



*Documentos Humboldt 2*

**ACCREDITATION AND QUALITY.  
A NEW STRATEGY FOR THE EUROPEAN  
UNIVERSITY?**

Abril 2003



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## **PRESENTATION**

*Santiago García Echevarría, President of the  
Asociación Alexander von Humboldt en España*

Rector of the University of Alcalá,  
Rectors of the Universities of Paderborn and  
Osnabrück,  
Vice-Rectors,  
Distinguished professors and lecturers,  
Friends and colleagues:

May I first thank the Rector of our University of Alcalá for his customary welcome and magnificent hospitality; and, secondly, I would like to extend to all of you here today our warmest welcome to this 2<sup>nd</sup> Humboldt Kolleg. Thank you.

To begin with, I would like to give a brief overview of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and of its Association in Spain. The Alexander von Humboldt Foundation brings together 23,000 scientists from all the areas of knowledge and is present in virtually all the countries of the world. Almost fifty of its members are Nobel prize-

winners. Spain, through its Association with a membership of more than 200 Humboldt scholars from the widest range of scientific institutions, is working to integrate both scientists and institutions within these networks of knowledge.

The creation of this Alexander von Humboldt Foundation knowledge network, covering all areas of science and with its great interdisciplinary and intercultural richness, is organized around more than eighty Scientific Associations in more than sixty countries. These associations encourage the sharing of knowledge and are building a scientific world characterised by those humanistic values which dominate Humboldt thinking and which form the necessary basis for generating the process of sharing knowledge and experience with others.

Within the framework of such a philosophy, both open and generous, are embedded these activities of the Humboldt Kolleg, in a search for open and dynamic international contacts in areas which transcend countries, cultures and spheres of knowledge.

The topic of our discussion, Accreditation and Quality, decided upon a year ago, has today emerged as one of the basic considerations which can facilitate a new vision of the University, changing from the institution itself as the point of orientation to knowledge as the key to the future of the University and its relationship with Society.

It is interesting to note that today in Dublin an identical meeting on the same topic is taking place. Suddenly in Europe this search for the long sought after “common European knowledge area” has accelerated and it is clear that Europe, the Europe of knowledge, is starting to awaken to this priority after decades of very slow progress. Without such a powerful and dynamic “common area of knowledge” Europe cannot provide solutions to the deteriorating levels of scientific and technological innovation and, consequently, has no answer to current social and economic challenges.

The importance of sharing knowledge, both in research and teaching, within Europe requires open areas which enable knowledge to provide answers to the requirement for innovation in order to improve the well-being of its peoples and the European contribution, in ethics, the economy and society, to the world. This is the future.

Such an orientation towards knowledge represents an enormous challenge for all scientific, business, social and political institutions in order that Society may give high priority to innovation, and therefore knowledge, in its scheme of values.

This Humboldt Kolleg will discuss scientific institutions, primarily in the university teaching-research sphere, within the European area. By doing so this will open perspectives and people to the great commitment of sharing knowledge in

order to achieve that wisdom on which the progress and development of our societies depends.

Such is the aim of this Humboldt Kolleg, sharing with you here in the University of Alcalá all available knowledge in the field of university development, and I am sure that the interest and effort you have shown by being with us here today will result in a fruitful debate, open and enriching, for all of us.

May I conclude by welcoming our speakers: Prof. Weber and Prof. Künzel from Germany, Prof. Vroeijenstign from the Netherlands, Prof. Cowen from the United Kingdom and Prof. Perez from France, all of whom having so generously accepted the challenge of this invitation. We are confident that this first meeting will establish a basis of trust for fruitful cooperation in the near future.

Welcome and thank you.



**OPENING ADDRESS BY THE RECTOR  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ALCALÁ  
Prof.Dr. Virgilio Zapatero**

Fellow Rectors, Vice-Rectors, educationalists,  
friends and colleagues:

Speaking on behalf of the University of Alcalá, just a few words to open this conference, hosted by the University and organised by the Asociación von Humboldt, which I congratulate in advance for such an excellent initiative. Our most recent Nobel prize-winner described the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a kind of enormous firing squad permanently on active service. A firing squad which, throughout the century, was inspired by movements such as fascism, Stalinism and the most savage nationalisms. Nor has the 21<sup>st</sup> century begun much better, what with a war which has destroyed international legality, produced innocent victims, bankrupted internal consensus in many countries and put in danger the European project by dividing the member states of the European Union. Under such circumstances, with the European Union unfortunately very divided, it might seem an

extravagance to talk of the European University and of a process of accreditation towards a Europe of knowledge. However, I believe that now more than ever there is a need to consolidate and deepen the European project for now more than ever we need a Europe united in its stand against the new barbarians. Today we need the “old Europe” with its old voices and with, what I believe to be, its eternal values, rooted fundamentally in reason. This Europe began to emerge during the 14<sup>th</sup> century with the first humanists, began to consolidate after the Enlightenment and culminated in our great thinkers, such as Kant and including, of course, Humboldt. They constructed a project based on two principles: knowledge and ethics or, as that great Spaniard Giner de los Ríos would say, science and conscience.

I believe the best way to confront the crisis which Europe is living through today is to vindicate the Europe of knowledge, the Europe of reason and the Europe of ethical principles. We must put our shoulders to the wheel, each of us in our own areas, and create a strong region whose voice is heard loudly and with reason as the objective of this European project – reason and also ethics.

Since 1997, with the convention on the recognition of Higher Education qualifications in the European region, which emerged within the framework of UNESCO, the Council of Europe and especially since the Bologna Declaration of 1999, a debate

has taken place on the role which Higher Education should play in the knowledge society and in the Europe of the future. I believe it is true, as was said in Lisbon in 2002, that if Europe wishes its economy to be based on knowledge in order for it to be the most competitive in the world and to have the capacity for sustainable economic growth, with better occupations and greater social cohesion, then it is necessary to construct an area for Higher Education, an area for the European University.

I would like to see all these initiatives reflected in the future European Union Constitution and education not regarded as a subsidiary matter, as unfortunately can often happen, or ending up as something merely complementary. We may make great declarations and organise important meetings, but if afterwards these do not reflect the role that Higher Education must play in the European Union then we will have advanced very little.

Both the documents approved by the European Commission and the framework document published by our own Government in that same month, February of this year, propose a profound reflection on the future of the University. But in my opinion there are many pitfalls which European universities must avoid if they are to achieve this objective: a stronger Europe, which is what I believe our world needs. This framework document lists some of these pitfalls; I will refer briefly to three:

**How to guarantee sufficient resources in the universities and that these are used efficiently.**

The document recognises that the resources are insufficient. In contrast with the 2.3% of GDP invested in Higher Education by the United States, our most direct competitor, the European Union apportions scarcely 1.2% of its GDP. This may well be one of the reasons for the enormous power of attraction exercised by the American Higher Education system in contrast with our own universities. Very simply, they spend much more. For that reason I believe we must continue to insist that what was promised at the European Council meeting in Barcelona in 2002 is put into practice: that Europe invests at least 3% of its GDP in Higher Education. We need better financing if we are to seriously confront the challenge posed by the American university system and we can achieve this by increasing both public and private financing and by establishing a much better balanced mix of public and private.

**Coordination between teaching and research**

Virtually all of the 4000 universities in Europe have adopted the model of Alexander von Humboldt in linking teaching with research. The possibility of teaching without research is not accepted and even less acceptable are researchers

who are not also lecturers. The university ideal is to be both lecturer and researcher. 34% of the research in Europe takes place in universities and in our country, Spain, the figure is 55%. In the American system, in contrast, not all universities carry out research. Of the 4000 universities and associated centres in the United States only 500 award doctorates and only 125 are research centres. Their system is clearly very different from ours. But which system is better? What can we learn from the American experience? To what extent can we expand or improve our research system? Are teaching and research compatible? Can we reduce the teaching load in our universities to create more time for research? All of these questions need to be answered, but it must be borne in mind that the American system requires more teaching staff and therefore greater resources. Are the authorities prepared to increase university financing?

### **Professionalization of university management**

I doubt whether universities can be more competitive and develop strongly unless they have in place a much more efficient system of administration. Our university administration is very weak with few resources and on many occasions it is the teaching staff who have to perform management functions – functions which are not appropriate for us and are wasteful for the system. I believe that without radical reform of

university administration, without the establishment of a much stronger and more professional corps of administrators, it will be difficult to face the challenges presented by the European Union.

Universities in Europe need radical reform and I am pleased that both the European Commission and the Government of Spain have stated decisively that this is both possible and necessary. It was Albert Gisman who, in 1991, published *The rhetoric of intransigence* in which he presented a shrewd analysis of the types of argument used to oppose, and to oppose ourselves, to any reform. These are what he calls *reactionary arguments* because for every action there is a reaction.

Such intransigent arguments in the face of any change or reform are, as Gisman states, an *argument of perversity*: any attempt to improve a situation, any attempt at reform, will lead to a worsening of the situation. This is the first argument and when it fails or cannot be applied then the *argument of futility* is employed: this reform is purely cosmetic and at the end things will go on just as before. If the futility argument fails then the *argument of risk* is resorted to: this proposed reform will produce worse effects and results and its costs will be greater than its benefits.

These arguments of perversity, futility and risk are reactionary arguments, in a political sense,

because they are the reaction to any action – that is, in the face of reform. And I believe that the proposed reform – towards a Europe of knowledge, a European University, a university with criteria of harmonisation, a university which is much stronger and much more robust – will have more positive than negative effects, will not be merely a cosmetic reform and its benefits will outweigh the costs. And all of this can be achieved given at least two conditions:

**First condition:** The decision by national and also by EU authorities to take seriously the financing of Higher Education. This requires acceptance of the challenge and commitment taken in Barcelona by the European Council: within a realistic timeframe to provide for research 3% of the GDP.

**Second condition:** Universities, the University Community of all our countries, to take reform seriously and, above all, to adopt a positive and not a reactionary position towards this. I believe that if there are no radical changes in European Higher Education, including that in our own country, we will have missed the boat. In which case we shall not be able to confront the challenge posed by other research and teaching systems which are much further developed, much stronger, more attractive and which continue to be a benchmark for our students and teachers.

If this conference serves to further stimulate this idea, as I believe it will, and develops the consensus on the need and possibility of radical

reform of our European university system, then it will have been of great use - as well as providing me with the pleasure of welcoming all of you here today.

Nothing further from me except to wish you good luck and a pleasant stay. I now declare open this Alexander von Humboldt and University of Alcalá conference. Thank you.



## **ACCREDITATION IN EUROPE – AN OVERVIEW**

***Rainer Künzel, Universidad de  
Osnabrück***

Since the eighties we have been observing a development in Europe which involves a reform of the entire public sector. A series of approaches to reform are united under the term New Public Management (NPM):

- deregulation and decentralisation of responsibility and
- decision- making
- management by means of set targets
- output-oriented productivity checks
- greater autonomy combined with accountability.

The higher education system in European countries is part of this public sector and is therefore faced with similar challenges.

As far as universities are concerned, there is the additional fact that since the working world is becoming increasingly scientific many European countries are reacting with an education policy which has as its goal a growing proportion of academically-trained employees. And, finally, European universities are on the path to a common higher education area. The Bologna Declaration of 1999 was the starting point for an increasingly rapid development in the whole of post-secondary education. This development is no longer reversible; it leads to the greater mobility of teaching staff and students, and it is accompanied by internationally compatible course structures and higher education degrees, without neglecting the special cultural features in the European regions. We are therefore eager to find out which interim results the more than 30 countries of the Bologna Declaration and the Prague Communiqué will come to in Berlin in September of this year.

Much has happened since the meetings in Bologna and Prague. I would like to give examples in order to illustrate how lively and dynamic this development is.

Although the starting point for national quality assurance is sometimes different, in the institutions of higher education we can observe a high level of agreement with the goals of the Bologna Declaration. In a number of initiatives the institutions of higher education and the quality assurance systems supported by them have taken

up the concept of the European higher education area and have tried to develop strategic and operative common ground. This includes not only the formation of a European Network for Quality Assurance (ENQA), but also additional initiatives, such as the Joint Quality Initiative (JQI), in which agencies and government representatives work together. Agencies from the following European countries are participating: Germany, Spain, Denmark, Ireland, Sweden, Flanders of Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria, Norway and the United Kingdom.

The Joint Quality Initiative has made a remarkably good attempt at developing output-oriented descriptors for the Bachelor's and Master's degrees. What is remarkable about this is the fact that the representatives from the ten European countries mentioned above have worked together on this by agreement, and that, above all, operative goals are being pursued. It is not a matter of making additional declarations of intent, but of testing the goals and intentions formulated in Bologna and Prague by means of concrete actions, and by contributing to transparency in the higher education systems by means of confidence-building measures. To this end the members of the JQI presented descriptors in Dublin in February 2002 which describe the areas of competence to be covered by graduates with a Bachelor's or Master's degree. I am extremely pleased that the practicability of these descriptors is now being tested in a number of cross-border actions. From the German point of view what is impressive about

these descriptions is, by the way, that they go beyond standards relevant just to particular subjects and that they also include interdisciplinary key areas of competence.

Allow me to quote from the concept of the so-called Dublin descriptors, in order to make clear, in which way the areas of competence are described for the Master's graduates:

"Master's degrees are to be awarded to students who:

- have demonstrated knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances that typically associated with the Bachelor's level, 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 judgements with incomplete or limited information, but that include reflecting on

social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgements;

- 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."

In the meantime a number of agencies have declared that they will apply these standards in their evaluation procedures. My own agency, the Central Evaluation and Accreditation Agency at Hannover (ZEvA), has also declared its support of these descriptors, which it also helped to define.

A current proposal on the formation of a European Network for Accreditation (ENA) was made only a few weeks ago. Agencies interested in this will meet in The Hague at the end of June.

At this conference the idea put forward by ENQA will be discussed to develop it into an agency which could fulfil the task of securing common standards and procedures of the national or regional accreditation agencies in Europe. An effective way of doing this would be to accredit these agencies on the basis of a cyclical evaluation of their practice. This way a European standard of accreditation

could emerge which would not imply the uniformity of European educational programs but respect the cultural diversity of the European regions.

Let us take a look at quality assurance from the perspective of the young people who are interested in a degree course. Well before they start on a course of study they must be given the opportunity to obtain information about the subject they want to study or about the degree course and the locations at which it is being offered. An institution of higher education must have an interest in being attractive for as large a number of motivated prospective students as possible. For this reason, too, it ought to show what value it attaches to teaching and studying, and how it guarantees that the quality is maintained. In addition, providing a profile of the teaching on offer within the context of international higher education can contribute to consolidating its reputation. Its graduates will have increased employment chances, both nationally and internationally, because they come from a higher education institution which, through the employment of suitable quality assurance measures, enjoys a high reputation with regard to teaching and studying. This form of quality assurance is therefore a suitable means for completing the profile of a subject.

The state expects that the higher education institutions will provide proof of self-regulation in the sense of the efficient and effective employment of funds by means of checks on themselves and

comprehensible quality assurance measures. The continuing shortage of public funds increasingly forces higher education institutions to account for the resources they have used. To this extent accreditation also represents an instrument of reporting to the state and society about the application of the funds granted and the fulfilling of the tasks assigned to the higher education institution. In addition, within the institution itself it possibly leads to the recognition of the inappropriate use of funds (i.e. of cost-intensive areas with a low output), and thus to efforts to make corrections.

If we place special emphasis on accreditation in our discussion today, we must at the same time know that there are other elements of quality assurance. Therefore one must first clarify what accreditation means. In a study published by ENQA in 2001 we find good examples of the different approaches:

1. "Accreditation is a formal, published statement regarding the quality of an institution or a programme, following a cyclical evaluation based on agreed standards." (CRE, 2001)
2. "Accreditation is a process of external quality review used by higher education to scrutinize colleges, universities and higher education programs for quality assurance and quality improvement." (Council For Higher Education Accreditation, 2000)

3. "Accreditation is the award of a status. Accreditation as a process is generally based on the application of predefined standards. It is primarily an outcome of evaluation." (The European Training Foundation, 1998)

However different these definitions may be, they nevertheless show essential areas of agreement. It is always a matter of evaluating a programme of study or an institution, and not of the individual evaluation of graduates with the goal of admitting them to a profession. In addition: accreditation confirms (or denies) that an established standard is achieved by a degree course or an institution. The assessment is always based on quality criteria and not on considerations of higher education policy, and, finally, it leads to an assessment that ends in approval or denial (i.e. a yes or no decision). Unlike in many evaluation procedures, accreditation does not lead to a profile of strengths and weaknesses (the causes of weaknesses are not even considered), and as a rule there are also no recommendations for improving the quality.

Not only in Germany and in the Scandinavian countries, but in many European regions, so far state authorities have made the decisions about approving university education and recognizing academic degrees. As a rule they have applied formal considerations and those of higher education policy. They have not made their own judgements about the quality of university education. An assessment of the subject content



and the quality of teaching and studying was not of prime importance, but rather the formal correctness of the degree courses. As far as assessment of the subjects themselves is concerned, the ministries have informed themselves outside the institutions of higher education, not always systematically, and with differing intensity. In Germany we have sometimes jokingly called this practice of decision-making in the ministries "enlightened arbitrariness".

