of the Sovereign – is a further mechanism of protection of universities from political interference.) While this formal autonomy may perhaps account for the sometimes high levels of belligerence from individual vice chancellors, it might be argued that the autonomy is more apparent than real. Overall, higher education institutions are dependent on various government monies for about 80% of their funding. Only a few receive more than 50% of their funding from other sources. In many ways, it has been through its various funding mechanisms and incentives that UK government has attempted to steer and control higher education.

But it is also the case that there is probably consensus that central control should be limited. Much is made of control and steerage through the market. With well over 100 separate institutions and a tradition of students leaving home to study, institutional competition exists at quite high levels. Thus, evaluation judgements that impact upon the reputation of the institutions can have great effect on the institution's competitive position.

In summary, emphasis in the UK is placed upon the maintenance of sound, competent, well-managed institutions. The strength of university managements and administrations should be noted in the UK case with a growing emphasis upon responsiveness to markets and the role of public information to inform these markets. Evaluation is seen by Government as having an increasingly important role to play in providing information for higher education's markets.

3.2 Recent History

Quality assurance arrangements for higher education have been extremely unstable since the early 1990s. They have been criticised by higher education leaders, been under pressure from politicians and been generally unpopular with most academics. They have changed several times over this period. The main phases are described briefly below.

The 'ancien regime'

At the start of the 1990s, the only external system of quality assurance in place in the universities was that of external examining. This was a voluntary self-regulatory arrangement to be found across the whole of higher education with the one exception of the University of Oxford. External examiners were responsible to the higher education institution whose courses they were examining. Politicians had been making it clear that they did not regard this system as sufficiently rigorous, especially as far more extensive national systems existed for the other sector of higher education, by now the larger, i.e. the polytechnics and colleges. The general perception was that this was all a part of the general Thatcherite attack on the public sector in general and on the professions in particular. Thus, it was regarded as a very specific problem to Britain.

The polytechnics and colleges, as well as having external examiners, were subject to the validation and accreditation requirements of the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA), a chartered body set up in 1964 to ensure the standards of academic awards in higher education outside the universities. The CNAA, with its degree-awarding powers, had considerable authority over the polytechnics and colleges which it exercised through linked peer review processes of institutional and programme review. This was becoming increasingly unpopular with the large and mature institutions that now comprised the 'public sector' of higher education. On the other hand, the Thatcher Government did not regard this essentially academic body as sufficiently tough on the institutions for which it was responsible. A celebrated charge of 'Marxist bias' in the teaching of sociology in one of the polytechnics saw the Government turn to its preferred instrument of quality scrutiny – Her Majesty's Inspectors. The Inspectorate operated in all public sector educational institutions, from schools to polytechnics. But at the end of the 1980s, the Government transformed their predominantly advisory role into a genuinely inspectorial one, involving the observation of teaching and with potential consequences for institutional funding.

Recognising their exposed position in comparison to the surfeit of regulation in the polytechnics and colleges, the universities' representative body, the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (CVCP), set up its own national quality assurance system administered by a new body, the Academic Audit Unit. This was a voluntary system under which universities 'invited' the AAU to audit their internal arrangements for ensuring quality and standards. This it did through a peer review process of visits to universities. The autonomy of each individual university was to be jealously safeguarded. There was to be no question of the AAU making judgements of what the quality and standards of universities actually were. If the aim of the CVCP was to prevent the Government introducing its own evaluation system for universities, it must be judged a failure. It did however introduce the concept of academic audit into higher education with long-term consequences for the approach to evaluation in the UK.

Dual evaluations in a unitary higher education system

In 1992, the Government abolished the old higher education 'binary line', awarding university titles to all of the polytechnics, some of the larger higher education colleges and the so-called 'central institutions' in Scotland. However, in setting up a unitary system of higher education, the government established a dual system of evaluation. The AAU was transformed into the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC), a body owned by the institutions through the CVCP and the equivalent body for the higher education colleges – the Standing Conference of Principals (SCOP). It continued the process of audit (now called 'quality audit') and took on some of the quality enhancement functions of the CNAA. The latter was closed down although some national functions for research and development and an accreditation service for non-university institutions were transferred to the Open University. In parallel to the institutionally owned HEQC, the Government established quality assessment committees in each of the national higher education funding councils. These took over the methods and many of the staff of the Inspectorate to introduce a system of teaching quality assessment at subject level across all higher education institutions. The funding councils had, and still have, a statutory responsibility for the assessment of higher education quality.

