
**Studies on Higher Education**

# Indicators for Institutional and Programme Accreditation in Higher/Tertiary Education

Edited by

**Lazar Vlasceanu** and **Leland Conley Barrows**

**Bucharest**
**2004**

# Studies on Higher Education

Editor of the Series:

**Leland Conley Barrows**

Assistants to the Editor:

**Maria-Ana Dumitrescu**
(Editing Clerk)
**Viorica Popa**
(Secretary)

ISBN 92-9069-177-2

# Contents


Preface ..... 11

I. Standards, Criteria, and Indicators in Programme Accreditation and Evaluation in Western Europe ..... 17
*KAUKO HÄMÄLÄINEN, KIRSI MUSTONEN, and KARL HOLM ..... 17*

1. INTRODUCTION ..... 17

2. What is Accreditation? ..... 17

2.1. Accreditation ..... 17
2.2. The Objectives of Accreditation ..... 19
2.3. Accreditation and Evaluation ..... 19
2.4. Programme Specification and Competence ..... 20

3. Linked Concepts ..... 22

3.1. Standards and Criteria ..... 22
3.2. Indicators ..... 22

4. Standards, Criteria, and Indicators Used in Programme Accreditation and Evaluation ..... 23

5. Reflections ..... 26

5.1. Diffusion of Standards ..... 27
5.2. Lack of a Theoretical Basis ..... 27
5.3. Evaluation of New Programmes ..... 28
5.4. The Context Is Changing but how about the Evaluations? ..... 28
5.5. So Many Details ..... 29

6. Conflicting Demands ..... 29

REFERENCES ..... 30

II. The Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education in Central and Eastern Europe ..... 33
*IOAN MIHAILESCU ..... 33*

1. The Need to Introduce Quality Assessment and accreditation inTO Higher Education ..... 33

1.1. Circumstantial Factors ..... 33
1.2. Long-Term Factors ..... 33

2. The Functions of QUALITY Assessment and Accreditation ..... 34

3. The Organization OF qUality Assessment and Accreditation ..... 35

3.1. Quality Assessment and Accreditation Procedures.....35
3.1.1. Provisional Authorization .....36
3.1.2. Accreditation .....36
3.1.3. Periodic Evaluation.....36
3.2. The Mechanisms of Academic Assessment .....37
3.2.1. Institutional Self-Evaluation.....37
3.2.2. Evaluation by Specialized Commissions .....37
3.2.3. Evaluation by the Accreditation Council.....38
3.2.4. Approval by the Ministry of Education .....39
3.2.5. Notification of the Applicant Institutions.....39
3.2.6. Approval by the Government and/or Parliament .....39
4. Parameters and Standards for Self-Evaluation and Accreditation .....39
4.1. Basic Quality Standards .....40
4.1.1. Assumed Mission and Objectives.....40
4.1.2. The Students .....40
4.1.3. The Content of the Educational Process.....41
4.1.4. The Teaching Staff.....42
4.1.5. Research.....42
4.1.6. The Infrastructure .....43
4.1.7. Financial and Managerial Activities.....43
4.2. Process and Result Standards .....43
4.3. The Need for Institutional and System Analysis.....48
4.4. Quality Assessment and Accreditation in the Context of Paradigmatic Changes.....49
5. Quality Assurance and Accreditation in the European Context..51
III. Uses of Indicators in the Processes of Accreditation and Quality Assessment in the Countries of Central and Eastern Europe . *LÁSZLÓ V. FRENYÓ and CHRISTINA ROZSNYAI*.....*55*
1. RECENT HISTORY AND CURRENT STATUS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE .....55
2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF AND RECENT TRENDS IN QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE SINCE 1990.....57
3. NETWORKING: A POWERFUL TOOL IN QUALITY MANAGEMENT .....58
4. NATIONAL EXAMPLES OF THE USES OF STANDARDS, CRITERIA, AND INDICATORS .....59
4.1. Hungary.....59
4.2. Latvia.....59
4.3. Romania.....60
4.4. The Czech Republic.....60
5. LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FROM INTERNATIONAL SURVEYS 60

6. FUTURE PERSPECTIVES FOR QUALITY EVALUATION AND ACCREDITATION: A EUROPEAN CONVERGENCE.....61

7. conclusions .....63

*REFERENCES* .....64

IV. Accreditation in the Context of the Bologna Process: Needs, Trends, and Developments.....67
*ANDRÉE SURSOCK* .....*67*

1. Introduction .....67

2. The European Higher Education Area – Main Goals, Objectives, and Instruments.....69

3. Challenges and Tension POINTS.....71

3.1. Challenges and Tension Points in Terms of Quality Assurance .....71
3.2. Challenges and Tension Points in Terms of Mobility .....74
3.3. Challenges and Tension Points in Terms of Attractiveness .....75

4. Conclusion .....77

*REFERENCES* .....77

V. Standards and Indicators in the Processes of Accreditation: The WASC Experience – An American Higher Education Accreditation Perspective .....79
*JAMES R. APPLETON AND RALPH A. WOLFF*.....*79*