In the last few years, however, there has been a trend towards delegating the task of assessing educational programmes. In the study mentioned above, ENQA has described different forms of this delegation:

- In few cases has the state delegated the accreditation of the degree programmes - together with their approval - to an independent institution on the basis of a law.
- In numerous countries in Europe - including Germany - (largely) independent agencies accredit the courses of study, and thus in the end provide the state with substantially founded recommendations for approving the degree courses.
- In the USA and Canada, where accreditation explicitly did not develop as a means to deregulate the state policy, associations of

higher education institutions and professional organizations fulfil this function.

- And, finally, individual higher education institutions accredit the implementation of the study programmes in (foreign) partner institutions in order to grant their graduates a degree from their own home higher education institution. We know this system as franchising.

The introduction of new study programmes and structures often goes hand in hand with the implementation of new quality assurance systems. This development is proceeding rapidly in many European countries. A study (Tauch, Rauhvargers: Survey on Master's Degrees and Joint Degrees in Europe) by the EU Commission of September 2002 has gathered a large amount of information on this, and it reveals that very many activities are being undertaken.

An essential question in accreditation is the alternative between institutional and programme-related accreditation. The accreditation of degree programmes aims at an assessment of whether or not a degree course reaches certain standards. The intention is to make clear to students, those responsible for the academic programmes and those providing funds for the higher education institutions, as well as to cooperation partners and the working world, whether or not the required

standards are reached. One can call it a kind of consumer protection. The essential questions are: Will the graduates do justice to the expectations of the working world, society and academia? Do the standards of the examinations justify the awarding of a particular higher education degree? Does the curriculum provide the contents and abilities necessary for passing the examinations? Which goals determine the curriculum, and are the necessary educational resources available?

Institutional accreditation has a different emphasis. Does the higher education institution provide the basis for guaranteeing a good university education? What about the general goals of the educational programme? How good are the management of the higher education institution, the efficiency of the administration, the financial resources, the competence of the teaching staff, the framework conditions for teaching, the internal quality assurance system, and the research achievements?

Here I do not want to put the case for a decision in favour of the one or the other method of procedure or perspective. It may even be necessary to combine both variants with one another. I believe, however, that we cannot do without programme-related accreditation when new degree courses are being implemented. Let me give you an example from the car industry. You will certainly agree with me that Daimler Chrysler is one of the best car makers in the world. Nevertheless, a small Mercedes car did not pass the so called "elk test" in the far north of Europe because it tipped over during a fast

manoeuvre in a curve. Thus we also need the "elk test", even in the degree programmes at famous institutions of higher education, for even a good institution of higher education will not always guarantee that a new degree programme fulfils all the requirements on a satisfactory quality level.

With regard to programme-related accreditation, we are, in addition, dealing with two variants of accreditation: accreditation "ex ante" and "ex post". In Germany, as in other countries, too, both variants are being practised. In many cases institutions of higher education set up new programmes, approval of which depends on their accreditation. In these cases of "ex ante" accreditation (or licensing) it is a matter of providing a prognosis for the success of a degree course by looking at the curriculum and the provision of personnel, equipment and other resources. As a rule this is not easy and it frequently leads to conditional accreditations with certain conditions and recommendations.

This is different in the case of the accreditation of existing programmes. Here it is much rather the principles of the evaluation of the success of the course of study that are of importance. Have the graduates achieved the employment positions they were aiming at? Were they able to complete the programme in the time allowed for? Does the quality of the examinations show that a satisfactory level of expertise has been reached?

This form of a follow-up accreditation is practised, for example, in Sweden, and it is being considered in Norway, where a number of programmes are being transformed from college to university programmes. In addition, in several European countries we can observe that private institutions would now like to have their existing programmes recognized as university-level education. Here, too, we are dealing with follow-up accreditation.

Accreditation, however, is also not without its specific problems. One must clearly see what it can achieve, and what it cannot. From the widely-established evaluation procedure we already know that it is not easy to define quality. We must understand that the academic disciplines have their own specialist cultures. In the arts and humanities certain general educational goals are regarded as key competencies while they are still being discussed in the engineering sciences. The frequently demanded professional qualification of the graduates is defined by the scientific community to which the degree courses belong.

And, finally, we have to take the participation of many stakeholders into account. It is certainly the case that they do not always have identical interests. Do institutions of higher education have the same ideas about professional qualification as businesses have? Do not some of them see this aspect in the much longer term than the others? What are the chances for new, innovative programmes which do not lie within the mainstream of the subjects? Are they not assessed

by established peers who have rather a traditional understanding of university education and its content? And what about cultural variety? Are we not in danger of harmonizing, where it ought to be rather a matter of diversifying? Does accreditation not lead to the formation of alliances whose goal is the screening off of markets? Together with accreditation are we not also importing the negative effects of competition? Is there not a danger that the opinion leaders want to push through prohibitive standards for accreditation in order to restrict the number of providers of attractive degree programmes? Is, then, transparency actually achieved?

We ought to meet these questions actively and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of accreditation openly. It is in nobody's interest if we do not gain the confidence of society, the working world and academia in this new system of quality assurance.

My wish for all of us is, therefore, that this conference will make clear the different concepts, experiences, fears and hopes which put us jointly in the position to take a big step closer to the vision of a European higher education area.

## **Accreditation Procedures in Germany: Expectations, facts and achievements**

*Wolfgang Weber, Universidad de Paderborn*

The following paper provides a brief overview of developments in higher education in Germany, the reactions to these developments in Germany, the responsibilities in the field of higher education are distributed, and the steps leading to the current system of quality assurance in the German higher education system, including the accreditation system. The paper ends with a number of open questions and conflicts of interest in Germany which play a certain role in the current discussion on the accreditation of degree courses and study programmes without having been completely resolved.

### **Developments in higher education in Germany**

The outstanding feature in the development of higher education in Germany over the past 40 years lies in the expansion of the education sector. In 1962 approximately 5% of an age group were

studying, in 1970 the figure was around 11% and in 1999 34%. The proportion of students among an age group is currently moving towards around 40%.

This creates the need for differentiation in the higher education system. It is not enough just to offer 40% of an age group the same study programmes that were offered to 5 or 10%. This pressure led and still leads to two major development lines:

1. to a differentiation of study programmes, and
2. to the development of differing higher education institution profiles.

These developments followed in line with the developments in Europe triggered by the Bologna Declaration and which can be summarised as follows:

- System of two-cycle study programmes,
- Mobility in Europe,
- Modularisation of study programmes, and
- Introduction of a credit points system.



### **Reactions to these developments in Germany**

The reactions in Germany to these developments essentially revolve around the topic of quality assurance and the opening of higher education for the new degree courses and programmes. Both developments were closely interlinked at the end of the 1990s. The following four points may be seen as particularly important:

- From the mid 1990s: Evaluation of study programmes and the development of evaluation agencies became important.
- Since 1998: Quality assurance of study programmes generally became an important topic. For example, the Hochschulrektorenkonferenz (HRK) started its Quality Assurance Project (Projekt Q), which has since provided many impulses for the further development.
- Also since 1998: Introduction of Bachelor's and Master's programmes and measures to guarantee national and international recognition of academic degrees.
- And finally also in 1998: Introduction of accreditation.

## **Responsibilities**

To understand the further steps, it is important that the distribution of responsibilities and competences in Germany is understood. The following two points play a particularly important role:

- The Federal States (Länder) are responsible for the recognition and licensing of higher education institutions, including the institutional accreditation of private universities, for example.
- Responsibility for the content and organisation of studies and examinations is shared by the higher education institutions and the Länder.

This forms the important role played by the Kultusministerkonferenz - KMK (the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs in the Länder - i.e. the state governments) and of the Hochschulrektorenkonferenz - HRK (the Association of Universities and other Higher Education Institutions in Germany) in this context.

### **Steps towards an accreditation system in Germany**

The system of accreditation of degree courses and study programmes which now exists in Germany in 2003 has been developed over the course of just five years or so. The following chronology provides an overview of the steps which led to the current system:

- 1988: Higher education reform with the introduction of Bachelor's and Master's degrees. Decisions by the Hochschulrektorenkonferenz and the Kultusministerkonferenz to introduce an accreditation procedure for Bachelor's and Master's programmes, but not for traditional German degree courses.
- 1999: Kultusministerkonferenz resolution: Structural guidelines for the introduction of Bachelor's and Master's programmes and the start of a 3-year pilot phase for the German Accreditation Council (Akkreditierungsrat).
- 2000: Accreditation of the first accreditation agencies and Bachelor's and Master's programmes.
- 2001: Evaluation of the German Accreditation Council and revision of the structural guidelines by the Kultusministerkonferenz.

2002: Kultusministerkonferenz resolution: Statute concerning the further accreditation procedure in Germany.

2003: The results: accreditation of seven accreditation agencies and about 200 Bachelor's and Master's programmes.

### **The German Accreditation Council and the accreditation agencies**

The system which has now been established is made up of accreditation agencies and the German Accreditation Council, which has a steering and supervisory function in the system.

German Accreditation Council (Akkreditierungsrat)

Three points need to be emphasised:

- The Länder ministers of education and cultural affairs decided on a functional separation between state approval and accreditation.
- The Cross-Länder-Akkreditierungsrat (German Accreditation Council) created by HRK and KMK was affiliated to the HRK (until 2002) and then became a permanent institution at the KMK (from 2003).

- The German Accreditation Council is responsible for the definition of comparable quality standards for all degree courses and study programmes in an essentially decentralised accreditation process carried out by independent accreditation agencies.

The organisational structure of the German Accreditation Council is arranged as follows:

- The German Accreditation Council has 17 members: 4 representatives of the higher education institutions, 4 representatives of the state, 5 representatives of professional practice, 2 international representatives and 2 student representatives. These members are appointed by the HRK (Association of Universities and other Higher Education Institutions in Germany) and by the KMK (Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs). HRK and KMK also established the Office of the German Accreditation Council. The German Accreditation Council accredits the accreditation agencies which accredit the study programmes and degree courses.

The German Accreditation Council is responsible not only for the accreditation of the accreditation agencies but also for the specification of a framework for the accreditation process, for reviewing and supervising the agencies (re-accreditation), for encouraging communication and

cooperation between the agencies, for assuring fair competition between the agencies and for encouraging and intensifying international cooperation in the field of quality assurance.

### **Accreditation Agencies**

In 2003 six agencies had been accredited. Three of these agencies have a cross-disciplinary concept:

- ACQUIN (Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute)
- AQAS (Agency for Quality Assurance through Accreditation of Study Programmes)
- ZEvA (Central Evaluation and Accreditation Agency)

The members of these agencies were mainly research universities and universities of applied sciences from two or more Länder and, in one case, professional associations and business companies were also members.

Three agencies have a single discipline concept, i.e. concentrate on specific disciplines:

- AHPGS (Agency for Study Courses in Medical Pedagogy, Care, Health and Social Work)

- ASIIN (Agency for Study Programmes in Engineering, Informatics and Chemistry, Biochemistry, Chemical Engineering) formed as a result of a merger of two existing agencies.
- FIBAA (Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation)

These six agencies currently carry out all the study programme and degree course accreditations and in Germany, whereby many more Bachelor's and Master's programmes exist or are being newly established than the accreditation agencies can actually manage. Of the 1,800 or so programmes, around 200 have been accredited so far. Since the capacity of the agencies has been substantially increased, it is expected that the mountain of not yet accredited study programmes will be reduced in the course of 2003 and 2004.

Peer reviewers play a central role in the accreditation process as experts for programmes offered in the various disciplines. The reviewers are responsible for judging the objective of the programme concept, the plausibility of its planned implementation and for guaranteeing that compliance with the minimum standards of specialist-academic content is assured.

### **Open questions**

The discussion on quality assurance through accreditation in a decentralised system in Germany has not been completed yet. These are some of the most frequently discussed points:

- Deregulation or state supervision: Some Länder are only gradually and hesitatingly joining the system agreed between the KMK and HRK.
- What standards should accreditation be based on? Minimum standards, maximum standards and/or general quality criteria.
- Significance of peer review and disciplinary societies.
- Pricing competition instead of quality competition between agencies: Since the established system only confirms the compliance with defined minimum standards by awarding an accreditation quality seal, quality competition is largely prevented and the focus is placed on price competition,
- Disciplinary and/or cross-disciplinary agencies: The parallel existence of both types has proven itself so far. However, it



remains open as to what direction the system will develop in.

- Relation between evaluation and accreditation.



## **Accreditation in the Netherlands. The Finishing Touch of Quality Assurance\***

*Ton Vroeijenstijn, Consultant, External Quality Assessment, Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU)- Netherlands Accreditation Organisation (NAO)*

First of all, I want to express what is the meaning of accreditation in the Netherlands and why did we introduce this. Because, when I go back first to 1985, we started with a good well-functioning system of quality assurance in the Netherlands. We have heard often about the so-called Dutch model, as the Netherlands was one of the first countries in Europe starting with excellence and quality assessment. Let me give you first some characteristics of it:

- I think the most important one may be that higher education institutions themselves

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\* Transcription of video recording of speech

were responsible for decisions of external quality assessment. I think higher education Institutions took the initiative. Of course, there was a threat from outside because the government said: "We will do it" and because higher education did like to keep inspectors outside they decided to do it themselves. And I personally believe that without the threat from outside universities would have done nothing. So it was first the threat from outside, but then it became clear that higher education took the responsibility.

- We have chosen in the Netherlands for program assessment and not for the institutional approach, like France or Spain where they also combine institutional and program assessment.
- It is done in a competitive way; this means that one of the same committee is assessing the quality of the programmed in all universities. So is one committee going for history, looking for history programs in all institutions.
- It is compulsory. According to the law, every institution has to take care to external quality assessment. Voluntary is that it is done by the Association of Universities as, say, facilitator of the organization. So they have decided to do it together.

- Important was also that it was fit for the purpose. That means that we took the goals and aims of the institutions as starting points and assessment was if it was achieving the goals and aims. And I must say, connecting with this, was that it always had to emphasize the enhancement function of quality assurance. Of course, it was also for accountability, but the improvement orientation was much more important. By this approach it became clear that we did catch support from higher education themselves. They saw it as a system that was working for them and not for the ministry or government.
- But at the same time we got support from the government. It was an agreement between higher education and the government that this system was accepted as quality assurance of higher education. But, of course, because institutions were doing it themselves we needed a sort of watchdog to take care that it was not becoming an old boys' network. Therefore, inspectors have a role of evaluation called the "meta-evaluation".
- And now for universities we are in the third cycle of assessment. For the third time all programs that are given at the universities.

You may ask: Why are we changing the system? Why are you introducing accreditation? Why are you changing a winning team?

I think that the reasons to do this are several and the most important I think has to do with the development in Europe, where we can mention:

- The Bologna declaration
- The introduction of Bachelor and Master

All those developments in the European Higher Education Area make necessary that our programs should have a quality label to make international recognition much easier, also to have a benchmarking in Europe and also to have more transparency. The basic idea behind Bologna is that I can do a Bachelor in the University of Rotterdam, a Master in Madrid and going for the Ph. D to Finland. That means that we should know from each other what is the quality of the Bachelor, of the Master and that all should be very transparent. And I think this is the basic reason that now in Europe so many countries are discussing the word and introduction of accreditation. It is interesting to see that until 1999 all those agencies set up for quality assessment never used the word accreditation. When I was writing the first protocol for our assessment, one of the first sentences was that this system is not aiming for accreditation and now

we have accreditation. So you can see how changes are going.

But of course there were also some national reasons to introduce it. First of all the re-assuring of independence of the assessments. You can imagine if higher education themselves are organizing the external assessment. There are always people, especially politicians, that don't believe that a Bachelor can assess the quality of it by himself, but it should be by independent body. And for this reason it has always been independent, but to reassure we have set up the accreditation council. And the other reason is that the ministry and the government did like to have very clear consequences. So far it was always that inspectors talking in soccer terms, giving out a yellow card or a red card. Yellow card means you are in danger, you have to improve and if you don't improve we will close you down in future. The red card means that we will close you down. So, in fact, it is an informal accreditation but the politicians did like to have much more clear consequences.

#### **WHAT DOES ACCREDITATION MEAN**

We should now look at what does accreditation mean because there are so many interpretations about it and as board member of the International Network of Quality Assurance we try to formulate and to describe some of those consequences among accreditation and it is very difficult to give a real definition, and much more a description. In fact

accreditation means a formal decision. It is based on an overall assessment, it is based on at least minimum requirements, threshold quality. It is concerned with “yes” or “no” decisions and, of course, is connected with consequences. And, for example, if we look at the Netherlands the consequences are:

- Funding. If a program in the future will be not accredited, there will be no funding of the program
- The diplomas are recognized; they are registered in the so-called Central Register for Higher Education Programs and
- Also for the student it is very important because they can get student loans when they go studying in the programs that have been accredited.

When we started to discuss introduction of accreditation in the Netherlands, you can imagine that it was a big fight between higher education institutions who have had a very good system and on the other side, especially government and politicians that did like to have not an old-new building with the idea we will do it better than it was done so far. But finally we came to agreements and we accept that accreditation issues is not a new system, it has to be built upon the experiences we have already. And, in fact, we should see, as we can say, the last part of the building of quality



assurance: some self-evaluation as the first part, external assessment as the second part and accreditation as the final touch of the old system.

Very difficult and I think it will be a challenge for the future is if the introduction of accreditation will or might hinder the improvement orientation. We know from a lot of experiences in the USA that the old accreditation approach was: OK, I have to go for a stamp and as soon as I have this stamp I can sit and wait for six years, then do something because then I will go for the next time.

So how to combine accreditation with improvement?

And, of course, the developing system of accreditation should have support from all stakeholders. If, let's say, higher education themselves does not accept it then it will fail from the beginning because academics are very smart people and they know exactly how to cheat the system.