Thus, for the rest of the decade, higher education institutions were subject to the external audit of their quality assurance procedures by the HEQC – with visits approximately every five years – and the assessment of their teaching on a subject-by-subject basis by the funding council assessors. The latter process continued to be largely based on the observation of teaching practice and resulted in public gradings of the quality of teaching in each institution. Both audit and assessment made use of peer review, auditors/assessors being drawn from higher education institutions and trained in the appropriate methods by the respective agencies. The external examining system continued as did professional accreditation and research assessment. The much-vaunted autonomy of UK universities was looking a bit thin!

A new agency

The dual arrangements for audit and assessment were extremely unpopular in higher education. They took up a lot of time and resource during a period when higher education was expanding fast and the unit of resource was plunging. Assessment in particular, with its observation of teaching and its numerical gradings, was the cause of considerable tensions within institutions even though high grades were celebrated and used extensively in institutional publicity materials.

A joint review of the arrangements was made by the funding councils and the CVCP and this led to the creation in 1997 of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. Initially, the new agency continued to operate the dual procedures of institutional-level audit and subject-level assessment (now called subject review and with much less emphasis on the observation of teaching). It was claimed that their operation by a single body would be more efficient and would make fewer demands on the institutions. Despite several tinkerings with the assessment methodologies, the arrangements remained unpopular. Moreover, public and political attention was shifting away from process to outcome and calls were made for evaluation processes that would be more effective in the enhancement of quality. The fact that subject review had uncovered hardly any cases of really poor quality was also used by its opponents to argue that it was an onerous and unnecessary burden.

In a wider context, the Labour Government was continuing its Conservative predecessor's policies of introducing greater competition and consumer choice into the public sector. Conse-

quently, it was not keen to see the removal of subject review with its gradings and consequent league tables of institutions, essential in the view of New Labour enthusiasts to inform markets, ensure competition and hence efficiency and quality improvement. If then evaluation had to produce information to inform the public, it was clear that subject review would need to be replaced by something that would also deliver consumer information. A number of influential vice-chancellors argued that institutions could do this for themselves by publishing selective extracts from the information that they held about themselves. A committee was established to consider this proposition and to make recommendations for the kinds of information to be published. The Committee's report was accepted by the funding councils and the Government and its recommendations are in the process of implementation. Subject review is being run down, replaced for an interim period by review-style 'disciplinary engagements' but lacking the controversial gradings aspect. However, institutions are expected to operate their own internal systems of review and these should include some external peer input. Information from these reviews, from external examiners and from student feedback questionnaires are among the sources of institutional data that higher education institutions are expected to publish on the web-sites.

3.3 Whose victory?

This brief history is necessary to record in order to understand why evaluation has been subject to so much controversy in UK higher education in recent years. To a considerable extent it can be seen as a long running battle between several governments and university leaderships. The generals have been the higher education funding councils on the one hand and the universities' representative bodies (the CVCP rebranded itself as Universities UK a few years ago) and the front-line troops have been the thousands of academic staff who have spent much time evaluating each other. In what sense then is it possible to talk about victory or defeat in this battle? On the one hand the hated teaching quality assessments have gone. On the other, external evaluation is still present and a new system, as yet untried, will expose possibly even more of the inner workings of higher education institutions to public scrutiny.

If a victory is to be claimed, it probably has to go to the government side. Given the starting point of the vice chancellors of opposition to almost any form of external evaluation, the present arrangements represent a pretty comprehensive system of external scrutiny. The fact that much of the evaluative work will be done by the institutions themselves should not disguise the reality that it is being externally driven, and to an agenda dictated by government. Moreover, the notion that there should be some form of externally monitored quality assurance is now almost universally accepted by academics.

This agenda has been one of exerting control over a fast-growing and expensive area of the public sector. The traditions of relative (and symbolic) autonomy of universities in the UK go a long way to explaining why governments wanted to exert control and why universities wanted to resist it. Control mechanisms common elsewhere in Europe – e.g. over university curricula, over staffing – were entirely absent in the UK. Evaluation (or quality assurance as the more generally used term in the UK) became a principal tool for the state to acquire more control and it was seen as such by the universities.

Evaluation – especially by state controlled bodies – was objected to in principle, because it resulted in gradings and rankings, and because it was seen as consuming vast amounts of time and resource. Those operating the various evaluation procedures would stress the quality improvement potential of evaluation and while much was undoubtedly changed for the better within in-

stitutions as a result of evaluation, it was largely out of sight from the generals fighting the battle. Insofar as a quality improvement function was acknowledged, it was felt to be something which institutions could achieve for themselves much more effectively than through the efforts of an external body.

3.4 Consequences

Away from the noise of battle, the twin procedures of institutional audit and subject assessment have produced many changes in higher education institutions. Especially for the older pre-1992 universities, they were responsible for the establishment of internal quality assurance procedures which formalised and standardised practices which, where they had existed at all, had been informal and local rather than systematic and institution-wide. These practices would include the better documentation of courses and the requirements made of students, new monitoring and review arrangements, more systematic data collection and analysis (including student performance and feedback data), action plans to chart the effectiveness of changes made. New 'quality' committees were established as were specialist administrative units to support their work. Managers at all levels across the institutions found themselves with new responsibilities for quality and evaluation.