1. INTRODUCTION.....79

2. BRIEF COMMENT ABOUT ACCREDITATION IN THE UNITED STATES .....80

3. STRUCTURE OF THE WASC Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities.....83

4. CHALLENGES TO ACCREDITATION AND THE WASC REFORM PROCESS .....85

5. DEVELOPMENT OF THE WASC 2001 ACCREDITATION STANDARDS.....87

6. REVISING THE EVALUATION PROCESS AND THE CYCLE OF REVIEW .....88

Stage 1. The Institutional Proposal.....89
Stage 2. The Preparatory Review.....90
Stage 3. The Educational Effectiveness Review.....90

7. A CULTURE OF EVIDENCE: EXAMPLES OF INDICATORS USED BY INSTITUTIONS.....91

8. RESULTS OF THE NEW ACCREDITATION MODEL .....96

9. THE LIBERAL ARTS FOUNDATION IN AMERICAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES – AN ONGOING CHALLENGE.....98

10. OTHER ISSUES AND CHALLENGES .....99

10.1. Internal Challenges.....100
10.2. The Challenges Resulting from Changes in Higher Education Itself.....101

11. THE REFORM OF OTHER REGIONAL ACCREDITING COMMISSIONS.....102

12. CONCLUDING REMARKS .....103

*REFERENCES* .....103

VI. The Japanese University Evaluation System and the Main Self-Evaluation Criteria of the Japan University Accreditation Association (JUAA).....105
*MASATERU OHNAMI AND HIROSHI HOKAMA* .....*105*

1. Introduction and Background.....105

2. Presentation and Characteristics of the New University Evaluation System.....106

2.1. JUAA University Evaluation Mechanisms and Evaluation Targets.....106
2.2. JUAA University and Subject Evaluations .....106
2.3. Duration of JUAA University Assessment.....109
2.4. The Results and Consequences of Institutional Evaluation .....110

3. Summary of THE Main Self-Evaluation Items.....110

3.1. Undergraduate Academic Units.....112
3.1.1. Key Evaluation Items.....112
3.1.2. Contents of Education and Research .....112
*Group A (Essential)*.....112
*Group B (Highly Recommended):* .....113
*Group C (Optional)*.....113
3.1.3. Educational Methodology and Its Development .....114
*Group A (Essential)*.....114
*Group B (Highly Recommended)* .....114
*Group C (Optional)*.....114
3.1.4. Correspondence Colleges.....115
*Group A (Essential)*.....115
*Group B (Highly Recommended)* .....115
*Group C (Optional)*.....115
3.1.5. Conditions for Student Admittance .....115
3.2. Graduate Academic Units.....115

3.2.1. Key Evaluation Items.....115
*Group A (Essential)*.....115
*Group B (Highly Recommended)*.....115
*Group C (Optional)*.....116
3.2.2. Research Activities.....116
*Group A (Essential)*.....116
*Group B (highly recommended)*.....116
*Group C (optional)*.....116
3.2.3. Maintenance of the Research System.....116
*Group A (essential)*.....116
*Group B (Highly Recommended)*.....116
*Group C (Optional)*.....116
3.2.4. Facilities, Equipment, and Information Infrastructure .....117
4. conclusions .....117

VII. Current Debates on Standards, Criteria, and Indicators Used in Programme Accreditation and Quality Assessment in Japan.....119
*AKIYOSHI YONEZAWA* .....*119*

1. INTRODUCTION.....119

2. DEVELOPMENT OF ACCREDITATION/EVALUATION SYSTEMS .....120

3. ONGOING UNIVERSITY REFORM AND THE QUALITY ASSURANCE SCHEME.....121

4. DATA ACCUMULATION.....123

5. CONCLUSION – A DECENTRALIZED APPROACH TO INDICATORS .....124

*REFERENCES* .....125

VIII. Standards and Indicators in Institutional and Programme Accreditation in Higher Education: A Conceptual Framework and a Proposal.....127
*DIRK VAN DAMME*.....*127*

1. Introduction .....127
1.1. Purpose and Structure of This Study .....127
1.2. A Note on Definitions .....128

2. CONCEPTS OF AND APPROACHES TO QUALITY .....131

3. MAPPING QUALITY DEFINITIONS.....134

4. From Quality Assurance to Accreditation and beyond.....134
4.1. The Emergence of Quality Assurance in Higher Education .....134

4.2. Strengths and Weaknesses of Quality Assurance Systems in Higher Education ..... 135
4.3. The Expansion of Accreditation ..... 137
4.4. Towards International Quality Assurance and Accreditation? ..... 139
4.5. A Multi-Level Model ..... 141
5. Standards and Indicators for Accreditation ..... 143
5.1. Introduction ..... 143
5.2. The Use of Quality Aspects, Standards, and Indicators ..... 143
5.3. The Numbers of Standards and Indicators Used in Accreditation ..... 146
5.4. Mapping Standards and Indicators in the CIPOF-Model ..... 148
5.4.1. Context ..... 149
5.4.2. Input ..... 149
5.4.3. Process ..... 151
5.4.4. Output ..... 152
5.4.5. Feedback ..... 154
5.5. Criteria, Thresholds, and Evidence for the CIPOF-Standards and Indicators ..... 155
6. Conclusion ..... 156
*References* ..... 158
IX. Working with the CIPOF Model – A Hypothetical Example ..... 161
*MIRCEA MICLEA* ..... *161*
1. Premises ..... 161
2. Characteristics of THE Test Case Institution ..... 161
2.1. Multiculturalism ..... 161
2.2. Ecumenism ..... 163
2.3. A Full Range of Degrees ..... 163
2.4. Development of Distance Learning ..... 165
3. How the Model Works and CERTAIN Institutional Reactions to It ..... 165
3.1. The CIPOF Model and a SWOT Analysis ..... 165
3.2. The CIPOF Model – Considering Research and External Services ..... 169
3.3. Applying the CIPOF Model to the Intermediate Levels of Higher Education Institutions ..... 170
3.4. The Actual versus the Prospective Perspective in Accreditation ..... 175
4. Concluding Remarks ..... 176
*References* ..... 176
The Contributors ..... 179