And, of course, very important that it never should become a bureaucratic system that should not increase the average loads of the institutions. Some problems that can arise, as in the UK, is that one committee is coming, another is leaving and sometimes you have the feeling that they are only working to show the quality, instead of delivering quality. And I think we have to have in mind that showing quality is good thinking, but it should not be the basic.

What are the characteristics of the accreditation system we have now in the Netherlands?

First of all, again we have chosen for a degree program accreditation, so not institution accreditation. It's compulsory, everybody has to go through it and not only, let's say, public higher education but also private higher education. And it will have consequences. The accreditation counts for six years and then it has to be repeated. Interesting to see in the development in the Netherlands is that accreditation and evaluation is done by different organizations. Normally, when you look, for example, in the USA, the accredited body is also organizing the external assessment and bases of the accreditation assessment. But caused by historical development in the Netherlands it is said the Accreditation Council will do the accreditation and the evaluation will be done by other agencies. Of course, the NAO (Netherlands Accreditation Organization) is independent, independent from Higher Education, independent from government. It is a special structure in the Dutch law. And the task of the NAO is:

- First place, accreditation
- Second, licensing new programs. This is just the other way round, as in Germany that they start accreditation for new programs and they are going now to higher education old programs. In the

Netherlands it was, say: accreditation is for all old programs and licensing for testing new programs is a specific task

- Beside that, the NAO will play a role in the introduction of the Bachelor/Master structure in Dutch higher education. In the Netherlands it was chosen, as in Austria, to introduce Bachelor /Master structure as a whole and so last year it was the last time that old programs started and all Universities now do have Bachelor/Master degrees.

The most important role of the NAO is to verify and validate the external assessment done by us. So that it will look if the assessment has been done in the right way and if they can agree with the way the assessment has been done they will provide the quality label and accreditation. But, of course, before they can certify and validate they should have for themselves also an accreditation framework. And they have formulated now the most important topics that have to be assessed by the evaluators. Here I will give an overview of them.

1. First of all, we have to look to the goals, aims, of the program. And this is, in fact, the most important part because it has to do with three aspects:
  - First, it is the problem of the level. Is it a Bachelor or is it a Master? We need to know that we are talking about the same,

that the Bachelor level in Germany or in Spain is equivalent to the level in the Netherlands. We have tried to formulate what do we mean with Bachelor and what do we mean with Master. And it is very interesting to see that the NAO has taken the Dublin description as starting point for the assessing level. So in the coming time it will be a real check if the Dublin descriptors are working or not.

- Second part is the orientation that is typically Dutch as we have a bilateral system, universities and Fachhochschulen, educational training institutes. So there should be a clear distinction between the universities program and the vocational program. And is up to the Accreditation Council to decide what level they have. And, in effect, institutions will claim that this is Bachelor at university level or Bachelor at vocational level and they have to give evidence, the external experts have to look at it and finally it will be assessed as Bachelor in one of those directions.
- Of course the third part of it is specific standards, the domain specific. It is not enough to see if it is Bachelor or Master, but, of course, what is a Bachelor in Engineering or is a Bachelor in Economics.

2. They are looking to the programs and I think these are in common future figures we are all using in Europe:

- Are the goals really translated in the program?
- Is there coherence in the program?
- What is the study load?
- What are the didactic concepts?
- How do we know that the students have learned what they are expected to learn?  
Assessment.

All these aspects I think are coming in all assessments in Europe.

3. Personnel, not only quantitative also qualitative

4. Facilities, lecture halls, student counseling

5. Internal quality assurance - where the NAO is putting a very important emphasis because the idea is that, if there is good system in place to assure internal quality, then the external assessment can be less. And this might be a solution for the future, when we have to go to reaccreditation, that the emphasis of the internal quality assurance is becoming higher and higher.

6. And of course they are looking for an outcome. Are the graduates indeed demonstrating the

final qualification they are expected to get and also such topics as pass rates.

I think these are the basic elements for the quality to assess and I think they will not be unfamiliar.

There are also some very interesting developments for accreditation that we have had so far not present in the current situation. First of all, besides written judgments and verbal reports, the external accrediting is expected also to give a quantitative scaling. And there is now the idea to work with a four-point scale running from Excellent to Unsatisfactory. And if you like to be accredited, all the topics, goals, aims, programs, personnel, facilities, internal quality assurance and outcomes, should be satisfactory. If one is missing, then there will not be an accreditation decision. It also means that the external committees have to give also an overall judgment. So far we have always worked with an assessment of different topics, but now they have to conclude with more or less a final accreditation body. This program is worthwhile to be accredited or not.

To prevent and I think there is another danger with accreditation if we are accredited with threshold quality it may be possible that there are lowering the quality instead of raising the quality. And therefore the idea also introduced is that universities, institutions, can ask for an assessment of specific characteristics of quality to show that they are in some respects doing it in a

more excellent way. It might be a good connection with the labor market, it might be much more student oriented and might be a specific didactic concept. All those different aspects might be including in the accreditation too.

As said, we have chosen for two different organizations, accreditation and the evaluation agencies. Like our Association, we will go on with doing the external assessment. In fact, the idea is that an institution that has to go for accreditation in six years can choose one of the quality assessment agencies that would be in the Netherlands and one of the decisions of politicians has been that the market should be open for more assessment agencies. We have now only the university assessment and the vocational assessment: But it looks like that if we will have now five or six quality assessment agencies in the Netherlands, then it will be much more competition. But when I look to countries like Germany I do not know if I should be very glad with the possibility of competition as long as it going for competition on money.

Of course there would be another question, what is a reliable trustworthy assessment agency? The NAO is trying to formulate some criteria and they will publish the list with agencies that are expected to deliver a report that would be accepted for accreditation. This is more or less, let's say, protection of institutions that they are not being assessed by an agency whose report would be refused by the NAO.

If we look for the requirements, we can say:

- Independence of such an agency. But the problem is: What is independent? At this moment, so far people are saying this means that, for example, our department of quality assurance in the association has to go outside the association to have its own structure, its own building and no connection with higher education. I think this is the right way to go.
- Expert committee: Of course, it is quite clear that they should be reliable, they should have no conflict of interest and, of course, they should have enough expertise in the committee.
- Still we have the problem of the comparison if we leave to the institution to choose how it can be benchmarked. So we have to find a solution how to combine the individual assessment with the competitive approach. Of course, the basic condition is that it follows the accreditation criteria of the NAO. All those topics have to be included.



## **INTERNATIONALIZATION OF ACCREDITATION**

What I have seen happen in Europe is that after Bologna there is an incentive to discuss accreditation and to implement accreditation, but at the same time there is a tendency that countries, governments, are using accreditation to protect their own system, to set up standards so high and also try to use it only for controlling higher education in their country.

And I believe that accreditation as such not only has national requirements and has to fulfill national needs, but much more international needs for the Open European Higher Education Area. I think the introduction in Europe of accreditation is first of all for the sake of the European Higher Education Area. In the Netherlands we could have done without accreditation but, because we have to show also outside our country, we need such a qualification. It means that the international dimension in the framework is necessary. We cannot do without it. Very interesting to see and I think it will be unique in the world is that there are now plans, but we are already in a very high stage of achievement of a joint accreditation body between Flanders and the Netherlands. And the main aim is one accredited body for both countries. In fact this means that the NAO, the Netherlands Accreditation Organization, has to change its name very quickly before the agreement between the two countries will be signed in 4-5 months. I do not know what the name will be, but it cannot be the

Netherlands. It is very interesting to see that two countries will share and have one accrediting body.

But, of course, this is only one step in the developments in Europe. We all know and we all agree that one European accreditation body is not wanted and is also quite impossible. But what we should do is try to come to mutual recognition of each others' accreditation system: And this is one of the reasons that we took the initiative to invite in June to come to The Hague all those countries that are or have accreditation - but only in Germany is in fact accreditation running - or are about to implement and to discuss the possibility to set up the European Consortium for Accreditation. First of all, to help each other to see what we all have in common and finally with the aim to come to mutual recognition.

But that brings me to the question: What is a common framework? What do we mean by that? I think that these are some basics that we have to agree. First of all, we have to agree upon the Dublin descriptor for Bachelor and Master so that we know what we are talking about. I think that, in this moment, starting with the Dublin descriptors is going in the right direction. The biggest problem is that the description of Bachelor and Master is in fact, let's say, an output description or competences description. And so far in Europe we are only using the inputs descriptors and there is still the danger, let me say, that a Bachelor is so many hours or so many credit points. But in fact

we should turn it the other way round: What are the expected outcomes from the Bachelor and do we expect from the Master? Secondly, Bachelor and Master is not enough; we also have to look to benchmarked standards for subjects What is Engineering, what is Economics? There is already done a good job by the EQA with the benchmarked standards and we do not have to follow them, but there are good inputs. This is the same with the Turing project, where 350 universities all over Europe try to formulate these standards for 15 disciplines. I think at least we should agree on benchmarks for our disciplines. It does not mean that we should have uniform programs – no, because there is nothing like to have uniformity, but at least what we are expecting should be clear. This also means that we should have a shared idea about the basic core. What do we mean by threshold? When are we applying the accreditation? And to assess the quality we should agree about an equivalent quality model and also about an assessment system. Everybody knows that it is difficult, if not impossible, to define quality because quality is in the eye of the beholder and, if you are asking government to define quality or higher education institutions, they will have a different approach.

But, when I look to all guidelines or protocols for assessment in Europe, we have so much in common that it is not so difficult to find some basic model about what we think that is important for the quality. And, of course, we should also use equivalent accreditation criteria. And only if we

have that in common, then we can go for mutual recognition. But this all does not mean that we have to do all in the same way, but it should be equivalent. Of course, everybody, every country, can have its own emphasis or add something. But there is something in common that we should look for. And I think that is one of those basic ideas also behind the European Consortium for Accreditation to find what do we have in common. I think that one of the biggest problems nowadays in Europe, and I see also in the European Network for Quality Assurance, for quality assurance is that people are saying we are so different, do not tell me that we have something in common with other countries. We have now been working for more then 20 years for quality assessment and it is time that we tried to find what is basic for us.

### **CONCLUSION**

In the Netherlands, after the discussion between politicians and higher education, we now agree about the accreditation framework and the accreditation organisation is accepted. We start now to evaluate the first programmes and hopefully we will have experience with the first accreditation in September. But, of course, there are some challenges that we have to face:

First of all, as was mentioned several times, the intrinsic value of the quality label from the Netherlands must be valid also outside; if not, it does not make sense.

Another question is how to prevent that institutions only are going running for a stamp and forget the improvement orientation. If we are making it too bureaucratic or too much accreditation oriented, we are losing a lot of the good things we have had in the past 20 years.

Another question is: How long can we afford to run the system with such high investment in time and money? And I think we have also to think about if it can be easier but with the same effect.

And for us a very important question would be what will be the consequences of opening the market for more external quality assessment agencies? Would they spoil the market, would there be competition between agencies and we would forget the real quality? All those questions are behind this.



## **Accreditation of Universities in England: Politics and Problems**

*Robert Cowen, Universidad de Londres*

### **Introduction**

One of the best books on the English university is by an American, Robert Berdahl.<sup>i</sup> His book shows how the English University during the time of the University Grants Committee was one of the most independent in the world. Even when State money was given to the university, it was filtered through the UGC, which was dominated by academics. The British had created an insulation system, which prevented the state – the government – from interfering with the Universities. The main responsibility of the Government, through the Privy Council and by a signature of the Queen, was to assign a Royal Charter to a University which could then award degrees. The other responsibility of the Government was finance – to provide money to the UGC that the UGC then distributed to the Universities. That finance covered the majority of university costs in, for example, the 1950s.

The other excellent illustration of the independence of the English University that I like is sketched by Renate Simson in her book on *How the Ph.D. came to Britain*.<sup>ii</sup> She shows how the British government was keen to establish the Ph.D. as a degree early in the twentieth century. The government wished to compete with the Germany University system and to attract young Americans into the English cultural sphere rather than permit their continued immersion in German culture. The government wrote nervously to the Universities asking if for a meeting. The Universities refused the invitation. This is a firm definition of independence, within a clear sense of spheres of responsibility.

### ***The Change***

In contrast I would like to suggest that the contemporary English University is now *attenuated*.

By the term 'attenuated university' I mean a university whose activities and processes need to be understood as stretching across a range of social spaces. For example, a high proportion of students may be inter-national; research contracts may be held with multiple partners external to the university; finance will have many sources (other than public money); the academic staff may be regularly working overseas or indeed be based



overseas.<sup>iii</sup> In other words, the university is no longer a particular *locus*, in which all activities are generated, controlled, and delivered. The metaphor is not of a *box* (rectangular with fixed boundary lines), which is the university; but a *web*: intricate, sensitive to and responding to different pressures. The idea of the attenuated university is a more subtle idea than the simplicities of a loss of academic freedom or institutional autonomy - precisely because the concept of attenuation hints at *the way* institutional autonomy is lost. The model of the university as a web - or the concept of the university as attenuated - raises the question of who dominates the social spaces within which the web-like university is expected to do its work.

Thus my immediate theme is the relation between accreditation and attenuation. Gradually the Universities in England have lost a good deal of control over their own certification of their standards in research, in teaching and in staff development. The basic turning point was the 1988 Educational Reform Act, and the subsequent work of agencies such as the Higher Education Funding Councils of England (and Scotland or Wales).

The official discourse of the UK project - a discourse about quality control, accountability and transparency - has at least three dimensions in the definition of 'quality': principles for the measurement of research (the Research Assessment Exercise); the measurement of 'good teaching' (formerly conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency which is giving way to a process

called Institutional Audit); and staff development programmes. In addition the Economic and Social Research Council (and its equivalent bodies in the natural sciences) has specified concrete ways to organise research, including the supervision of doctoral candidates. All universities in the UK are measured against these detailed definitions of good practice. The official discourse promises – in return for public money – effective, efficient, and transparent delivery of research and teaching services and an improvement in staff quality.

The whole system is delivered and enforced by a ‘social technology’: specific agencies staffed by professionals. The practices are also well established: the Research Assessment Exercise with minor variations has been running for over 20 years. The schemes are working. They are in place and are having practical effects. The models are being borrowed or at least looked at very carefully, for example by the Argentines, Brazilians, and the Japanese.

The attractiveness of the model is buttressed by the well-known political context in which the reforms were generated. There was a domestic crisis, and a sense of a new international world. Let us briefly rehearse that context.

### **The English Economic and Social Crisis**

By 1979, the inflation rate was running at about 25% per annum and national politics were dominated and dramatised by disputes between the unions and the government. The so-called "Winter of Discontent" led to the fall of the Labour Government and in 1979 the election of the first of Mrs Thatcher's Conservative administrations.

The basic reform propositions were that the State was too big and public spending too large. The overall solution was a *laissez-faire* vision: let the State withdraw and let the rule of the market operate. Oligarchies and bureaucracies were to be broken up: the miners' union, the steel industry, the railways, the law, medicine and the National Health Service and the education service itself (in which schools and universities were judged to be professionally dominated bureaucracies). Domestically a crisis had been identified, and solutions proposed. Internationally, a new world of a different kind of economic competition was being identified.

The strategic principle was for the State to establish the rules of competition, especially under ideas from Sir Keith Joseph and the New Right, a loose grouping of intellectual pressure groups including think tanks, such as the Adam Smith Institute. The process was long and complex, a genuine shift in a political paradigm. The results were labelled 'Thatcherism', but the shift in the

political spectrum has affected the policies of New Labour under Mr Blair.

The educational 'solutions' to the problem followed within that political vision.

Within English education there has been a shift from equality of educational opportunity, to effectiveness and efficiency as the new meta-principle of education. The core concept was 'the market'. The purposes of education would be deducible from economic need, in which the individual became a consumer of education and through which the nation would be modernised economically. Thus, in education there were huge structural shifts.<sup>iv</sup>

In summary, then, there have been four principles vital to the redefinition of the English university: (i) the international economic position of Britain had been moving into crisis from the 1960s and major rethinking is required; (ii) the socio-economic organisation of Britain has been incorrect and too heavily affected by major oligarchies such as the trades unions and the professions (iii) the correct direction of reform is the destruction of those oligarchies and the creation of not merely a classless Britain (an old aspiration) but one with flexible institutions in a risk-taking society and (iv) one way towards such flexibility is by embracing the ideology and the institutional arrangements of what is called – as it was in the eighteenth century – 'the market'.

### **The Universities**

These four principles have directly affected the legitimization of the reform of universities – and the details of that reform: piecemeal at first, and then with increasing speed and with some consolidation in the 1988 Education Act.

The 1988 Education Act abolished the University Grants Committee. By the time of the 1988 Education Act, the differences between the universities and the polytechnics were diminishing and in 1992 the binary divide was abolished: the category ‘universities’ now included the former polytechnics. The patterns of funding changed. The grant of a large amount of money for undifferentiated purposes (block grants) was replaced by a number of formulae so that the income of universities was built up partly by the numbers of students they had, partly by their research performance, partly by what they were able to earn in the market place and partly by a ‘magnifier’ – where the government added extra public resources to those universities that had already been judged to be successful.

The policy of British governments towards universities over the last two decades has thus led in three directions:

- (i) externally, there has been the creation of a competitive market, marked by public and published

results of measurements of performance which will allow 'customers' to make an informed choice of universities;

- (ii) externally, there has been an effort, through different patterns of funding and through the creation of an enterprise culture, to link universities to the economic needs of an internationally competitive nation and to measure university success by criteria such as the placement of their graduates in employment; and
- (iii) internally, there has been the creation of a culture of management in the universities.