At the level of individual teachers, some counter pressure to the dictates of research assessment has been achieved. External evaluation has pushed teaching up the agenda of academic departments. Teaching and learning have been discussed by staff where previously they had been the private business of individuals. Staff appraisal and development systems have looked at teaching in a more systematic way. Related national developments such as the creation of an Institute for Learning and Teaching and the subject-focused Learning and Teaching Support Networks have given further impetus to looking at the teaching function in higher education.

How far all of this has really improved the learning experiences of students is less clear. There is probably rather less really poor teaching than had existed previously. Student views are probably taken more into account although a lack of action on student feedback is a common complaint. Courses are better documented and objectives and expectations more clear. Whether these improvements compensate for the decline in resources for teaching is another matter, but given that the latter would have happened anyway these changes were probably even more necessary.

Looking outside the institutions towards other stakeholders and society in general, the effects of the evaluation systems have probably been to reinforce the already strong sense of stratification of higher education institutions in the UK. The gradings of subject assessment and research assessment have been used to create league tables of institutions. While these have mainly reinforced existing reputational hierarchies, they have given added credence to them. In a sense the post-1992 'unitary' system has become more stratified than the old 'binary' system (of universities and polytechnics). It remains to be seen whether plans to publish even more comparative data on institutions will further reinforce these hierarchies or challenge them, or at least give recognition to diversity of type and function.

An important claim for external evaluation systems was that they were essential for continued government support for higher education and that funding settlements would be in part dependent on the higher education sector having effective mechanisms of accountability for the vast sums of public money it consumed. It is difficult to really test this claim although it may be noted that the recent Government strategy announcement on higher education was financially quite generous.

It should be noted that in the context of the larger comparative project, activities that can properly be called accreditation have been left largely untouched by the controversies and changes to national evaluation arrangements. Professional bodies have continued to accredit programmes using mechanisms broadly recognisable to those which have existed for decades. Various attempts to better integrate their procedures with those of the QAA and its predecessors do not appear to have achieved a lot. (Professional bodies constitute another largely independent actor in the evaluation scene and have had no overwhelming interest in seeing their autonomy and authority diminished by closer collaboration with other actors.) University accreditation of other institutions and programmes has been affected by QAA guidelines and its reviews of 'collaborative provision'. These have not been particularly controversial although in the case of international partnerships they may have limited the entrepreneurial zeal of certain universities.

4. International

There has been little apparent influence of European or wider international developments on accreditation and evaluation procedures in the UK. Rather, the influence has been seen in the other direction with UK models exported to other countries (largely to former colonies). Insofar as key actors have looked outside the UK for inspiration, it has been towards the US or Australia rather than across the English Channel to the rest of Europe. The recent Government strategy paper makes virtually no reference to Bologna and European issues although references abound to notions of 'world class' and 'international excellence'.

That said, individuals from UK quality agencies are active in the various international forums to do with accreditation and evaluation. But while there may be an awareness of the international issues and contexts, it is rarely visible in domestic debates.

The one area where there has been international activity has been with regards to the overseas collaborations of UK higher education institutions. These come within the remit of the QAA and are audited in quite rigorous ways. The basic principle has been that quality and standards should be equal to the institution's UK provision. This is an issue of ongoing concern and debate, especially with regard to the extent to which UK institutions have the mechanisms to discharge their responsibilities when working with other institutions in other jurisdictions. As more and more countries establish their own accreditation or evaluation systems, the potential for a clash of regulatory procedures becomes more likely. It may be that this will make the British more interested in a possible harmonisation of evaluation practices but there are few signs of this to date.

International issues are also of interest to professional bodies and there are signs of international accreditation/evaluation developments in several fields. A European system for the review of business and management programmes has been in existence for some time (EQUIS – European Quality Improvement System). As at November 2002, 12 UK business schools have been awarded the European Quality label.

5. Other Quality Assessment Activities

Staff appraisal systems have been in existence in UK universities for some years now. They differ to some extent between institutions but tend to emphasise a staff development function. They do

however also contribute to promotion decisions. (They generally take the form of an annual interview with a senior colleague which reviews the achievements and difficulties of the last year and sets objectives and targets for the next.)

They do not relate directly to other evaluation or quality assessment activities other than in the sense that any recent evaluation experiences would probably be discussed during the annual interview. The introduction of systematic staff appraisal arrangements was at the prompting of Government in return for a more favourable funding settlement.