UNESCO-CEPES PUBLICATIONS.....183
Studies on Higher Education.....185
Papers on Higher Education.....185
Monographs on Higher Education.....185
Studies on Science and Culture.....185

# Preface

This volume, that publishes the papers that were presented at the "Invitational Roundtable on Indicators for Institutional and Programme Accreditation in Higher/Tertiary Education" (Bucharest, 3-6 April 2003), brings to a close a very successful and timely, three-year (2001-2003) project titled "Strategic Indicators for Monitoring Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century" which was implemented by UNESCO-CEPES in collaboration with a number of institutions and organizations. Among these, particular mention should be made of the Division of Higher Education, UNESCO, Paris; the Research Institute for Higher Education, Hiroshima University, Hiroshima, Japan; and the Leon Kozminski Academy of Entrepreneurship and Management (LKAEM), Warsaw, Poland.

The Invitational Roundtable upon which the volume is based, and the larger UNESCO-CEPES project, of which both are the final two products, arose from the recommendations of the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education (Paris, 5-9 October 1998) that higher education be renewed and re-oriented at system and institutional levels. The two main documents of the meeting – the "World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century: Vision and Action", and the "Framework for Priority Action for Change and Development of Higher Education" (the Priority Action Plan) laid down the conceptual framework of reform, its main directions, and its governing principles.

It became immediately clear that developments in higher/tertiary education needed to be monitored both at the system and at the institutional levels, for only in this way would it be possible to judge the extent to which the specific recommendations made by UNESCO were being implemented. In order to better reinforce policy and decision-making, the need for a quantitative, qualitative, and solid system of factual reporting became increasingly evident. This need was confirmed by the exigencies arising from the goals set for the Bologna Process aiming at the creation of the European Higher Education Area by the year 2010. The latter aspect, with its reliance on and expansion of the European Credit Transfer System and the continued diversification of higher education in Europe called for the specific definition of standards, indicators, and groups of indicators to be used for purposes of accreditation. The latter process, very new to the European experience, also needed to be adapted to a new environment and expanded.

Thus, the larger project evolved along the following three consecutive lines corresponding to the three sub-projects:

– System-level indicators for higher/tertiary education.

- Statistical indicators relevant for the quality assessment of higher/tertiary education institutions – ranking and league table methodologies.
- Indicators for institutional and programme accreditation in higher/tertiary education.

This project gave rise, first of all, to an "Invitational Roundtable on System-Level Indicators for Higher/Tertiary Education", held in Hiroshima, Japan, from 11 to 13 June 2001, and to a publication of its findings in a volume titled, *System-Level and Strategic Indicators for Monitoring Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century* (Bucharest: UNESCO-CEPES, 2003), disseminated in the same UNESCO-CEPES series, "Studies on Higher Education", as the present volume.

A second spate of activity brought about the organization of an "Invitational Roundtable on Statistical Indicators for Quality Assessment of Higher/Tertiary Education Institutions – Ranking and League Tables Methodologies". Held in Warsaw, Poland, from 13 to 15 June 2002, this conference was, apparently, the first one ever organized to discuss this subject. Some of the papers written for the meeting were then published in the UNESCO-CEPES quarterly review, *Higher Education in Europe* (Volume 27, Number 4, 2002) under the general title, "Ranking and League Tables of Higher Education Institutions". Here it should be mentioned that the wide interest in this topic inspired UNESCO-CEPES and the Institute for Higher Education Policy in Washington D.C. to continue international work on the workings and methodologies of higher education ranking systems.

The third thrust of the project, that concerned itself specifically with the identification and the use of indicators for the purposes of accreditation in higher education, gave rise to the formation of an international Working Group on Indicators for Institutional and Programme Accreditation in Higher/Tertiary Education and a first conference titled "Approaches to Standards/Indicators for Institutional and Programme Accreditation in Higher/Tertiary Education" that was organized by UNESCO-CEPES and held in Bucharest, Romania, from 5 to 6 April 2002. The working group, the members of which included the authors who have contributed to the present volume, were asked to accomplish the following:

- To provide a survey of the existing sets of standards and indicators used in the processes of institutional and programme accreditation;
- To reflect on causes that brought about the enlargement or even a shift from indicators focused on institutional inputs and resources towards quality standards and performance indicators focused on outputs like institutional capacity and educational effectiveness;
- To make an in-depth comparison of different standards and indicators from the perspective of their relevance for providing valid and reliable information on the quality of higher education provision;
- To propose a set of core standards and their corresponding performance indicators.

The result was expected to be pragmatic and policy-oriented.