These strategies have changed the discourse about universities. What is increasingly discussed is efficiency, rather than the older theme of equality of educational opportunity; the management of universities, rather than the scholarship of universities; the performance of universities, rather than their historical or cultural mission; the contribution of universities to the economy, rather than their critical and reflective role in society.

The discourse marks a shift in policy. Successive governments have tried to make the system of higher education and especially the new system of

universities demonstrably of a high standard and demonstrably efficient.

The new solution has four characteristics:

- (a) a startling expansion of the university system by breaking the 'binary line';
- (b) the removal of insulation mechanisms between government and the universities, especially quinquennial finance cycles and the distribution of public money to universities on the basis of advice by academics;
- (c) the creation of a financial market within which universities compete; and
- (d) the invention of a variety of mechanisms – justified by the phrase 'quality control' – which make the performance of universities measurable and transparent.

The universities are judged against '*national rules*', which apply to all universities and affect all academics. This is – de facto – a new system of accreditation.

Money for the new system of universities is now distributed by the Higher Education Funding Councils (for England, for Scotland and so on). The HEFCs have their members appointed by the Secretary of State for Education and contain academics as a minority of their membership.

Universities now compete for funding from the HEFC, within a national formula. Universities can adapt themselves to the exigencies of the formula and can decide to increase student numbers, make a greater effort to obtain externally funded research, or increase the output of research publications. They could also decide, as it were, to let themselves go bankrupt by not competing. Most wish to “stay in business” (to borrow a phrase). There are major incentives to adapt because both public reputation and cash income are affected by public measurements of performance.<sup>v</sup> These now include the quality of university teaching, which has been declared measurable and is being measured.

One obvious corollary of these new rules is the increased significance of ‘management’.<sup>vi</sup> It is now of enormous importance that information about staff productivity, teaching loads, course creation, course management and student care be collected internally before an institution is subjected to external evaluation. Thus inside the university in England there has been a major growth in the size of the managerial group – whether these persons be trained administrators, senior executive secretaries or academics temporarily diverted into the holding of such positions as Head of Department or Dean for three or more years. The role of Professor as the permanent head of department (as in the classical German model) has tended to disappear. It now seems possible to make a career as an academic who administers other



academics. The administrative-academic, and certainly the entrepreneurial academic, is now important in the four-year cycle of evaluation used by the HEFCs.

Most of these strategic changes follow from legislation, notably from sections 120 to 138 on Higher and Further Education in the Education Reform Act of 1988. Since then details have been modified by executive action but the strategy they represent has not altered. A former Editor of *the Times Higher Education Supplement*, Stuart Maclure, captured much of the significance of the change as early as a decade ago:

*It is difficult to exaggerate the magnitude of the change in the management of British HE implicit in these sections of the Act. One set of long-standing conventions has been swept away. The foundations have shifted. The idea of universities as independent centres of learning and research, capable of standing out against government and society, and offering critical judgements of varying objectivity, informed by learning and protected by the autonomy of historical institutions, is discarded. Instead, universities are made the servant of the State and its priorities. In the context of the late twentieth century, they, like the rest of the education system, are to be used in the attempt to create a nation of enterprise and to discredit the 'dependency culture'*

*associated with the forty years after  
World War II.*<sup>vii</sup>

The overall effort since 1979 has included expansion of the system – there is now talk of over 40% of the age cohort being in higher education – but a cutting of the proportion of university budgets which comes from tax monies. The effort has been made not merely to insert universities into an enterprise culture but to make universities themselves an enterprise culture. As early as 1985 one of the major Reports on the system was the Jarrett Committee. Jarrett himself was a businessman and it was his Committee which introduced the idea of Chairpersons of Departments – i.e. separating the professorial from the managerial and potentially the entrepreneurial role. This was the first major hint of managerialism in the English university.

Looking back then it is possible to identify a number of strategies of British governments since 1979 that have redefined the English university. The strategies have restructured the external relations of universities, their legitimation in terms of their tasks, and their internal management.

The governments and their strategies have constructed a new system of how universities are – in practice – accredited.

The crucial first strategy was to ensure *financial instability*, in the sense that even before the 1988

Education Reform Act the government had moved from providing about 95% of the universities' budget from public money to providing about 75%. This shift in funding meant that the universities needed to increase their income from research grants and contracts or by accepting more students especially overseas students whose numbers were not limited by the governments, and by doing research jointly with industry. External relations were dramatically changed.

The second general strategy was to *measure university output*. That is, to assess for each individual, for each department, each faculty or disciplinary area, and ultimately for each university its 'productivity'. Productivity in this sense involves the careful measurement of the output of books, edited books, book chapter, articles in the major journals, articles in the minor journals, soft-money funded research and so on. Some academic output (e.g. book reviews) is not measured. As indicated earlier, all this is measured is on a national scale - for all the universities in England. Reports are made by each institution to the HEFC(E), there is sampled check on the accuracy of the statement which includes the invitation to identify at least four items of output of high 'quality' by each member of staff. Panels of experts may read these. Thus there is both a quantitative and a qualitative dimension to the measurements. The quantitative measurement is expressed by the proportion of 'active researchers' in an institution (i.e. those who have published at least four items in the four year cycle). The

qualitative assessment is the reading of a selection of such works by panels of experts. The scale of the RAE exercise in England is considerable. According to the Association of University Teachers, in 2001, 'sixty assessment panels assessed approximately 200,000 publications submitted by almost 50,000 academics'.

The third strategy which legitimates 'excellence', and the processes of institutional competition and which also clarifies relations with 'customers' is to *publish the results*, classifying each institution on a national scale. The scale keeps changing – as do most of the details of the measurement schemes – but it has been essentially a five-point scale, published on a four-year cycle. In the older version of the scale, universities were graded out of 5. The grade of 1 means that the faculty or the department or the university contains few departments which have reached even national levels of excellence. In the old version of the scale, a grading of 2 means that national excellence has been reached in up to half the disciplinary areas and, for a Grade 3, in the majority of disciplinary areas. Grade 4 means national excellence in all areas with international excellence in several and grade 5 means international excellence in most areas. It has been possible to gain a 5 Star - a reference not to an hotel or a restaurant, but to a University.

The fourth strategy that affects internal institutional arrangements has been the introduction of *staff assessment and staff training schemes*. This was done at the insistence of the government, which made a salary increase for academics dependent on it. University staff in England now, on at least a two-year cycle and increasingly on an annual basis, experience peer assessment and evaluation. This has been kept separate from promotion procedures but it is a thorough exercise. It is done by senior staff or by a Chairperson of a Department and is increasingly used to anticipate the construction of a production profile appropriate for the whole Department. It is also a career review process that contains the opportunity to, and sometimes the necessity for, requesting further training in new professional skills. Which skills (e.g. language training for research purposes, or perhaps training courses in doctoral supervision or applying for research grants) depends on the individual.

The last emerging strategy is the *measurement of teaching performance* on the basis of both looking at the paperwork on courses but also visiting university classrooms and watching people teach, and holding prolonged discussions with teachers and students. Results are published (though the style of the 'audit' has shifted, as a result of criticisms).

## **Conclusion**

Thus, there have been major shifts in the definition of, and the accreditation patterns for, the English university:

- universities are being encouraged to behave as if they are corporations, *knowledge corporations*, competing in an international economy in which hierarchies of wealth are created by control over information technology, biotechnology, and other generic 'soft' technologies.<sup>viii</sup>

There have been major shifts in the measurement of the performance of English academics:

- the evaluative rules have shifted from the personalised judgements of academic authorities (the professors) to national standardised universal rules which measure the flow of scholarly production, the processes of teaching and levels of 'customer satisfaction'.

All these former professional expectations and the relations of those working inside the university

- are subordinated to a management culture. This management culture is very heavily influenced by national rules for evaluation, the entry of the English university into

international space for research contracts, consultancies and the recruitment of overseas students and new definitions of what counts as scholarship and research. For example, edited books count for little; articles in refereed academic journals are highly rewarded; and a single-authored book was very well rewarded. (A book was a book if it was (i) commercially published; (ii) with an ISBN number; and (iii) had a text which was more than 80 pages. Thus in England we are getting 'attenuated universities'. But that is not all.

There are broader and historically significant changes. We are seeing four new processes in England:

- a fuller and more thorough absorption of the university into capitalism<sup>ix</sup>. The university itself is taking corporate capitalist form.
- the emergence of panoptical surveillance patterns<sup>x</sup> with
- a shift into a culture of managerialism<sup>xi</sup>.
- a clear definition of a new kind of university - a Managed University - in which managers handle performance to deal with accreditation rules affecting research, teaching and staff development.

The historic question, given our concern for domestic and parochial rules about what counts (literally) as good research and teaching, is whether we are destroying the academic culture of the centres of internationally excellent scholarship, research and teaching which we already have in England.

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<sup>i</sup> R. O. Berdahl, *British Universities and the State*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959.

<sup>ii</sup> R. Simpson, *How the PhD came to Britain: a century of struggle for postgraduate education*, Guildford: Society for Research into Higher Education, 1983.

<sup>iii</sup> P. Blumenthal, C. Goodwin, A. Smith, and U Teichler (eds.) *Academic mobility in a changing world: regional and global trends* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 1996).

<sup>iv</sup> For example, a National Curriculum was created; there was to be National Testing of children at 7, 11 and 14 and 'Local Management of Schools' was invented, where finance and management were delegated to school level. Head Teachers became managers. Local Authority power, especially over the finance of education, was limited and "opting out" became possible (that is, where schools could choose to be directly financed and controlled from London). Her Majesty's Inspectors were largely replaced by the Office for Standards in Education. There was to be assessment and measurement of teacher performance and of school performance. Teacher training passed into the hands of the new Teacher Training Agency, which is state, rather than university, dominated. Teacher training is now strongly linked to schools and the practice of teaching. There was a growth in new types of schools, such as City Technical Colleges and an expansion in vocational-technical education. Universities were forced into the market place to compete for money and tenure was abolished in the 1988 Education Reform Act.



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<sup>xi</sup> M. Cave, S. Hanney, M. Henkel, and M. Kogan. *The Use of Performance Indicators in Higher Education: The Challenge of the Quality Movement*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London and Bristol: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1997); D. Warner, and D. Palfreyman (eds.) *Higher Education Management: The Key Elements* (Buckingham: The Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press, 1996); M. Trow, "Managerialism and the academic profession: the case of England". *Higher Education Policy*, Vol 7, No. (2), 1994.

## **Accreditation and Assessment Procedures in the French University System: Operation and Impact**

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The purpose of this contribution is to briefly explain the French situation regarding university policy and, in particular, accreditation procedures based on quality assessment criteria.

As the historical and institutional context of the French higher education system is very specific, an overview of its general characteristics and the reforms which have affected it will be given first. The current operation of recognition-accreditation and its associated assessment processes will then be considered. Finally, the impact of these operations and processes will be evaluated and an outline given of some prospects for the future.

*The historical and institutional context*

France loves reforms .. or at least it would appear so from the speeches of its leaders. All governments, and within them all ministers, dream of making their mark with a “great reform”, with which their names will be forever associated. Reality is a little more modest and one may observe that changes, if they actually take place, occur within the long-term dynamic of the evolution of French society.

The French higher education system cannot escape from these two factors above. One may even put forward the hypothesis that it represents a sector of national activity in which the gap between a stated desire for change and the observable resistance is at its greatest.

After giving an overview of the main characteristics of the system, the reforms of the recent decades and those currently taking place will be presented.

*General characteristics of the French higher education system*

In essence, two main features characterise the French system and differentiate it from most of those in other European countries: the tradition of the State and the university – *grandes écoles* duality.

*The tradition of the State*

This tradition is rooted in history: from Louis XIV up to De Gaulle, and including Napoleon, France is built around its State. The educational system, at its different levels (school education and higher education), bears the imprint of this State tradition, and has the following important characteristics:

- National diplomas/degrees: The various diplomas/degrees (*baccalauréats, licences, doctorats*, etc.) must all offer the same rights – for example, eligibility for civil service examinations – and for that reason must be based on the same, or at least, similar contents.
- Free of charge: Education is a public service and, as such, is both open to all and free, or almost so – payments required from its users, except for university registration fees, represent only a modest part of educational expenditure.
- Secular in nature: This concept, very important in France, implies a position of neutrality towards the different philosophical and religious positions, even given the existence of private institutions, notably those linked to the Catholic church.

- Centralised in organisation: As both courses and diplomas/degrees are national, the institutions involved must either be public in character or under the control of the public powers. Educational policy is decided in Paris and is applied by a ministry with great power – the *Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale* (Ministry of National Education) – which has under it more than a million and a half employees.

### **The duality of the universities and *grandes écoles***

This duality is one of the characteristics of the French system; it is as ancient as the tradition of the State, and is linked to the latter. Throughout the ages the public powers, masters of the educational game, have never hesitated to create new structures in response to new needs or when they felt that existing institutions were not sufficiently fulfilling their mission. From the Collège de France, founded by François I in 1530 opposite the Sorbonne (already at that time considered “fossilised”) to the Institut Universitaire de France (IUF), created at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to “invigorate” the traditional universities, one can now longer count the number of specialised institutions serving this or that function in higher education.

Most of these ad hoc structures are classed as *grandes écoles*, even though these are very varied

in size, shape and reputation: from the most illustrious ( the Ecole Normal Supérieure, the Ecole Polytechnique) to others much more modest. Overall, these *grandes écoles* are characterised by their entry selection, by their profession-orientated studies (usually rewarded with an engineering or business degree) and by their active “old boys” networks – all of these factors contributing to the success of their former students and to their envied position in the French system for the “production of an elite”.

*Previous institutional reforms*

Without going too far back in the many centuries old history of the French university one may refer to the two last institutional reforms affecting recent decades: those of 1968 and 1984.

*The Faure Law (1968): Creation of universities as autonomous public institutions*

The so-called “May 68” crisis, affecting not only France – for it was born on the American campuses – and not only universities – for it had repercussions throughout society – resulted in a radical reform of the French higher education system, which up to then was more or less based on the organisation of the Napoleonic imperial university.

The law passed at the end of 1968 – known as the Edgar Faure Law – introduced important

institutional innovations. The most noteworthy of these was the recognition of universities as “public institutions of a scientific, cultural and professional nature” (EPCSCP) endowed with relative autonomy: elected presidents and councils, budgets passed by the councils, a posteriori financial control, etc.

On this basis a hundred or so institutions were granted university status over the following years and these gradually learned how to operate in a less centralised manner.

*The Savary Law (1984): The introduction of contractualisation*

This law, resulting from the left-wing majority of 1981, is of less importance than the preceding one for it was intended only to correct, and in other cases define more precisely, certain aspects of the latter. The clearest definition was the reminder that the autonomy of university institutions was to be exercised within the public service as one form of organisation of this service.

The establishment of procedures for *contractualisation* can be placed within this context, even though the principle of such contracting, in reality, already existed. The functioning of a public service in a decentralised manner, in effect, requires a logic of contracting between the central authority and the units involved in order to define the reciprocal rights and commitments both in



terms of educational and research aims and the means needed to achieve these aims.

**Institutional reforms in progress (1998 – 2003)**

The preceding reforms, while providing a framework for the substantial increase in the number of students in higher education in France during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (as in most other European countries), have also revealed – even accentuated – the complexity of the French system and its only faint resemblance to systems in other countries. The reforms currently in progress are attempting to address these problems by moving towards the harmonisation of educational systems in Europe and by effecting a rapprochement between the different educational networks existing in France.

*European harmonisation*

In response to a report commissioned by Jacques Attali and then to the interministerial meetings at the Sorbonne, in Bologna and in Prague, the process recommended for effecting an interconnection between European higher education systems rests on two key proposals: the defining of a hierarchy of grades and modular education.

**The hierarchy of grades** at three levels reflects the British/American system of Bachelor, Master and Ph.D. In France, therefore, the *licence* has been

defined as corresponding to Bachelor; the *doctorat* was reformed in 1984 in order to correspond to Master; what remains to be defined is the new grade of *master* (initially, in 1999, called *mastaire*). This new grade of *master* corresponds to a whole family of already existing diplomas (DEA, DESS, *titre d'ingénieur*, *diplômes des grandes écoles de gestion*, etc.), so facilitating their international recognition. In France this hierarchy is referred to as the “3-5-8”, reflecting the years of study, or the “L-M-D”, referring to the names of the qualifications.

**Modular education** offers an easily-implemented system. With experience gained from the Erasmus programmes and with an understanding of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) one can, by establishing that a full academic year is worth 60 credits (30 for a semester), define the number of credits required to reach the different grades. Thus, a *licence* (3 full years or 6 semesters) represents 180 credits; a *master* requires 120 additional credits, making 300 credits in total, etc.

### **Interconnecting the educational networks**

Such an interconnection would appear to be desirable in order to “fluidify” the overall system. It affects both the different categories of institutions (universities – *grandes écoles*) and also the general public involved (in initial or continuous/in-service training).

Interconnecting the institutions is a slow process, given the long-established inertia which is part of the culture of each type. Above all, it affects the universities and “grandes écoles”: admission midway through a course, co-recognition (notably at the level of doctoral programmes), etc. It may also affect universities between themselves – for example, those within the same region. Establishing such connections will be made easier by the greater autonomy to be given to each institution in the area of policy development.