At that first meeting of the Working Group, the participants surveyed existing experiences of standards and indicators and planned the elaboration of papers based on such surveys and of a comparative analysis, which would propose a tentative list of core standards and indicators. The meeting closed with a recommendation that the papers resulting from this first encounter be discussed in the second meeting to be held a year later in light of a search for a set of core standards and indicators for institutional and programme accreditation.

An expert-consultant, who had attended the first meeting, Professor Dirk van Damme, General Director of the Flemish Inter-University Council of Belgium (VLIR), was charged with the task of writing a major study that would serve both as a comparative analysis of indicators for accreditation and accreditation methods used in the Europe region of UNESCO (that includes North America and Europe) and as a proposal for a relatively small but comprehensive number of core standards and indicators to be adopted in the future, so as to standardize accreditation procedures internationally. This work of synthesis was to be based on preliminary surveys by Professor Kauko Hämäläinen[1] of the Department of Pedagogy of the University of Helsinki, Finland; Professor Ioan Mihailescu, President of the Romanian National Council for Academic Assessment and Accreditation and Rector of the University of Bucharest; Professor James Appleton,[2] Chairman of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges Commission and President of the University of Redlands, the United States of America, and Dr. Andrée Sursock, Programme Manager at the European University Association. Additional surveys were provided by Professor Masateru Ohnami,[3] President of the Japan University Accreditation Association, and by Professor Akiyoshi Yonezawa, of the National Institute for Academic Degrees, Japan.

Van Damme's proposals for a selection of quality assurance and accreditation standards and indicators were to be specifically evaluated by Mircea Miclea, the Chancellor of Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca of Romania, with specific reference to their applicability to the situation of this university. A proposal made at the first meeting of the Working Group, that UNESCO-CEPES prepare a glossary of "Quality Assurance and Accreditation Terms", also bore fruit, it having been prepared by Lazar Vlasceanu, Laura Grünberg, and Dan Pârlea, of UNESCO-CEPES, and presented during the second meeting. This glossary has been published

---

[1] Kauko Hämäläinen's study, in this volume, is co-authored by Kirsi Mustonen, Senior Advisor at the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC), and by Karl Holm, a Project Manager at the same organization.

[2] James Appleton's study, in this volume, is co-authored by Ralph A. Wolff, Executive Director of the Senior College Commission of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges of the United States.

[3] The co-author of Masateru Ohnami's study, in this volume, is Dr. Hiroshi Hokama, Professor Emeritus at Chuo University in Tokyo and Managing Director of the Accreditation Committee of JUAA.

under the title: *Quality Assurance and Accreditation: A Glossary of Basic Terms and Definitions* (Bucharest, UNESCO-CEPES, 2004).

Accreditation is widely viewed as a process during which a higher education institution or a particular programme is subjected to a review by a competent body or organization in order to establish whether or not the given institution or programme can meet a particular set of standards of quality in order to undertake or to continue to function as an "accredited institution". In other words, it is a confirmation of the collective ability to perform, at a basic level of quality, a given set of objectives and tasks in teaching, research, and services. Obviously, this process can only be undertaken when the "collective ability to perform" can be measured against an agreed set of standards, indicators, criteria, and procedures.

While in many countries much attention has been paid to various aspects of quality assurance in higher education, only recently has accreditation been the object of particular attention outside of North America. In the case of Europe, particularly Central and Eastern Europe, this interest can be linked to the emergence of private higher education institutions. Another reason for this interest is represented by the growing number of institutions and study programmes functioning as transnational education providers. An important additional factor in Europe is the Bologna Process. It should be noted that the European University Association (EUA) recently stated "that the time has come to take steps towards making accreditation standards of various European countries compatible with one another through bilateral or multilateral agreements".[4]

When considering accreditation both as a process and in terms of standards, criteria, and indicators, it has been found necessary to pay due attention to the challenges confronting the contemporary world of higher education. Among these, the following should be mentioned: the wide diversification of higher education institutional types, including not only bricks-and-mortar, classical types of higher education institutions and study programmes, but also on-line and for-profit institutions of higher learning; increasing globalization of curricula, study programmes, student population and institutions; a widely shared need for academic and professional recognition of credentials in a world of increased mobility of students and staff; and increasing demand for higher education coupled with an increased concern for the quality and effectiveness of educational provision. It was hoped that the set of accreditation standards and indicators that would be proposed as a result of the project would be elaborated so as to reflect such challenges facing the development of higher/tertiary education. For instance, the authors of the studies in this volume stressed the importance of exploring, both in-depth and in-breadth, the modalities and the reasons for which accreditation processes

---

[4] EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY ASSOCIATION. *Quality Assurance in Higher Education: A Policy of the European University Association*. Dubrovnik: 27 September 2001 <http://www.unige.ch/eua/>.

require information that facilitates the evaluation of specific outcomes, related to academic quality and educational effectiveness, as well as of inputs related to institutional structures, processes, and resources.

The project was particularly focused on the international analysis of the type of quantitative information, which is structured in the form of indicators requested by accreditation agencies/bodies in the course of institutional and programme evaluation. It also underlined the importance of indicators that can also enable the development of an institutional process of data collection and analysis leading to institutional self-review and/or external evaluation.

Indicators used in the process of accreditation would then serve a double purpose. On the one hand, they would be related to certain standards which would provide a framework for reviewing the academic level of an institution/programme. On the other hand, operating within the framework provided by the standards, the indicators in use would allow for the presentation of that information which demonstrates a certain level of institutional/programme capacity and performance. Until recently, there was a clear preference for input types of indicators. In view of the growing concern about overall quality assurance in the functioning of higher education institutions, accrediting and quality assessment agencies have been increasingly preoccupied with output types of indicators – particularly learning outcomes – as recommended by the contributors to this volume.

Both the discussions and the resulting studies appearing herein revealed, in regard to accreditation in European higher education, a very wide diversity of standards and indicators in use in different higher education systems and quality assurance and accreditation agencies. These, it was recommended, should be reviewed along with the terminology used in order to stimulate convergence and compatibility. It was strongly recommended that the numbers of standards and indicators be reduced and that the focus be directed at those considered essential because they reflect key aspects of higher education, particularly institutional outputs and learning outcomes. It was also felt that benchmarking practices, associated both with standards and indicators, should be introduced so as to increase the level of system and institutional convergence and compatibility in terms of quality provision. The importance of developing an institutional culture of evidence, as related to quality management and quality enhancement, was particularly stressed by James Appleton.

Dirk van Damme argued strongly for the adoption of the CIPOF comparative analysis method, viewing it as a successful methodology to be used both in reviewing accreditation systems, both national and international, as well as in preparing an institution for evaluation in view of accreditation. The acronym, CIPOF, stands for **c**ontext, **i**nputs, **p**rocesses, **o**utputs, **f**eedback, to which Mircea Miclea, in a critique of Dirk van Damme's presentation, proposed a sixth category of evaluation, **s**trategic management, thus changing the acronym to CIPOFS.

The hope is that both the larger project and its third line of activity will help to yield an increased convergence of standards and indicators in quality assurance and accreditation both regionally and globally, as strongly reiterated in a Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Higher Education adopted in Berlin on 19 September 2003.

The project as a whole and, in particular, the final meeting benefited from the financial support of the Japanese Funds-in-Trust for the Promotion of International Co-operation and Mutual Understanding as well as from that of the German Academic Exchange Service – DAAD. Without this support, UNESCO-CEPES would not have been able to bring the project to fruition.

Bucharest, February 2004.

*Jan Sadlak*
Director of UNESCO-CEPES

# I. Standards, Criteria, and Indicators in Programme Accreditation and Evaluation in Western Europe

*KAUKO HÄMÄLÄINEN, KIRSI MUSTONEN, AND KARL HOLM*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This study is based on documents describing the standards, criteria, and indicators used in programme accreditation, evaluation, and quality assurance in different countries of Western Europe. Various kinds of material and proposals are analyzed: reports by national accreditation and quality assurance authorities as well as reports by professional associations, associations of institutions, and private organizations.

This study concentrates on currently used standards, criteria, and indicators. At this stage, both statistical and qualitative materials have been collected. The possible changes in the elaboration of existing indicators from input to output indicators are also analyzed.

In what follows, some central concepts are defined. First of all, it is good to have a clear understanding of what the concept, "accreditation", means and why it is implemented in many European countries. It is also important to analyze concepts like "standards" and "criteria", because the use of these words seems to be confusing. Then, a kind of framework for evaluations and accreditation is described. It is based on different categories which are used in different sources mentioned above. Some comments, analyses, and recommendations about the current situation can be found at the end of this study.

## 2. WHAT IS ACCREDITATION?

In what follows, the concept, accreditation, is defined. Also, its objectives and relation to evaluation are discussed. The terms of programme specification and competence are described in order to explain the movement from input to output in undertaking evaluations and accreditation.

### *2.1. Accreditation*

There have already been two generations of accreditation in Europe. The first generation began in many countries of Central and Eastern Europe in 1989-1990. It was intended to protect the quality of higher education systems and to retain some kind of central control after the various higher education institutions had been accorded autonomy. There is also a rather

long history, in some countries, of the accreditation of professional studies, like medicine and psychology. Professional associations normally implement accreditation in these fields.

The second generation of national accreditation started at the end of the 1990s, when certain countries of Western Europe started to develop their national systems of accreditation (Westerheijden, 2001). The beginning of this process took place in Germany, in 1998. Austria came second, and, in 2002, the Netherlands and Norway started their own accreditation developments. Furthermore, certain proprietary professional bodies, like the European Foundation for Management Development/European Quality Improvement System (EFMD/EQUIS, and the European Association for Public Administration Accreditation (EAPAA) began to develop accreditation. Some European universities have used American accreditation agencies, like the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET), as well. So, in many countries, higher education institutions are free to choose the accreditation services that they prefer and which they think are useful for their own purposes.

Even though different definitions of accreditation exist, there are also clear similarities. Accreditation is one of several quality assurance measures. Its starting point is a need to maintain and improve quality in a higher education course, study programme, or institution. In some countries, accreditation is state-driven. The government wants to ensure that the higher education institutions or programmes are of sufficient quality. In other countries, accrediting organizations are controlled and owned by universities. The following characteristics are typical of accreditation:

- The object is to certify a set of defined standards of quality in a higher education course, programme, or institution.
- Accreditation includes a review by a competent body or organization.
- The standard can be a minimal one or one of excellence.
- Standards are used as benchmarks.
- Accreditation decisions include a binary element and are always either “yes” or “no”.
- Accreditation decisions are based solely on quality criteria, never on political considerations.
- Accreditation decisions are time-limited.