Interconnecting those undertaking initial training with those in continuous/in-service training would appear to be equally desirable for it conforms to that “education throughout life” recommended by the European authorities. With this in mind, France has defined a procedure for VAE: *validation des acquis de l’expérience* (validation of acquired experience), so allowing everyone to contemplate taking a programme of education without having to follow all of its stages. The inclusion of such programmes within the ECTS will clearly facilitate their validation.

*The current accreditation-assessment system*

In France the existing accreditation-assessment system is relatively complex. So, to simplify this account, I shall first explain the “normal” system, which applies to standard institutions (universities) and to standard education (academic disciplines). I shall then refer to specific systems directed towards

certain categories of institutions and types of education. Finally, I shall describe the ad hoc assessment structures, such as the CNU: *Conseil National de Universités* (National Universities' Council) and the CNE: *Comité National d'Évaluation* (National Assessment Committee), both of these being a priori unconnected with the accreditation process.

*The normal system*

This is a contractual procedure, which always includes an assessment phase.

*The contractual procedure*

This takes the form of *contrats quadriennaux* (four-year contracts) between the State (the ministry responsible for higher education) and the institutions involved. For this purpose the whole group of French institutions is divided into four series: A, B, C, D, corresponding to successive contractual periods. All institutions in the same region form part of the same series – the Académie de Montpellier, for example, is in group A – and this, therefore, provides a global view of the regional provision of education.

The main stages in this contractual procedure are:

- 1<sup>st</sup> stage: Preparation by and proposals from institutions – usually in the year preceding the future contract; studies and proposals

are accompanied by an assessment of the current contract.

- 2<sup>nd</sup> stage: Appraisal and negotiation between the ministry and institutions – usually during the spring of the first year of the new contract.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> stage: Ministerial decision, with particular reference to recognition of national degrees/diplomas – usually around May-June, so that it may be implemented by the beginning of the academic year in September.

It should be noted that these four-year contracts between the State and university institutions are not the only contractual elements. Among numerous others are the contracts made with the principal research institutions (CNRS, for example); these are also for four years and are usually coordinated with the above contracts. There are also State-Regional contracts signed between the State and the different regions of the country; these affect the higher education and research institutions in the regions concerned.

**The key role of assessment in the contractualisation process**

The *contractualisation* process necessarily involves an assessment phase and this, in principal, should be of great importance.

This assessment follows the only principle possible: a peer review by the scientific community itself. For this purpose the ministerial authorities in charge of higher education have at their disposal certain bodies whose names may vary (*mission scientifique*, MSRU, MSTP, etc.) and whose institutional affiliation may be with the research department of the ministry or inter-departmental. However, they all, more or less, perform the same function in assessing educational projects and the teams which provide these. The members of these bodies are professionals usually well-recognised in their various disciplines and, as far as is possible, they are not themselves directly involved in the cases which they assess.

The assessment criteria are standard:

- The relevance of the project to the educational requirements of society, the market for it
- The positioning of the project within the educational offer of the institution and in relation to the regional and national offer
- Internal coherence; quality of the teaching staff
- Recruitment methods and knowledge assessment

- Professional support and training
- Scientific support

These criteria can, of course, vary according to the nature of the educational project under scrutiny. Internal coherence will always be required; for professional training (*licence, master*) the contribution of professional partners will be examined closely; for postgraduate courses the scientific references (a recognised research team) required will be more demanding.

These assessment procedures are not immediate and definitive; they may often lead to negotiations between the ministry and assessment authority on the one hand and the university and its project directors on the other. Such discussions may result in a revision of the project or a decision to put it on hold (non-validation is limited to one year).

### **Specific systems**

The system described briefly above is generally applicable to university institutions and to standard academic courses. However, more specific accreditation-assessment systems are sometimes needed when dealing with certain types of institutions and certain educational courses.

*Particular types of institutions*

Not all higher education institutions in France are universities, nor are all the public *grandes écoles* under the control of the Ministry of National Education.

Firstly, some of the *grandes écoles* are under the aegis of other ministries (Industry, Agriculture, Economy, Defence, etc.) and, even though the Ministry of National Education has a predominant role in coordinating the overall system, it is clear that decisions affecting these institutions must be taken in collaboration with their supervising ministries.

Secondly, there exist a substantial number of private higher education institutions. These are controlled by chambers of commerce, of industry, etc., by religious establishments, by private individuals, and by financial groups which have chosen to invest in the education market.

Over these different institutions the Ministry of National Education exercises a supervisory role, which involves:

- Recognition of the institution and validation of its degrees/diplomas



- Recognition only of the institution without degree/diploma validation
- Non-recognition of the institution

One will understand that these different categories of recognition/validation bring with them different rights and obligations and, in consequence, require specific accreditation-assessment procedures.

*Particular types of educational courses*

This situation applies to certain types of professional training which the public powers believe should be regulated, whether by controlling access or by guaranteeing the level. The most important examples are:

**Engineering courses**, which in France lead to the *Diplôme d'Ingenieur* – an official qualification with the status of a *master*. For this purpose of supervising these the *Commission du titre d'ingenieur* was created almost a century ago. It is composed of eminent professionals and is charged with giving its recommendations on accreditation applications presented by the different candidate institutions (originally the *grandes écoles* and later also the universities). Even though its role is essentially consultative, its authority is great and its recommendations virtually binding.

**Health Sciences** (Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy, etc.). These are regulated professions with their

own professional bodies and they are submitted to quota restrictions within the framework of policies set out in the national plan. Accreditation procedures for these courses must, therefore, be defined in accordance with national policies.

**Business and Management courses** (Commerce, Accountancy-Finance, Administration, etc.) are not regulated – except for the profession of accountant – and many are provided by the network of institutions dependent upon chambers of commerce, private organisations, etc. With such courses wishing to claim recognition at the level of *master*, in 2001 it was thought advisable to create a *Commission d'évaluation des formations et diplômes de gestion* (Commission for assessing management/business courses and diplomas/degrees). Like the *Commission du titre d'ingénieur*, this particular commission is charged with providing the ministry with an assessment of the accreditation requests presented by institutions. The new body has begun its work and this should lead to greater transparency in this educational sector.

#### **Ad hoc assessment structures**

In the above systems assessment activities form a key part of the accreditation procedures. However, there also exist certain bodies dedicated to assessment for its own sake – that is, without any automatic link to accreditation applications, though their recommendations do have an influence on

such applications, as will be seen. Among the most important of these bodies are the CNE: the *Comité National d'Evaluation* (National Assessment Committee) and the CNU: the *Comité National des Universités* (National Universities' Committee).

**The *Comité National d'Evaluation* (CNE)**

The *Comité National d'Evaluation des Etablissements Publics à Caractère Scientifique, Culturel et Professionnel* (National Committee for the Assessment of Public Institutions of a Scientific, Cultural and Professional Nature) was created relatively recently – after the 1968 Law – and, as its name suggests, is dedicated exclusively to the assessment of these institutions (EPCSCP): the universities and a certain number of other public higher education institutions (notably, most of the *écoles d'ingénieurs autonomes*).

Although under the Ministry of National Education, the CNE enjoys great autonomy of operation – for example, in its programmes and in its working methods. On the other hand, however, its assessments, reports and recommendations have only a symbolic value, not influencing in any way administrative and budgetary decisions. It should be noted, though, that the CNE tends to adjust its calendar of work to fit in with the four-yearly contracts – for example, in making its assessments “upstream” of these contracts. For their part, the institutions are never loath to use CNE

assessments as excuses and justifications in their contract discussions with the ministry.

### **The *Comité National des Universités* (CNU)**

This body should really be called the *Comité National des Universitaires* (National Committee of University Staff). If the above committee, the CNE, is dedicated to assessment, then this one, the CNU, does not concern itself with the institutions themselves, but only with the teaching and research staff who work in them. Everyone knows how attached academics are to peer group evaluation, a system favourable to both their abilities and autonomy. The CNU, divided into disciplinary sections, brings together representatives of the academic staff and watches over the university profession, both in terms of appointments and promotions.

The development of institutional autonomy creates the problem of compatibility between these national bodies and the powers devolved locally to institutions. The problem is resolved in different ways at different times and according to the different disciplines.

The CNU, though in theory a stranger to the accreditation procedures, is not, in fact, that far removed from them. French university staff, even if they are particularly attached to the concept of a unified public service, are, nevertheless, very much aware of the relative prestige of the different

institutions – in particular, in terms of the advancement of their own careers.

### **Impact and prospects**

As the purpose of this contribution has been to give an informative overview of the situation, it has not been possible to present a detailed analysis of the results of the accreditation process implemented over recent decades, nor definitive indications of possible and/or desirable changes to come. However, it is possible for me to give you my personal reflections on the impact of current systems and a few open prospects.

### **An impact still weak**

Any observer of French university life after the great reform of 1968 would have been witness to the greatest quantitative and qualitative changes ever to affect the French university system, for the latter has changed more in just three decades than it did over the whole of the previous century: mass access to higher education, diversification of courses of study, creation of the EPCSCP, etc. However, despite such relatively rapid change, it must also be admitted that with “the brakes still jammed on” the reality of the university landscape is much less rosy than the view presented through official channels, given the picture one might create for oneself from reading documents defining how the higher education system operates.

Such reservations apply particularly to the system for accrediting institutions and the courses they offer. The main reasons for this situation seem to me to be rooted in, firstly, insufficient differentiation by quality and, secondly, the still only relative autonomy of university institutions.

### **Insufficient differentiation by quality**

A priori, the situation is clear: the contractual procedure provides an appropriate framework for implementing an accreditation policy based on criteria which encourage quality; and the public powers in theory have the means to enforce this policy. To be sure, the *contractualisation* process expressly stipulates an assessment stage and even places this at the heart of the accreditation system. Such assessment can be realised through specific evaluations carried out either by leading research institutions or by the CNE.

However, despite omnipresent assessment, experience shows that this assessment is, in fact, only marginally qualitative. As a result, too many mediocre – even inadequate – courses are accredited, compared with those subjected to the rigours of the published criteria. The reasons for this gap are many:

- Institutions, and within them the individual departments, join in a kind of “leaking in advance” of the courses they are going to

offer and this leads to the provision, and carrying, of under prepared projects;

- Projects with the most problems often originate in recently established or small institutions having fewer means available than the others; and such institutions sometimes receive a more lax examination, justified by the always commendable “positive discrimination”;
- The different levels of assessment and decision making (experts, educational advisors, institutional advisors, management, CNSER, ministry department) lead to cumulative slippage: a project rated inadequate at one level may be passed at the next level – the opposite does not happen;
- Even if recognised degrees/diplomas are usually checked periodically, only new proposals are subjected to rigorous examination; for various reasons it is exceptional for an institution to have one of its established courses “unvalidated”.

For all these reasons, which merit an in-depth analysis, the current impact of accreditation procedures brings with it insufficient differentiation by quality.

### **Only relative autonomy**

This second aspect complements the preceding one in explaining the relatively weak impact of the accreditation system. Though university institutions are in principle autonomous, one can observe that this autonomy is, in effect, very relative. Once again, several factors account for this distance between the potential situation and the actual reality:

- The parameter of the powers devolved to institutions restricts these to teaching and research. With a few exceptions, institutions have no autonomy in the areas of university buildings, staff (teaching, research, administrative, technical), nor in student welfare (grants, accommodation, etc.);
- If a priori financial control is beyond their reach, then the EPCSCP are still subject to public accountability and to a control which every year makes it more complicated and difficult for them to exercise their autonomy;
- The principles of the annually allotted budget and State traditions firmly entrenched in the official mentality ensure the continuing existence of the traditional patterns of “petitioning and bestowing” almost constantly at the right hands of the



heads of the various government departments in Paris – all of these maintain a culture of dependence.

As with the preceding point, an in-depth study would be necessary in order to examine these different factors, in particular those reflecting institutional positions and those revealing individual and collective behaviour patterns.

### **Some encouraging prospects**

Although the current impact of accreditation procedures based on quality is still limited, one may nonetheless view them as an encouraging prospect for the future. This view is not advanced merely to give my contribution a positive final note – even though we form part of a “world of goodwill and performance” (Schopenhauer) in which the performance forms part of the construction of reality.

Our conviction is supported by observance of two important movements affecting contemporary French society and whose combined effects are likely to lead both to structural crises and major innovations: firstly, an international opening up – particularly towards the rest of Europe; and, secondly, a change in national mind sets.

### **The inevitable opening up to Europe, and more internationally**

France, as the “special land, blessed by the gods” – *terre d’exception, bénie des Dieux – wie Gott in Frankreich* – belongs to a forgotten past. The two world wars, decolonisation, a falling birth-rate, social and economic crises .... and all accompanied by a steady decline in the power and influence of the country, and in its linguistic and cultural aspirations. The other great and middling European powers find themselves in more or less the same situation, even if appreciable differences can be observed in the different positions adopted by the various countries.

Furthermore, the globalisation of international life, in its double meaning of both an effect extending throughout the entire world and also the interpenetration of the different movements of which it is composed, is similarly irreversible, for it is a product of technological developments, notably those contributing to the information society. This “global village” effect is particularly strong in the worlds of research and higher education, which by their nature (*université a la même racine qu’universal* – university having the same root as universal) tend to ignore institutional boundaries and recognise only scientific communities.

These two movements have joined together in creating a new international order, which, after the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and after the attacks

of 11 September 2001, is being constructed under the aegis of the American empire. The old European nation states cannot hope to recover an influence worthy of their past without uniting their efforts. In most areas of activity, and particularly that of the university, there are only two choices: the creation of a European entity or vassalage.

### **The evolution of national mind sets**

French society is aware of the international changes affecting it and the different socio-political groups must adopt positions in response to these changes.

It is clear that the evolution towards open systems is a move in the right direction, for such systems will lead to greater efficiency and French society, including its university system, must adapt to the American model (I was going to say “benchmark”): increased liberalisation in the educational offer, even so far as abandoning national diplomas/degrees and the competing of university institutions with each other in the education market.

For those of the other opinion, however, this evolution is harmful, for it produces and accentuates inequalities. It should be resisted for as long as possible by preserving the national character of diplomas/degrees, the standardised distribution of means and resources – in brief, the traditional administrative system.

Our feeling is that it is a self-defeating and retrograde step to become wholly absorbed with this primary dilemma: the market as a synonym for efficiency versus the State as the guarantor of justice.

- Firstly, because such comparisons are simplistic, and sometimes false: the market – examples abound – can be “*défaillant ou dépassé* - inefficient or outdated”, as F. Perroux reminds us, and the State – history is witness to this – can show itself to be cruelly unjust;
- And secondly, because one cannot simply equate the decentralised organisation of an activity with marketability; nor the opposite: a public service activity with its centralisation.

The key dilemma seems to us to be this: research and teaching activities belong to the group of “*services d'intérêt general* – services of general/public interest”, which any professional body concerned about their future must guarantee. As such, they should not be subjected to the laws of the market in the same way that standard goods and services are. However, for all that, they do benefit from being organised in a decentralised manner, for in this way they can better adapt to the needs of their users and ensure greater involvement of all concerned.

The problem is one of regulating organisational systems, socio-political in nature and, by definition, complex. It is not believed that such regulation will be simple, but it is, nevertheless, a matter of urgency that such regulation takes place.



## **University Strategy Consistent with Accreditation and Quality Assessment**

***Francisco Michavila Pitarch, UNESCO Chair, Universidad Politécnica de Madrid***

### **Instruments and aims**

Improving the quality of state provision of higher education is an obligation for universities and governments, both regional and central. Each has responsibility for taking specific actions, depending on their areas of competence. After the last two decades, dominated fundamentally by coping with the increasing demand for university studies, principally from young people, the growth in the number of students enrolled in universities has now fallen, or has at least slowed, both for demographic reasons and because of the both rational and welcome wider access to higher education. The time is now ripe for other initiatives and new priorities, so opening the way to greater quality in the choice of higher education on offer.

The definition of strategic aims for the university system has first priority in the sequence of actions leading to better teaching and learning in universities. The academic objectives of universities in Spain have little in common today with those existing when the *Ley de Reforma Universitaria* (Law of University Reform) was passed in 1983. The context is also different, with the integration of the European Area of Higher Education. And so, to achieve the objectives set universities must adopt appropriate strategies. This is not a minor matter if they are to have, each individually and the whole system, clear, specific and incentivised aims.

The answer given to the question: *What do you want to do?* will serve to profile the identity of a university, each different from the others, headed towards a process of redefining their areas of competence and so making each both different and complementary at the same time. The question: *What does society in general and its individual members in particular ask you to do?* will cause universities to analyse the opportunities and difficulties encountered in their mission to serve the public. *What can be done?* will shed light on the weaknesses and strengths of their search for academic excellence. These questions and the answers to them will define university objectives – that is, *What is this institution going to do?* – and its strategies for action: *How is it going to do this?*



The above digression is opportune, given the current situation of Spanish universities. Following the enactment of the *Ley Orgánica de Universidades* (LOU) just a year and a half ago a fanatical faith in quality assessment and accreditation has emerged – a faith that I would venture to call the *faith of the converted*. Over recent months the words “assessment” and “accreditation” have been very much in vogue – to the great satisfaction of those who have spent years locked in a battle for their implementation and for the imbuing of university activities with this new culture of quality. Above all, however, everything must be in its right place for higher education to function well and the ends must be clearly differentiated from the means.