In accreditation, the central idea is that there must be a clear definition of the quality expected. Assessments and conclusions should be based on a coherent set of explicit reference points.

Since the late 1980s, different accreditation systems have been developed in Europe. Most countries have chosen a specific type of accreditation, which concentrates on programme accreditation in the form of standards set for inputs in all fields of subjects and programmes.

In some countries, accreditation concentrates on new study programmes. Public funding will not normally be granted to new courses or programmes unless they are officially recognized. In many Western

European countries, there seems to be a clear shift from quality enhancement to quality control. The reasons for this shift could be European harmonization ambitions and the generally accepted objective of increasing international student mobility. There is also a tendency to move from a ministry-regulated recognition system to one by which an independent agency is given all the accrediting power.

### *2.2. The Objectives of Accreditation*

There are many kinds of motivations for accreditation. Generally, the motivation is a steering mechanism. In the Netherlands, the Association of Universities of the Netherlands (VSNU) has stated that "[The] international acceptance of ...external quality assessment by means of independent, formal accreditation is one of the most important motives for introducing accreditation in the Netherlands", and "[in] the light of the Bologna Declaration, it is necessary for Dutch Higher Education to make its level and quality clear to other countries".

Both accreditation and evaluation have the same objectives in many countries: to improve the quality of education, to provide public information, and to ensure that education is of approved quality. In most cases, the idea is to examine whether or not the requirements of the institutions are fulfilled and whether or not a certain level of quality is met. It is part of a national quality improvement system.

In some countries, for instance the Netherlands, accreditation is introduced in addition to the existing programme evaluations, thus providing an official hallmark for the quality of study programmes. There, the purpose of accreditation includes international recognition, benchmarking, and transparency. In Germany, to take another example, the objectives are the following: assuring quality, providing efficient curricular designs, offering diversity, and creating transparency.

### *2.3. Accreditation and Evaluation*

Evaluation and accreditation are overlapping. The accreditation process is usually mingled with evaluation. If we are talking about programme evaluations or accreditation, the review committee is asked to form a judgment about the objectives, structure, and content of the syllabi, the relevance to the field, etc. Accreditation involves evaluation procedures, but it has a very limited objective (the yes-no decision). Accreditation and, generally also, evaluation refer to a standard against which the institution or programme will be assessed, but evaluations fulfill this task only partly or not at all. In evaluation, an important issue is whether or not given study programmes satisfy academic standards in more general terms and often in an international context. An external body, such as the government or a professional body, formulates standards. The external body consists normally of academic staff.

Programme evaluation, benchmarking, or audit also include evaluation, which normally assesses the extent to which a programme or an

institution meets the level of quality set by the programme planners or institutions themselves. Accreditation develops a decision as to whether a programme, degree, or institution meets certain external standards or requirements (Hämäläinen *et al.*, 2001). Accreditation is the last step in evaluation. It interprets the evaluation and asks whether or not a programme or an institution is of sufficiently high quality to meet existing standards.

The main focus of accreditation and evaluation varies a great deal. Evaluation can concentrate on one or more of the above-mentioned areas at the same time. Brennan and Shah (2000) have recognized four types of evaluation according to focus or quality values:

- the academic type;
- the managerial type;
- the pedagogical type;
- the employment-related type.

The first of these is based on traditional academic values, subject focus, and professional authority, whereas the values of the second type are associated with an institutional focus of assessment, with a concern for procedures and structures, and an assumption that quality can be produced by good management. The roots of the values of Type 2 are in Total Quality Management. In Type 3, the focus is on teaching skills and classroom practice. There is little emphasis on the content of education but a great deal on its delivery. The values of Type 4 are employment-focused. Emphasis is placed on graduate output characteristics, on standards, and on learning outcomes. Customer requirements are taken into account. In Type 2 and 3, quality values are invariable throughout the institution. In Type 1, they vary, and in Type 4, they can be both variable and invariable throughout the institution.

The question of the ownership of evaluation and accreditation processes is crucial. The universities are responsible for providing study programmes of good quality. They also have a responsibility to develop an adequate system of external quality assessment. The other side of the coin is accountability to taxpayers, students, and employers, the needs of whom may vary, as compared to those of the academic staff.

Sometimes the marks given by the committee in the public final report make it possible to come up with a ranking of study programmes (*i.e.*, the situation in the Netherlands, as presented by Brennan and Shah, 2000). However, according to the review prepared by Westerheijden (2001), secondary-level pupils are hardly interested in the differences in quality and profile that higher education programmes are said to have.

### *2.4. Programme Specification and Competence*

So far, the main focus of accreditation has been on the quality of the process. A major question being asked in Western Europe is how to shift from input criteria, such as the number of years in education and the number of credits, to outcome criteria. This shift is clearly occurring at the

present moment in the United Kingdom (see, QAA, 2000) and in the Netherlands. These outcome criteria can be called competence-based descriptors (the Netherlands) or programme specifications (the United Kingdom). The descriptors are supposed to offer a clear starting point for formulating discipline-specific standards and standards with respect to domain and general education. In the United Kingdom, "[The] framework of higher education qualifications provides reference points to be used to determine whether [or not] the intended outcomes for programmes and actual student achievement are appropriate to the level of the qualification awarded" (QAA, 2000).