Ends should not be confused with means. The prime aim of a university is the best possible teaching and research through improvements in its teaching and research capabilities. To achieve this, the more instruments we have available, the better. The assessment of quality and the processes of accreditation are not in themselves the ends of university activity; they are, rather, instruments with which to achieve this quality and accreditation. Making such a distinction is timely at this moment in Spain for it appears that today, in the actions of recently created bodies and numerous academic staff associations, everything is subordinated to the procedures and methods of accreditation.

University activities must not be organised just so that they may be accredited, for accreditation should be an instrument for quality assurance and improvement. The former should not happen. It does not happen in countries with extensive experience of assessment, accustomed to the systematic use of the results of accreditation; nor will it occur in our country, despite any accommodation of awkward egoisms in the interests of harmony in the university system.

### **Institutional assessment and accreditation in Spain**

Institutional assessment of university quality has existed in Spain for somewhat longer than ten years. After some isolated experiences and meetings to consider the topic, there began, in the first half of the 1990s, a process which has become unstoppable. An experimental programme involving seventeen universities and a European pilot project on teaching preceded the first *Plan Nacional de Evaluación* (National Assessment Plan), approved in September 1995. Since then a new university language has spread, incorporating innovative visions of a culture of quality, and the first concrete results have become clear, both successes and failures. In almost all universities technical and management units have been created, with their corresponding organisational structures; the first official reports with their interesting information on the health of the university system have been published, and so forth.

The methodology of assessment has been the main discovery. Its three stages – the internal report produced by an institution and then checked against a later assessment carried out by external experts, leading to the preparation of a public document containing the main conclusions on the plus and minus points of the qualification or unit examined – are the same as those followed in similar processes in other countries. This brief history has opened an enticing path towards international recognition and transparency, basic principles in the construction of the European Area of Higher Education. However, another piece has to be added in order to complete the puzzle: accreditation.

It is not just quality improvement which is of interest; also important is quality assurance – an assurance that the courses of study taught by universities comply with at least the minimum standards for levels of knowledge of academic staff, adequate infrastructures and appropriate educational methodologies. Faced with the expected future panorama of growing diversification in the university system, it appears perfectly logical for the public authorities to be concerned that the public does not feel cheated in its expectations of access to higher studies and that scientific work is of a level in accordance with international standards.

The report *Universidad 2000* offered a solution to this new uncertainty: Chapter VII proposed the

accreditation of teaching programmes and the creation of a national *Agencia de Acreditación*. The LOU later made this idea its own by devoting *Título V* to the topic of assessment and accreditation. Since then accreditation has always been in the news, and above all those bodies formed after the enactment of the LOU to perform the tasks of accreditation: ANECA - the *Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación* (National Quality Assessment and Accreditation Agency) and the similar agencies created by the *Gobiernos Autónomos* (Regional Governments). More specifically, the establishment of ANECA has aroused much distrust and doubt, its independence has been brought into question and, at the same time, it has suffered resignations and conflicts.

The importance given by the LOU to assessment and accreditation is not limited to teaching programmes, but extends also to the individual scrutiny of the merits of candidates applying for lecturing posts. The latter will entail a great amount of work over the coming years. Such a concern with teaching staff, administrators and technicians, with its consequent cost, should not become merely a bureaucratic processing of an enormous number of applications. For our immediate university future it concerns an area of crucial importance: that all this energy is directed towards stimulating better teaching and the development of innovative methodologies, and not solely to routine procedures, the obligatory compliance with certain formalities. The networking

operations of ANECA and the regional agencies will be beneficial for the system only if each defines its mission precisely and links this to those of the others.

ANECA must supervise the overall work of assessment and accreditation in Spain, so guaranteeing the quality of the assessment processes. The practical application of procedures – that is, the development of the assessment programmes – will be easier and more fluid if it is performed by the agencies created by the Regional Governments. For the smooth operation of the whole system, the dovetailing of competences and responsibilities between the various agencies is crucial.

There are two ways of interpreting this powerful instrument of university policy: assessment and accreditation. One leads to a reduction in university autonomy through the introduction of greater external control, from the sphere of government, over the activities of universities. This is a way of taking a step backwards, though camouflaged in the uniform of modern working methods. The other favours transparency and matches greater organisational and academic autonomy with a rapid system for revealing the results achieved to society and to its representatives. With this latter way of interpreting assessment tasks the emphasis must be placed on whatever favours innovative teaching and research excellence.

Two fundamental elements in the correct orientation of the assessment and accreditation processes are credibility – of the assessment bodies and of the individuals responsible for the actual assessing – and their capacity to look towards the future. The agencies should not limit themselves to producing a single snapshot, as it were, of the level of quality apparent in the university and in its educational programmes. They should, rather, consider among their functions prospecting for the future, investigating emerging social demands in training and research.

We find ourselves at the beginning of a long path and we must let matters take their course. It would be wise for those who hold in their hands such a powerful instrument for constructing university policy not to try to reinvent the wheel; let them learn from the experiences of other countries. And the correction of “excesses” and defects already present in the new system would also be timely. For example, the LOU does not give consideration to a truly authentic system for accrediting programmes – a fundamental aspect of which should be its periodic, cyclical nature. It only stipulates that there should be one single reapproval after qualifications, adapted to the new legal framework, have enjoyed a few years of legitimacy. This presents a serious problem in gaining international recognition for the implemented accrediting processes.

### **Priorities in the planning of university strategies**

Once assessment and accreditation are incorporated into the Spanish university system, the question then centres on how such changes can be used to define more accurately the priorities in university strategy. The five given here are fundamental for Spanish universities, but they are not the only ones.

The first is integration within the European Area of Higher Education. In the context of the now popularised European harmonisation, comparability between the higher education systems of the different member states has progressed through the strategies, agreed upon at the Bologna meeting, of introducing European credits, as a unit of measurement of teaching-learning, and of the supplement to be incorporated into diplomas containing previously approved additional information. In this way recognition of study programmes within the European Union will be made easier, with the proviso that action is taken to provide adequate and verifiable information on the quality of the relevant programmes. It is at this point that assessment and accreditation have a significant role, in addition to their contribution to strategies for the mobility, both real and virtual, of young people within the EU. Furthermore, within the system of indicators

used in the processes of assessing the quality of teaching, it would also be advisable to include a section dedicated specifically to the measurement of progress in the education in those values and subjects leading to the formation of European citizens.

The correction of evident weaknesses in our higher education is the second contribution of these assessment and accreditation plans. Thanks to the assessment of universities and the accreditation of programmes and lecturers, it will be possible to accurately diagnose those outstanding defects which require urgent corrective measures. The appropriate strategic actions are many and varied. To mention one of the most outstanding, we may refer to the training of academic staff. If educational methodology is considered when assessing lecturers, then the interest of junior staff in this will be stimulated and this, in turn, will encourage the development by universities themselves of training programmes, which will be accredited by the regional agencies. The training in methodology and in educational technology offered to lecturers, on whom the innovations in teaching depend, is a responsibility to be shared between universities and local authorities.

A third university issue which will benefit from the proposed changes will be improvements in the financing systems, so that they may be efficient, fair and provide resources in accordance with their exploitation – the latter being understood as results



satisfying previously defined objectives. Assessment and accreditation information will facilitate the introduction of mechanisms for differential financing whereby one part, small though it may be, will be conditional upon the achievement of good results. Financing, in addition to being transparent and objective, should be broken down into a major share *without conditions*, so that minimum quality standards may be assured, and a minor share *conditional upon* the introduction of quality improvement standards agreed between each university and its regional government. Strategic exploitation of assessment and evaluation processes will depend upon the existence of objective indicators for assessing universities, so permitting the apportioning of economic resources in relation to results obtained and the attainment of specific predetermined priority objectives. This will encourage the application of strategies leading to objectives linked to incentives dependent upon their attainment.

Of the points chosen from those which will positively influence assessment and accreditation, the fourth is the redefinition of the limits of university autonomy. This will allow for the adoption of strategies replacing the current “a priori” control with an “a posteriori” check on academic results. It will also help to introduce a more flexible university structure, one less rigid in its organisation and more open to society. One specific aspect of this opening up will be the participation of professional bodies in the accreditation processes, for these should measure

not only academic competence but also the professional training acquired by students.

University autonomy is not merely a rhetorical topic, empty of any meaning. University autonomy is an essential condition if academic activities are to develop satisfactorily. Its development, balanced against systematic accountability for the efficient use of public resources, is a firm step along the correct path.

From the recent history of Spanish universities we may extract one example, negative in the extreme, when the Partido Popular-controlled Regional Government of Valencia attempted to interfere with the autonomy of the University of Valencia. (The Partido Popular is the principal conservative political party, currently in power.) At the other extreme, and also damaging in terms of inefficiency and lack of accountability, is the tolerance allowed to many universities in their poor application of good legislation – that is, the Royal Decree of December 1987 on the production of course plans. The vested interests of many departments have been given precedence over the social expectations of modernisation of course contents, so jeopardising the reform.

A fifth and final area which one will see improved by the implementation of assessment and accreditation is that of student care. Students must be given better and more accurate information, for this is one of the functions of a quality assurance

system. In this way, they can choose both their studies and the university at which they will follow them, having to hand information on the institutional quality of universities, the quality of the courses offered and the facilities available. The right strategy will be one that leads to the generation of information comprehensible to the general public and not only abstruse technical data. Through such information people will have access to a principle of quality assurance. The socialisation of the university does not mean only an increased physical proximity to its students, for it must, at the same time, comply with minimum standards of quality.

### **Final comments**

We find ourselves on the threshold of a new era for the university. New values and new demands will determine what takes place in classrooms, laboratories and libraries. A new context is taking shape – one characterised by the spreading of a culture of quality, the implementation of compulsory systems with a universally recognised methodology for assessing the results of teaching and research, differentiating specifications which distinguish one university from another, and the mobility of students and staff within the European area.

What will be the dominant trends in the spread of quality and assessment programmes? The future is not assured for any human activity, but in relation to university quality one may venture to suggest

two characteristics of the times to come. The first will be less state involvement in assessment and accreditation programmes. In the United States such work is carried out by agencies which are recognised, but private in character; though I do not think we shall go so far in Europe, nor would it be advisable. However, the autonomy of assessment bodies and their equidistance from both universities and the state is essential for the acceptance and credibility of their work. The second characteristic will be the involvement of social interests in the criteria, standards and indicators used. This also assumes greater interaction between the academic world and society in the accreditation processes, with a sharing of certain responsibilities between professional organisations.

Although, at the beginning, the introduction of assessment and accreditation programmes aroused a certain amount of distrust within the academic community, the public perception of accreditation is without any doubt a favourable one. And it will continue to be so if actions taken in the next few years are guided by prudence and if certain of the newcomers now holding high positions in this area do not, in their newly paraded enthusiasm, rush headlong into changes, steamrolling everything in their path.

Information coming out of the United States on the value of accreditation is very encouraging. In studies carried out by the Middle States regional accreditation agency in Philadelphia it has been

shown that accreditation is itself considered to be an indicator of quality. There is, furthermore, recognition of the effectiveness of accreditation in improving the activities of institutions assessed by this agency. Almost two-thirds of selected managers and socially prominent individuals polled believe that assessment and accreditation programmes are very useful for improving university quality.

Assessment and accreditation will play a prominent role in the construction of the European university. Important technical aspects still have to be resolved: Discipline-based European agencies? Network operation? Mutual recognition of results, based on a common methodology?, etc. But there is no doubt whatsoever as to their crucial role in the construction of the European Area of Higher Education.



## **Quality Assessment in Spanish Universities: The Path to Accreditation**

***Purificación Moscoso, University of Alcalá***

### **Summary**

An overview is given of the process followed in Spain, from the earliest experiences of quality assessment in universities up to the current situation.

Firstly, the movement for quality assurance in higher education is examined within the European context: the Council of Europe Recommendation (1998), the Bologna Declaration (1999) and the Prague Communiqué (2001). Reference is also made to the Spanish legal framework (the *Ley Orgánica de Universidades*, 2001: L.O.U.), which refers, for the first time, to the concept of accreditation and requires universities to obtain re-

approval of their courses of study once these have been revised in accordance with quality criteria.

The most significant aspects of the first *Plan Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad de las Universidades* (National Plan for University Quality Assessment) are presented. Finally, reference is made to those fundamental elements of the accreditation process which have yet to be defined in the new landscape of the Spanish university system.

### **Introduction**

For the first time the Spanish university system is faced with a process through which, basically, an officially recognised organisation will endorse compliance with certain quality standards (which may be national or international) on the basis of evidence and results from procedures established by an authorised agency. Such a process is called “accreditation” and different types of organisations may be responsible for this, depending on the structures and legal norms of individual states.

It is a practice new to Spain but brings with it a decade of institutional experiences centred on the use of quality assessment to improve qualifications, research and university administration and services.

As a result of the coming into force of the L.O.U. (21 December 2001) doors have opened on to a new



landscape in which courses of study leading to the award of officially-recognised qualifications, as a result of Government approval, must be submitted to an accreditation process which will guarantee compliance with established quality indicators. The organisation responsible for this process is ANECA (the *Agencia Nacional de Evaluación, Calidad y Acreditación* – the National Agency for Evaluation, Quality and Accreditation).

However, as accreditation of university qualifications exists within the European framework of processes guaranteeing the quality of higher education, it is necessary to refer to this European context in order to explain the objectives it is intended to attain through such processes.

### **Processes of quality assurance within the European context**

The Council of Europe presented its Recommendation of 24 September 1998 on European cooperation in guaranteeing the quality of higher education (98/561/CE). This urged member states to develop transparent systems for evaluating the quality of higher education, to set up networks of cooperation between the relevant authorities and to involve all associations and organisations with experience in this area.

In addition, the Recommendation specified that such systems should possess a series of

appropriate follow-up measures and it also invited the relevant authorities and higher education centres to facilitate the exchange of experiences and cooperation with international organisations and associations.

The development of these transparent systems of quality assessment has as its principal aims:

- To safeguard the quality of higher education within the economic, social and cultural contexts of the various countries, taking into account both the European dimension and the continuing evolution of society.
- To encourage and assist higher education centres in their use of appropriate measures, in particular those related to assessment, with the aim of improving the quality of teaching and learning, and also of research training - another important aspect of this mission.
- To encourage exchanges of information related to quality and to quality assessment both within the EU and worldwide.
- To promote cooperation in this area between higher education centres.

Also of particular interest are the Council of Europe recommendations on the criteria to be applied to

the processes of quality assessment. These criteria are basically:

- The autonomy and independence of those bodies responsible for quality assessment in their choice of procedures and methods, with allowance made for adaptation to the structures of each member state.
- The adaptation of quality assessment procedures and methods to the profiles and missions of higher education centres, respecting their autonomy and independence, and allowing for the particular structures of each member state.
- The use, in pursuit of the stated aims, of both internal and external quality assessment elements, adapted to the procedures and methods used.
- The participation of the various interested parties in accordance with the matter under evaluation.
- The publication of the results of the evaluation in a form appropriate to each member state.

This Council of Europe Recommendation therefore encouraged higher education centres, in cooperation with the appropriate organisations in

the member states, to adopt recognised methodologies and criteria, and invited the relevant authorities and higher education centres to attach particular importance to the exchange of experiences and to cooperation on matters of quality assessment with other member states and with international organisations and associations active in the area of higher education. Cooperation between the authorities responsible for evaluation and quality assessment of higher education was also encouraged in order to favour their interrelationships.

In 1998 in Paris, as a result of an initiative by the Ministers of Education of Germany, France, Italy and the United Kingdom, it was decided to promote the convergence of higher education systems, an idea which resulted in the Sorbonne Declaration, which underlines the central role of universities in the development of the European cultural dimension. So began a process, the aim of which is to construct a higher education area as a key instrument towards EU citizen mobility and the establishment of a unified employment market.

One year later, in 1999, twenty-nine states endorsed the Bologna Declaration and accepted a commitment to coordinate their respective policies in order to attain, before 2010, those objectives which have become the basic mechanisms for harmonisation. Such mechanisms basically involve the adoption of a comparable system of qualifications through the application of the

European Diploma Supplement, a new university structure essentially based on two cycles, undergraduate and postgraduate, and through the establishment of a new system of credits (ECTS) and qualifications. They also include participation in the European system for evaluating and accrediting courses of study.

One of the fundamental objectives of the Bologna Declaration (1999) is, therefore, to promote European cooperation within the area of the processes of quality assessment, with the aim of developing comparable criteria and methodologies.

In the Prague Declaration (2001) the above objective is further defined, with reference made to the development of quality assurance systems and to mechanisms of certification and accreditation, in order to enhance the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area.

At the same time, in 2000, the European Network for Quality Assurance emerged, the aim of which is to promote cooperation between those European agencies involved in both these processes and practices. More internationally, from 1991 the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education has grouped together such agencies from all continents.

### **Accreditation of university courses within the Spanish legal context**

As a consequence of the enactment of the L.O.U, (21 December 2001), Spanish universities now find themselves at the starting point of this European accreditation movement. The rationale for the L.O.U. lies in the need to introduce a new ordering of activity which, within the framework of the information and knowledge society, will enable the challenges presented by innovations in ways of generating and transmitting knowledge to be met. The L.O.U also states that “these new scenarios and challenges require new ways of dealing with them and the Spanish university system is now at the best moment of its entire history for responding to a challenge of enormous importance: the creation of a knowledge society in our country”.

The L.O.U. recognises the essential end of university policy to be the promotion and assurance of quality in Spanish universities (*Título V, artículo 31*) and includes as objectives:

- The measurement of the efficacy of the public provision of university higher education and its accountability.
- The transparency, comparison, cooperation and competitiveness of universities, both nationally and internationally.

- The improvement of teaching and research activities, and of university management.
- The provision of information to public administrations for the taking of decisions within their areas of competence.
- The provision of information to the general public in the interests of encouraging standards of excellence and mobility of students and staff.

The L.O.U. also specifies that the means to attain the above objectives are the evaluation, certification and accreditation of:

- Courses of study leading to the award of official qualifications valid throughout the whole of Spain, as a result of their recognition by the government under the terms set out in *artículo* 35, and also of the qualification of Doctor, in accordance with the terms of *artículo* 38.
- Courses of study leading to diplomas and degrees awarded by universities and higher education centres themselves.
- The teaching, research and administrative activities of university academic staff.

- The activities, programmes, services and management of centres and institutions of higher education.
- Other activities and programmes which may take place as a result of the promotion by public administrations of quality in teaching and research.

Once the objectives and mechanisms for assuring the quality of the activities carried out in universities have been established, the Law (L.O.U.) stipulates which organisations shall be responsible for the processes leading to evaluation, accreditation and certification by establishing two institutions which correspond to the different levels of the State Administration: central and regional. At the level of Central Administration the approved institution is ANECA: the *Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación* (National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation). The Law also refers to assessment bodies established under the laws of the *Comunidades Autónomas* (Autonomous Regions) and within their respective areas of competence, but without prejudicing what may be established by other state or regional assessment agencies.

In accordance with the new legal framework, on 19 July 2002 the *Consejo de Ministros* (Council of Ministers) authorised the creation by the *Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deportes* (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport) of a state



foundation: the *Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación* (National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation) in compliance with *artículo* 32 of the L.O.U. Also in accordance with the dictates of the Law, certain Autonomous Regions have created their own assessment and evaluation agencies. In this way both ANECA and the regional agencies are responsible, within their respective areas of competence, for implementing the established policies on assessment, certification and accreditation.

The institution responsible for producing reports leading to government recognition of official qualifications valid throughout Spain is, therefore, the recently-created ANECA, which, on 5 March 2003, established its *Comité Nacional de Acreditación* (National Accreditation Committee). This body will be charged with validating the accreditation process and, in principal, it is expected to initiate an experimental accreditation process for each of the main scientific fields.

#### **Assessment and accreditation agencies within the Autonomous Regions**

As explained, some of the *Comunidades Autónomas* (Autonomous Regions), supported by the new legal structuring of the university system, have created their own evaluation and accreditation agencies. These exist in the Canary Islands, Catalonia, the

Balearic Islands, Madrid and Valencia. In Catalonia this results from a change in the *Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari a Catalunya*, active since 1996.

The *Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari a Catalunya* was created in response to pressure for a body which would promote the implementation of a culture of quality and continuous improvement in Catalan universities. Six and a half years later, as a result of the enactment of the *Llei d'Universitats Catalana*, it became AQU Catalunya: the *Agència per a la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari de Catalunya* (Agency for Quality in the University System of Catalonia). This law gives the agency new powers and objectives, and also a new structure for managing the changes both required and rapidly taking place in all areas and at all levels.

In the *Comunidad Valenciana* (Valencia Region) the *Consejo Valenciano de Universidades* (Valencia Universities' Council) and the *Comisión Valenciana de Acreditación y Evaluación de la Calidad en el Sistema Universitario Valenciano* (Valencia Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assessment in the Valencia University System) were both created on 19 June 2002. The latter is an autonomous external assessment body which fulfils the functions set out in the L.O.U. and provides universities in Valencia with the means necessary to comply with the legal requirements of the L.O.U. for the employment of university academic staff. It

is involved in assessment, being the most appropriate means for improving quality in all areas of university activity.

The *Comisión Valenciana de Acreditación y Evaluación de la Calidad* exists not only as a useful instrument for instigating and developing policies of quality within the universities in Valencia but also captures and channels a constant flow of information to the general public, the client for university services, within a framework of transparency, so encouraging a better yield from these services. At the same time, this accreditation and assessment body serves the public authorities in accurately defining university policies on quality, in particular those related to the financing of the Valencia university system.

In the Balearic Region the *Ley de Organización Institucional del Sistema Universitario de las Islas Baleares* (20 March 2003) makes reference in *Título II* to the *Agencia de Calidad Universitaria de las Illes Balears* (Agency for University Quality in the Balearic Islands), which is responsible for the evaluation, accreditation and quality assessment of the university system in this *Comunidad Autónoma* (Autonomous Region). It enjoys the following functions:

- Planning and management of the assessment projects of the Universidad de

las Illes Balears in the areas of teaching, research, cultural expansion and services.

- Certification of the quality of the courses of study, management and activities of the Universidad de las Illes Balears.
- Accreditation of university studies in accordance with the legislation in force.
- Prior accreditation and assessment of teaching and research staff contracted by the Universidad de las Illes Balears in accordance with the legislation in force.
- Evaluation of the worth of teaching and research staff working for and contracted by the Universidad de las Illes Balears in order that they may receive supplementary remuneration in accordance with the legislation in force.
- Any other functions assigned in accordance with current university legislation and those which may be assigned by the governing body of the Agency.

In the Canary Islands the *Agencia Canaria de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación Universitaria* (Canary Agency for University Quality and Accreditation) was constituted on 26 July 2002. This Agency is responsible for the assessment and accreditation of courses of study,

qualifications, services and university centres, and for the evaluation of teaching and research staff. It will perform functions related to the future plans of the Canary university system and will provide any information required by the *Consejos Sociales* (Social Councils), in accordance with *artículo* 14.2 of the L.O.U., and that required by any other university body or by the public administrations. All of this is for the purpose of taking decisions which fall within its area of competence.

In the *Comunidad de Madrid* (Madrid Region) the Regional Assembly meeting of 27 December 2002 passed a law for the creation of the *Agencia de la Calidad, Acreditación y Prospectiva de las Universidades de Madrid* (Agency for Quality, Accreditation and Prospects in the Universities of Madrid). Among the objectives of this agency are:

- To assess the quality of the university system.
- To research into the designing of programmes aimed at achieving the highest levels of quality in teaching, research and university management.
- To cooperate with quality, assessment and accreditation programmes at the state and regional levels, and also internationally.

In Andalusia, Castilla-León and Galicia there exist agencies dedicated to the assessment of their respective universities. These agencies were established before the enactment of the current Law.

In Andalusia the *Consortio para la Calidad de las Universidades Andaluzas* (the Association for Quality in Andalusian Universities) has been in existence since 8 November 1998. The agreement for the creation of this Association was signed by the *Consejero de Educación y Ciencia* (Councillor for Education and Science) and by the rectors of the universities in Andalusia. The objectives of the Association are:

- To maintain the quality of higher education in the areas of teaching, research, management and provision of services.
- To assist higher education centres in employing quality assurance techniques.
- To exercise a watching brief over the appropriateness of the procedures, the combination of internal and external assessment, the participation of all interested parties and the publication of assessment reports, given that the systems of quality assurance are based on principles of independence and autonomy for those authorities responsible for evaluation.

- To promote the adoption of follow-up measures which will enable higher education centres to implement their improvement plans.
- To ensure that high priority is given to continuous exchange of experiences and cooperation in quality assurance matters.

In Galicia the *Consortio Agencia para la Calidad del Sistema Universitario de Galicia* (Agency for Quality in the Galician University System) was established on 30 January 2001 through a partnership agreement between the Xunta de Galicia (Regional Government of Galicia) and the universities of this region. The objectives of the Agency are:

- To assess the Galician university system.
- To analyse the results.
- To propose measures for the improvement of the quality of services provided by the Galician public universities, particularly in the areas of teaching, research, management and services.

In Castilla-León the *Consortio Agencia para la Calidad del Sistema Universitario de Castilla y León* (Agency for Quality in the University System of Castilla-León) was created on 15 November 2001 as

a body which, together with the *Gabinetes de Calidad* (Quality Councils) of each university, will collaborate in regional, national and international university quality initiatives. The objectives of the Agency are:

- To develop a quality system through assessment of the Castilla-León university system.
- To analyse the results.
- To propose measures for the improvement of the quality of services provided by the Castilla-León public universities and in other institutions receiving services from the latter.

**From the Almagro Group to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Plan for University Quality (*II Plan de Calidad de las Universidades*)**

At the beginning of the 1990s the first attempts at institutional assessment began in Spain with the *Programa Experimental de Evaluación de la Calidad del Sistema Universitario:1992-1994* (Experimental Programme for Quality Assessment of the University System); it was supported by the *Consejo de Universidades* (Universities' Council) and by the *Grupo de Almagro*. The European Pilot Project for the assessment of Education followed in 1994-1995.



These experiences led to the development of a methodology adapted to emerging European models and resulted in the first *Plan de Evaluación de la Calidad de las Universidades*, PNECU: 1995-2000 (Quality Assessment of Universities Plan); this was followed by the *II Plan de Evaluación de la Calidad de las Universidades*, PCU (2001-2006). Both depend on the *Consejo de Coordinación Universitaria* (Council for University Coordination).

The prime aim of the first *Plan de Evaluación de la Calidad de las Universidades* (Royal Decree 1947/1995 of 1 December) was to promote institutional quality assessment. The *II Plan de Evaluación de la Calidad de las Universidades* (Royal Decree 408/2001 of 20 April), currently in force, was introduced with the following aims:

- To continue the implementation of quality systems for continuous improvement.
- To encourage the participation of the Autonomous Regions in order to create a Network of Quality Agencies (*Red de Agencias de Calidad*).
- To introduce information systems and to establish accreditation systems.

The new Law has, therefore, changed the existing scenario, with the appearance of ANECA and, in consequence, the co-existence of two state

organisations with responsibilities in the areas of assessment and accreditation. The situation is expected to stabilize within the coming months with the Spanish universities planning their assessment policies in accordance with the new methodological framework and requirements.

Furthermore, the co-existence of ANECA and the various regional accreditation agencies necessitates the development of cooperation policies and agreements to facilitate and simplify the processes to be implemented in our universities.

### The ground covered since the first experiences

The fundamental aim of the *Plan Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad de las Universidades* (National Plan for University Quality Assessment) was to promote institutional quality assessment. If we consider the large number of participating institutions and the volume of organisations assessed, then we may conclude that this aim has been achieved. The four sessions implementing this first plan resulted in the participation of 80% of the universities in our country (55) and the evaluation of 64% of the assessable qualifications: diplomas, first degrees and postgraduate qualifications – “assessable” meaning that courses of study leading to these qualifications have been operating for three years. Statistics from the *Informe Global del Plan Nacional: 1996-2000* (General Report on the National Plan) reveal that 130 qualifications were

included in the first session, 230 in the second, 293 in the third and 286 in the fourth.

In terms of the qualifications assessed, the social sciences and law predominate (371), followed by technical subjects (257), the humanities (124), the experimental sciences (108) and health sciences (62). More diplomas (441) than degrees (420) were assessed. Sixty postgraduate qualifications were assessed during this four-year period. Finally, in the two last sessions a total of 30 departments and 46 university services participated.

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport contributed €4,591,732 to the four sessions of the plan and to this must be added the financing from the universities themselves and from some of the Autonomous Regions.

With the implementation of the first plan Spain has introduced scrutinized and recognised methodological approaches which share stages and common elements with those approaches used in the other EU countries. For example, the independence of governments and institutions is guaranteed, a fundamental aspect of the process.

The methodology employed consists of a mixed process of self-evaluation and external evaluation, leading to a final report. The organisation assessed, whether by qualification, department or service, establishes the internal, or self-evaluation,

committee, consisting of representatives from the academic staff, students and non-teaching staff. The work carried out by this committee leads to a self-assessment report, and this, in turn, forms the basis for the work of the external committee, which comprises academics and professionals distinguished in their disciplines, together with experts in assessment methodology.

After analysing the self-assessment report, visiting the organisation involved and carrying out various interviews, the external committee produces its external report. In the final report, produced by the internal committee, the detected strengths and weaknesses are noted and the main steps to be taken towards quality improvement are detailed.

The principal actions for improvement appearing in final reports of this first plan fall within the following areas:

- Teaching
- Offer / Demand
- University management
- External relations
- Research and project development
- Academic staff policy

In the area of teaching the principal actions are directed towards developing methods and procedures for improving coordination processes, internal and external practices for awarding

qualifications, academic output and the professional skills of the students. Also specified are a series of improvement actions which will lead to innovations in teaching, the use of new technologies in the teaching-learning process and in information systems and in student care.

Actions to improve the balance between offer and demand for qualifications involve renewal of what is on offer and research into future prospects and attracting students.

In the area of university management the principal actions are centred on improving the processing of institutional information and administrative services. Also included is the need to introduce systems of quality and to improve certain aspects of the library services. It is worth mentioning that of all the services it is the library service which is most closely assessed.

#### Conclusion: achievements and challenges

The Spanish university system faces a fundamental change in the recognition process for official qualifications and this will lead along a path very different from that followed up to now. It is no longer sufficient merely to abide by the directives issued in the *Boletín Oficial del Estado* (Official Government Gazette) and to follow the regulatory procedures for the introduction of a university qualification, for, in addition to the former, it is now

necessary to participate in the new process of accountability, through assessment leading to accreditation. In short, this means that an independent organisation will grant recognition to the processes and results of a qualification a posteriori – that is, after the latter is already institutionalised.

The development of systems of quality assurance is, however, not new in Spain. From the beginning of the 1990s there has existed a voluntary policy on this and it has resulted in assessment processes aimed at improving the quality of teaching, research and services, with the support of regional and central authorities, and the universities themselves.

As a consequence of this decade of institutional assessment there now exists within the university community a greater awareness of assessment and quality, values intrinsic to the achievement of educational excellence. Many organisations and individuals have taken part in this movement and helped spread the idea that, in order to improve, it is necessary to follow assessment processes which help institutions understand their strengths and weaknesses and systematise their improvement procedures by identifying the object of the action, its priority, area of competence, time need for implementation, estimated cost, etc.

It may be argued that one of the most welcome outcomes of the methodology employed has been

the involvement of students, teaching and non-teaching staff in both the internal and external assessment stages. In this way the university community has not perceived assessment as something foreign to their own institution, but rather as an exercise in reflection on improvement, stemming from the responsibility which comes with university autonomy.

The development of this first plan has resulted in something else, both positive and necessary: the creation, in most universities, of technical units dedicated to promoting a culture of quality and to giving support to the processes of assessment. Progressively, these units are being staffed with qualified personnel and there are ever more universities with an infrastructure suited to undertaking the different stages of assessment.

Similarly, throughout this period regional agencies have been created, thus demonstrating the interest of these administrations in becoming further involved in the quality improvement of the universities which they finance. This regional involvement has been encouraged by the new legal structuring of our university system, so resulting in the establishment *ex novo* of agencies in Autonomous Regions which previously lacked any body dedicated to assessment.

One should also mention that the need to systematise and provide data during the different

assessment stages has resulted in Spanish universities improving their information management and systems and becoming more aware of the importance of possessing structured information in order to take better-informed decisions.

In terms of qualifications, the principal objects of assessment, the assessment processes to which they have been subjected have resulted in close analysis of courses of study and the initiation of various strategies to link these more closely to their environment.

However, what remains to be achieved is a more generalised culture of quality, involving university governing bodies and faculty and departmental teams in the processes. Only in this way can the results of the assessment be linked to open support for those improvement measures proposed in the final reports. One cannot ignore the fact that there still exists a general feeling that assessment, in reality, will not achieve its objectives, for after the final report is produced it is noticeable that there scarcely exists any real desire to dedicate effort and finance towards improving the identified areas of weakness.

Furthermore, in the sphere of competences in the assessment policy, many questions still remain unasked and therefore unanswered. As we have seen, at the present time two state bodies co-exist: the *Consejo de Coordinación Universitaria* and



ANECA. Under current legislation both of these are charged with carrying out assessment and accreditation processes, for the establishment of an accreditation system is one of the objectives of the *II Plan de Calidad de las Universidades*. It is, therefore, essential for this situation to be resolved so that Spanish universities may know exactly who they should report to in this process of accountability.

Also still to be determined is the coordination between the regional agencies and the relationship between these and ANECA. At this moment it is not clear if there is to be any type of procedure for mutual recognition between accreditation agencies.

Nor should we forget that our university system is immersed in the process of European harmonisation and for this the procedure to be followed with qualifications must also be clarified. It would appear logical that both steps, accreditation and harmonisation, be programmed coherently and in such a way that the process leading to the re-recognition of courses of study applies to studies already harmonised.

Preparing their qualifications for accreditation will become one of the principal objectives for the governing bodies of Spanish universities. For this it is necessary to know precisely the indicators and standards regulating this process, as well as the procedures to be followed by these institutions. It is

also necessary to clarify the relationship between assessment and accreditation.

However, the greatest and most worrying unknown is perhaps the consequence in a state system of being “not accredited” – in short, the relationship and interdependence between accreditation and the recognition of courses of study.

## **Accreditation in Spain: Approaches, Development and Influence on University Transformation**

***Ismael Crespo, ANECA***

In this contribution I would like to present the essential aspects of what is understood in general terms as accreditation within the sphere of higher education and also to explain the specific meaning that this concept has in the Spanish university system.

In the world of industry accreditation has enjoyed a well-established meaning for some time: it refers to a process by means of which an “accrediting” agency confirms the compliance by another “certifying” agency of those necessary requirements in procedures that authorise the latter to award quality certification to a certain product or process.