A descriptor indicates an overall summary of the learning outcomes of the whole study programme. A descriptor gives information about the competencies and skills of students that have to be achieved through enrollment in given courses.

A programme specification is a concise description of the intended learning outcome of a higher education programme and the means by which these outcomes are achieved and demonstrated. An outcome is simply a result or a consequence of an action or process. The outcome of learning is a learning outcome (United Kingdom).

Programme specifications should make explicit the intended outcomes in terms of knowledge, understanding, skills, and other attributes. Specifications are divided into two groups: *(i)* discipline-specific and *(ii)* general academic standards. Discipline (subject)-specific skills are defined in the Netherlands as follows:

- necessary basic knowledge and subjects from the discipline concerned;
- methods and techniques;
- theory development;
- specific skills associated with the given disciplines;
- specific study and thought processes as expected and demanded within the disciplines.

The general skills include, for instance:

- problem-solving;
- analytical and critical thought;
- ability to synthesize;
- communication (written and oral);
- working with others.

In the United Kingdom, the term, "subject benchmark", is used. It refers to statements which represent general expectations about standards for the award of qualifications at a given level in a particular subject area.

Competence means the ability to meet individual and social demands. It is a combination of interrelated attitudes, values, knowledge, and skills. It is greatly related to a given context. It can be learned and taught. Competencies can also be divided into subject area-related and generic

competencies. The first ones refer to academic subject-related competencies.

## 3. LINKED CONCEPTS

### *3.1. Standards and Criteria*

There is a growing need for a reference framework for evaluation and accreditation. Both criteria and standards are used for this purpose. Both terms are used and defined in many ways, some of them confusing. In the following, a *criterion* is understood to provide a basis on which an evaluative conclusion is drawn. It offers a means to interpret how well the objectives have been reached. Standards are generally defined in a similar way. They tell about the threshold which should be reached. At their best, standards and criteria can serve as benchmarks, against which each programme can be evaluated and rated.

*Standards* refer to the level of requirements and conditions that must be met by institutions or programmes to be accredited or certified by a quality assurance or accrediting agency. These conditions involve expectations regarding quality, attainment, effectiveness, financial viability, outcomes, and sustainability. Standards can also describe the expected outcomes of a programme. They concern the competencies, knowledge, skills, and/or attitudes that are expected of graduates.

The standards should be linked to factors important to learning. In practice, it is important to ask what the theoretical bases for the standards used are in different countries.

The standards, at their best, are pre-determined points on a pre-determined scale, both prescriptive and normative. Accordingly, the aim of standardizing quality means the adoption of result-outcomes according to predetermined goals.

The standards and criteria are usually intended to provide for stimuli for change as well as for the quality of institutions and programmes. In order to be useful, they should be clearly and explicitly formulated. In any case, the final judgment is always subjective. Even if there are standards and criteria, the reviewers will decide whether or not they have confidence in the academic standards of the provision under review.

The creation of standards transfers the right of control and power to those who set the standards, and therefore, at least partly away from the higher education institutions. A central question is the following: can the responsibility to students and parents, on the one hand, and accountability to administration, on the other hand, be combined? Doing so could mean a change from an informative policy listing options and possibilities to a policy of normative orders.

### *3.2. Indicators*

Standards can be divided into indicators, which tend to be operational. Indicators describe the features or the state of the object or the change

occurring in it. Often indicators refer to parameters based on statistics (statistical indicators). This indicator is usually the most relevant when evaluating student flows, staff/student ratios, research records, cost per student, laboratories and other equipment, libraries, information technology, equity, etc. It is less relevant when the quality of outcomes, teaching, or links to research are described. In practice, indicators are used in a broader sense, in a qualitative way, to describe the object. In addition, an indicator can describe the current state of affairs compared to one of previous years as the current situation in relation to goals or differences among regions.

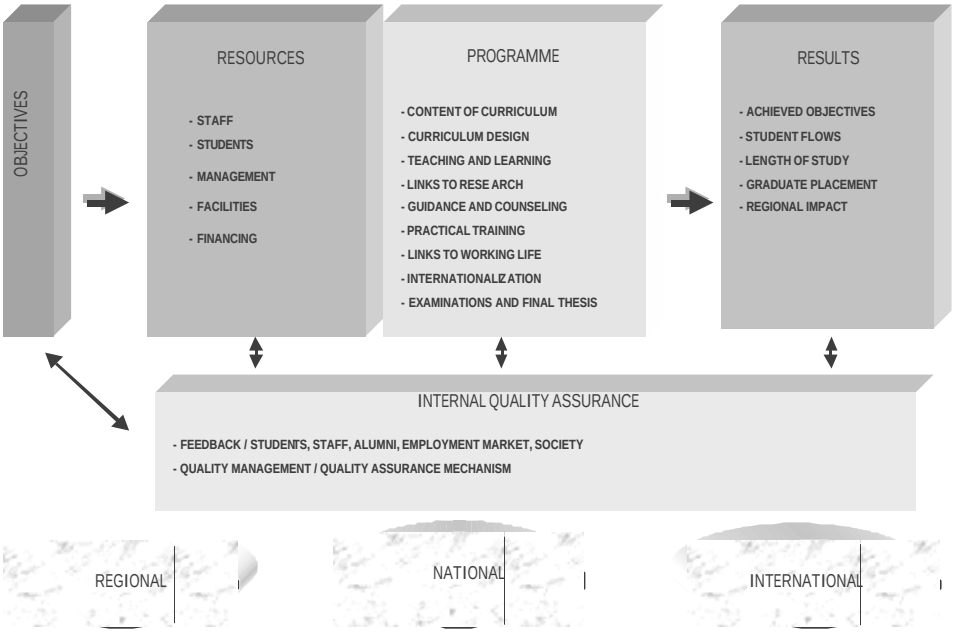
Performance indicators are a range of statistical indicators intended to offer an objective measure as to how a higher education institution is performing. They can enable institutions to benchmark their own performances or to allow comparison among institutions. One example of a performance indicator is an assessment made of students by the use of tests and examinations.