In the world of higher education the word “accreditation” may be said to have a similar meaning if we consider universities to be agencies

which award academic qualifications to citizens.  
(Both their own and official qualifications)

In this context the aim of university accreditation is to check that qualifications awarded by universities (by means of degrees) comply with the minimum requisites of required quality. Accreditation is, therefore, essentially an evaluation of results, examined in conformity with certain criteria and compared with standards of quality previously established and recognised. The result of such an examination is, in principle, simply binary: accredited or not accredited.

In general, we may consider the main objective of accreditation to be the evaluation of educational and institutional programmes in order to offer a guarantee to the general public that the quality of each qualification reaches certain predetermined levels.

To this fundamental objective may be added two other equally explicit aims:

- To provide information to the public about these levels of quality,
- To provide to the public authorities information related to the efficient use of the resources provided.

Accreditation is a relatively new procedure in Europe, resulting, on the one hand, from growing

university autonomy and, on the other, from the concern of States about the quality of public service in the higher education offered once the main aim of guaranteeing universal access to such education has been achieved.

Furthermore, the existence of a more open European labour market has generated a demand at the heart of the European Union for greater transparency in the subject matter of degrees and diplomas, which authorise its citizens to exercise a profession in any one of the Member States.

The Bologna Declaration, issued as a consequence of the two aforementioned trends, has produced a new situation in Europe, converting into a priority the possibility of comparing, and making compatible, higher studies.

The hypothesis that the existence of a national accreditation system with some kind of international validation can be an effective instrument in facilitating the comparison of diplomas, degrees and lengths of studies and so remove barriers currently existing and preventing undergraduate and graduate mobility is achieving rapid acceptance in Europe, stimulated, above all, by the processes of convergence.

In addition, it is evident that the credibility of an accreditation process depends to a large extent upon the procedures and criteria used being recognised as valid both externally and

internationally. It would appear reasonable, therefore, to harmonise procedures, objectives and general accreditation criteria in order to increase such external credibility.

How to structure this transnational character is, however, quite complex.

The work carried out by ENQA within the European Union is directed towards achieving this transnational dimension. At this moment there are a series of interesting proposals for revising and reinforcing its structure and operation, with the final possible, and desirable aim, of the creation of a European accreditation agency.

### **The accreditation situation in Spain**

The creation of the Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Accreditation (National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation) has provided us with a structure for the evaluation, certification and accreditation of universities. This will permit close collaboration with other countries and also fully involve us in the trends referred to in the previous paragraph, within both the European sphere and further afield.

The Accreditation Programme of the Spanish National Agency is responsible for the application of those aspects of the Ley de Universidades (Univer-

sities' Law) which are obligatory for all qualifications. Specifically, these are:

- The accreditation of courses of study leading to the award of official qualifications, for the purpose of Government recognition (Article 35 of the LOU – Ley Orgánica de Universidades),
- The accreditation of courses of study leading to the award of a doctorate (Article 38 of the LOU),
- The accreditation of centres providing courses of study in accordance with foreign educational systems (Article 86 of the LOU).

Such accreditation has four main objectives:

- To guarantee minimum standards of quality for the official qualifications of Spanish universities,
- To inform the public about the quality levels of these qualifications,
- To provide educational administrations with information on the quality level of universities,
- To stimulate student and staff mobility.

The LOU states that, after the introductory period of a new course of studies, universities must submit to an evaluation by ANECA of the effective development of such studies. The procedure, and the criteria for suspension or revocation of the recognition of a qualification, will be established by the Government.

This process should be recognised as a more ambitious approval procedure than the simple recognition procedure currently in effect. It involves a *a posteriori* quality control of a particular qualification and the evaluation of such is the exclusive competence of the National Agency, as granted in the Ley de Universidades.

New qualifications emerging as a result of European convergence will be accredited and criteria related to the quality and integration of the Spanish system within the European University Programme will be applied to such qualifications. These criteria, and the accreditation procedure, will be similar to those developed in other European countries, in order that our official qualifications can be automatically recognised in other countries through a mutual recognition procedure between agencies.

On request, existing qualifications may be similarly accredited, conditional upon their adaptation to the convergence norms. To a large extent accreditation criteria will be common for all qualifications, but



with a margin to allow for the specific nature of each particular qualification.

Accreditation, therefore, will be a quality guarantee for all participants in the system: students, universities (with a focus on both internal and external procedures) and administrations.

Accreditation will be introduced in a flexible and progressive manner, with a transition period to take into account the characteristics of the qualifications and the adaptation period needed by universities.

To carry out all these tasks the Agencia Nacional has created the Accreditation Programme, the main responsibility of which is procedure design and the defining of criteria, indicators and standards. The programme will operate in three stages, from June 2003 until the completion of the final stage during the 2002/2006 academic year.

1<sup>st</sup> stage:

- This will begin in June 2003 with the publication of a call for experimental plans and of the conditions of participation in order to test criteria, methodologies and procedure standards.
- At the beginning of the coming academic year 2003/2004 a selection of the requests

presented will be made, taking into account two main parameters:

- A reasonable number of qualifications (from 10 to 15)
  - That these include at least one but preferably two within each of the principal scientific fields, and that these comply with prior requisites - an essential one of the latter being that the qualifications selected have been submitted to a process of auto evaluation.
- Each experimental plan will have:
- One person responsible for the project,
  - A group of experts to define the criteria, indicators and standards,
  - A guide to the accreditation of these qualifications, which includes the criteria, indicators and standards defined by the group of experts.
  - An External Accreditation Committee (Comité de Acreditación Externa) which will make the project follow-up visits.
- The results of the experimental plan will be analysed by the National Accreditation

Committee and this will give its approval of the procedure followed.

- The experimental plans will be financed through individual Collaboration Agreements (Convenios de Colaboración) between ANECA and each of the universities taking part in this project.

2<sup>nd</sup> stage:

This will take place during the academic year 2004/2005 with regular accreditation plans, which:

- will be voluntary in character,
- will allow for the application of the criteria, indicators and standards tested in the earlier experimental stage.

3<sup>rd</sup> stage:

This corresponds to the academic year 2005/2006, during which:

- the National Agency will produce the guides and procedures,
- the MECD (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport) will publish the procedural rules and minimum requirements,

- Compulsory accreditation is introduced.

The accreditation process leads to:

**ANECA Accreditation of Excellence (Acreditación ANECA de excelencia)**, which indicates that levels of excellence have been reached in the quality indicators. The awarding of this accreditation permits the use of the ANECA seal of accreditation.

**Accreditation (Acreditación)** indicates compliance with the basic standards of quality. These standards will be those set by the Ministry to obtain reapproval of courses of study leading to the award of official qualifications.

**Accreditation with conditions (Acreditación con condiciones)** indicates that, following the implementation of certain improvements within a reasonable period of time, the course of studies or educational centre will have complied with the basic standards.

**Not accredited (No acreditación)** indicates that a qualification does not comply with the minimum standards of quality and is therefore illegal, or requires too long a period of time in order to comply with the minimum standards of quality.

The length of accreditation will be limited in time. During the period of accreditation ANECA will carry

out any checking considered necessary. When accreditation has expired, it may be renewed through a process of re-accreditation.

If accreditation is not granted, a claim for consideration may be lodged and appropriate corrections made within the period of one year in order for a new evaluation to take place.

### **CONCLUSION**

At times like the present, when higher education institutions and governments are working together for the construction of the European university programme, it is particularly important to understand and set in place the keys to quality improvement in universities. Such a premise is absolutely essential if we are to establish a European sphere of knowledge and reinforce our international competitiveness.

In such a context the University is a determining element in the progress of a knowledge-based society, for it provides its citizens with those qualifications necessary for their entry into the employment market, makes possible their personal fulfilment, and contributes towards social cohesion.

Viewing the matter from this perspective, the National Agency has set out its objectives: to improve the quality of universities, to introduce evaluation as a key to reinforcing this quality, transparency and competitiveness, and to integrate

our universities, together with other quality centres of higher education, within the new European university programme, which is now in formation.

I believe that the existing consensus regarding the need to guarantee the quality of the systems, studies and higher education institutions of the European Union as an indispensable means towards achieving other equally desirable goals should be regarded as a great achievement. A similar accomplishment is the conviction that in order to reach this goal we need mechanisms for evaluation and quality assurance which are common, efficient and rigorous – such as, for example, the National Quality Agencies now operating in certain countries, which can further empower their activities through network organisation.

## Questions for Debate

**Accreditation**, according to the CRE, 2001, “*is a formal , published statement regarding the **quality of an institution or a programme**, following a cyclical evaluation based on agreed standards*”.

### **Conclusions:**

To ensure that all Accreditation (and Evaluation Systems) will, in practice:

1. display transparency in their operation for students, and the public,
2. be cost-effective to operate,
3. non-bureaucratic in their day to day impact on University life, and
4. work as a partnership among relevant stakeholders,
5. encourage continuous staff development and professional improvement,

6. contribute to Europe as an economic union, but will also permit the maintenance and celebration of cultural diversity and cultural cooperation within Europe (and outside it),
7. contribute to the role of Spanish Universities within the European context,
8. strengthen the internationalisation of Spanish Universities and their international links,
9. sustain the traditional mission of the University to advance knowledge and understanding,
10. confirm the historic commitment to equality of educational opportunity for all.



## CONCLUSIONES

Según el documento de la CRE (Conferencia de Rectores Europeos) titulado *Towards Accreditation Schemes for Higher Education in Europe?* (Final Project Report. CRE-SOCRATES, February, 2001), la acreditación consiste en **“una declaración pública y formal referente a la calidad de una Institución o titulación, en el sentido de haber seguido una evaluación cíclica basada en unos estándares acordados”**.

Tal declaración pública y formal ha de realizarla una *entidad externa*, sobre una titulación o Institución, después de una *evaluación cíclica*, orientada a los resultados, y tras cumplir unos *ciertos estándares adecuados de calidad* que han sido previamente convenidos. No hay que olvidar que el objetivo último de la acreditación es servir de instrumento para la *mejora de la calidad*.

Esta *declaración pública y formal*, realizada por un *organismo autorizado*, da *crédito* (confirma, prueba, justifica, demuestra) de que una Universidad *tiene la competencia académica y técnica* para conceder

una titulación(es) a aquellos estudiantes que han obtenido un nivel de *conocimiento competencial teórico-práctico adecuado*, definido con anterioridad, y que dicha Institución cumple también con los *requisitos específicos* para la impartición de la titulación o titulaciones.

La *Acreditación* promueve, como afirma G. Rauret, Directora de la Agencia per la Qualitat del Sistema Universitari a Catalunya (<http://www.agenqua.org>)

:

- el logro de los *niveles* ( de conocimiento teórico-práctico, de competencia, etc.) previamente establecidos,
- el cumplimiento de los *requisitos* (referidos a la capacidad del sistema: profesorado, alumnado, instalaciones, gestión, etc.)

La *Certificación* promueve que una titulación funcione eficazmente para conseguir los *objetivos* y mejorar su posición estratégica, así como la *mejora continua de los procesos* implicados a través de *mediciones objetivas*.

La *Acreditación* (niveles y requisitos) + *Certificación* (objetivos y procesos) = ACREDITACIÓN DE LA CALIDAD.

No hay que olvidar que el objetivo último de la acreditación es servir de instrumento para la *mejora de la calidad*. La *calidad*, en el marco de una Institución Superior, se ha de medir en

términos del logro de los objetivos y fines de la Institución y, por consiguiente, la *misión o el propósito de la Institución* está en el centro de la actividad. Esto implica que la consecución del objetivo o finalidad institucional está muy relacionado con:

1. Un *proceso continuo de autoevaluación* en el que se reflexiona y actúa en base a datos internos y externos.
2. Un fuerte compromiso por parte de la comunidad universitaria con el entorno social.

La acreditación es otra consecuencia de la *internacionalización* y de la *adaptación a la convergencia europea* (la fecha tope para esa adaptación es el 1 de octubre de 2010). A través de la acreditación se pueden comparar las titulaciones entre sí, así como las (competencias) destrezas profesionales, y facilitar la movilidad de estudiantes y profesores. En plena concordancia con la *Declaración de Bolonia* (19 de junio de 1999) en cuanto a comprensión, comparación, transparencia del sistema europeo de Enseñanza Superior (*Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior*) y promoción de la cooperación europea en el aseguramiento de la calidad con vistas a desarrollar criterios y metodologías comparables, mediante la acreditación se redefinen los papeles de los agentes dentro de la Institución y se incentiva la innovación y la “rendición de cuentas” (transparencia e información al ciudadano),

además de obtener credibilidad, ante las autoridades competentes y ante la sociedad.

Aunque la acreditación puede tener diferentes objetivos, es necesario que el sistema de acreditación garantice estándares mínimos de calidad en beneficio de los estudiantes y empleados, y de la sociedad en general.

Es importante desarrollar *sistemas de garantía de la calidad* que sean compatibles a nivel europeo, sobre todo en relación a esos estándares mínimos que se han de validar en el ámbito internacional. La *evaluación* ha de ser *independiente* y ha de conducir a niveles europeos de calidad.

Las Agencias de Evaluación y Acreditación deberían ser también independientes de las autoridades nacionales y europeas y deberían trabajar en líneas temáticas estableciendo redes transnacionales europeas (*networks y consorcios*).

En el tema de la acreditación es decisivo saber dónde estamos, y dónde queremos estar a corto y largo plazo. Esto exige un *cambio de mentalidad* en las personas, que han de asumir la *calidad como un compromiso ético fundamental*. Aunque se podría discutir sobre el concepto de calidad, pues en ella intervienen muchos agentes, podríamos decir que calidad es obtener lo que se ha definido que se va a ofrecer.

Si estamos construyendo Europa, un buen camino es hacerlo a través del respeto a la diversidad cultural europea, el reconocimiento mutuo y la Educación de Calidad. Para el aseguramiento de la calidad necesitamos cooperación mediante redes específicas. Tenemos que estar de acuerdo en ciertos procesos, y en los criterios para decidir sobre la forma en la que estamos tratando los problemas, pero no necesitamos una “Super Agencia” para controlarlo todo, pues podríamos caer en una gran burocratización, en un desplazamiento de la persona-profesor/a y en una carrera enloquecida para “conseguir el sello” de la acreditación, sin mejorar nada. La acreditación no puede ser un control por el mero hecho de controlar, sino que debe ser un *medio* para poner en *evidencia* en el mercado *la calidad* de nuestras Instituciones.

La Acreditación, se ha de recalcar una vez más, es un instrumento para mejorar la calidad universitaria. Esta cultura de la calidad en la Universidad ha de llegar a todas partes y todas las personas han de estar comprometidas en la realización de esta cultura.

M. Frazer afirmaba en 1994: What is Quality in Higher Education: An International Perspective, en D. Green (ed.): *What is Quality in Higher Education*. London , Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press, que la calidad de la educación superior tiene las siguiente fuentes:

- a) El gobierno o los gobiernos, dado que son ellos los que asignan los recursos públicos para la financiación de las instituciones universitarias,
- b) La ciudadanía en general, sobre todo, aquella que paga impuestos y que espera recibir por ello servicios públicos de mejor calidad, ante todo, en el campo de la educación,
- c) Empresarios y empleadores, públicos y privados, que requieren contar con recursos humanos cada vez mejor preparados,
- d) Estudiantes y padres de familia, los cuales esperan la educación les permita un desarrollo profesional encaminado a subir en su escala social,
- e) Personal académico y directivo de las instituciones que encontrarán sus esfuerzos, metas y misiones, mejor valorados.

Como muy bien ha afirmado M. Michavila, la función del sistema de la calidad en la Universidad consiste en :

- Mejorar la docencia, la investigación y la administración,
- Servir de mecanismo para rendir cuentas a los gobiernos y a la sociedad,

- Suministrar información pública a los estudiantes y al mercado laboral,
- Operar como mecanismo para decidir financiación diferencial de las Universidades,
- Servir de mecanismo de *Acreditación* de programas o Instituciones.

La Acreditación requiere un cambio de mentalidad universitaria, mucho trabajo previo y una metodología adecuada, así como profesionales bien formados y con experiencia en el campo de la Acreditación. La Acreditación, a su vez, no nos engañemos, exige un trabajo extra para la Universidades y las diferentes titulaciones y un coste económico bastante elevado. ¿Se podrá la Universidad, como ha afirmado T. Vroeijerstijn, permitir, a largo plazo, la gran inversión en tiempo y dinero necesario para ello? ¿Qué consecuencias se darán si se abre el mercado al aseguramiento de la calidad externo? ¿Se evitarán enfoques demasiado acadecimistas? ¿Qué ocurre con la excesiva lentitud de algunos Estados? ¿Tiene La Universidad la misma idea acerca de la cualificación profesional que tiene la empresa?

Aunque pueden surgir problemas las ventajas serán muchas:

- Aumentará la transparencia de la Institución universitaria y contribuirá a la mejora de la calidad,

- Facilitará y promoverá la movilidad de estudiantes, profesores y de los profesionales en general,
- Aumentará la comprensión y el reconocimiento mutuo de los títulos universitarios, lo que favorecerá la integración europea,
- Potenciará el atractivo de estudiantes de otros países,
- Fortalecerá y reforzará la emulación internacional en la evaluación y mejora de la calidad.

Nuestras Universidades no pueden quedar fuera del camino europeo que conduce a la mejora. La mejora de nuestras instituciones, junto con las personas que las componen, ha de ser un *imperativo ético*.