The longest tradition in creating international indicators is that of the OECD-INES project. A somewhat similar work is being conducted within the EURYDICE Network, supported by the European Commission. In these contexts, indicators are normally statistical. They tell something essential about the state, functioning, or results of certain parts of education. They make comparison possible.

## 4. STANDARDS, CRITERIA, AND INDICATORS USED IN PROGRAMME ACCREDITATION AND EVALUATION

There are nearly thirty different accreditation and programme evaluation handbooks at use in Europe, see, <http://www.enqa.net>. In Figure 1 below, the standards, criteria, and indicators used in these handbooks are classified under certain principal categories. Figure 1 also indicates the main focuses of evaluations. The information in this study is based on the references produced by the Western European national agencies and professional accreditation bodies in the field of quality assurance and evaluation of higher education.

Figure 1. Framework of programme accreditation and evaluation in Western Europe




*Source:* The author

There are many similarities in the frameworks of evaluations and accreditation in different Western European countries. For example, all evaluations focus on objectives, teaching methods, curriculum, and quality systems. It is easy to agree with the comment made by Westerheijden (2001) that, in Western Europe, the first and second rounds of accreditation have worked towards national uniformity rather than diversity. All programmes within given countries tend to conform to this set of criteria. In other words, they tend to converge. Both rounds have tried to develop so-called minimum standards for programmes by a single set of criteria. They have concentrated on inputs and curriculum. These requirements cannot, for instance, take into consideration, the special needs of certain areas (rural – urban, highly developed – underdeveloped, etc.).

So far, the idea of a standard or a criterion has not materialized. Thus it can be difficult to conclude with recommendations at a general level. The words, standards, criteria, indicators, and questions are used in a confusing way. In most countries, there are only lists of evaluation targets, and no real standards can be found. In some countries, only questions are used. The concepts, standards, criteria, and indicators should be clarified

in the context of programme accreditation and evaluation. This activity should be academic rather than administrative.

Very seldom are there minimum standards which could be used as thresholds for accreditation. In European countries, there are differences in how detailed the targets of accreditation or evaluation are, where they concentrate, and how concrete they are.

It is clear that certain kinds of standards are appropriate only for subject evaluations and not for programme evaluation or accreditation. Good examples of clear learning objectives and outcomes can be found in medical education (*e.g.*, Bloch and Burgi, 2002; Harden, 2002). In the United Kingdom and in the Netherlands, good examples can be found of the development of standards/criteria for outcomes.

Examples of the contents of such standards/criteria are the following:

*i.* the knowledge and understanding that a student will be expected to have gained upon completion;
*ii.* key skills, such as communication, numeracy, the use of information technology, and learning how to learn;
*iii.* cognitive skills, such as an understanding of methodologies or proven ability in critical analysis;
*iv.* subject specific skills.

Some fields have numbers of standards or evaluation targets. These include objectives (however, not all the models tie the objectives strongly together with other elements of a study programme, such as contents and study methods), facilities, content of the curriculum, curriculum design, teaching and learning, and quality assurance mechanisms.

The fields with few standards or targets of evaluation involve staff (especially the relationship between the research undertaken by the teaching staff members and the study programme, as well as the small amount of in-service training), links to working life, practical training, internationalization, examinations/final theses, guidance and counseling, regional impact, and links to research. Therefore, an integration of the research results, in terms of their contents, is an issue that should be stressed, while taking into account the basic functions of a university as a facilitator of teaching and research. The possible relationships between research and teaching are analyzed in depth by Robertson and Bond (2001), among others. These two authors provide good examples of standards for examinations and final tests, for example, in the United Kingdom. For them, this question (like tutoring) is central to the definition of quality in higher education in the United Kingdom, but not so much in other countries.

The focus of evaluation and accreditation is important because what is evaluated must be important. For this reason, it is interesting to identify certain differences. In other words, one should be aware that some areas are evaluated very thoroughly while others are dealt with only superficially. Some evaluation targets, such as internationalization and connections with working life/research, are only discussed in the reference materials

provided by certain individual countries. However, these countries had in fact analyzed the situations quite fundamentally and in great detail.

Some areas of evaluation frameworks are not very sophisticated. For example, teaching and learning methods could be analyzed in greater depth. Good examples of the knowledge which exists in this area can be found in Entwistle *et al.*, 2000. If one tries to develop learning, then one should reflect to a greater extent on how students acquire, organize, and use knowledge and competencies.

Also, the evaluation of learning results is not very developed. In the future, this area will require a great deal of development. Ways to measure general competencies are still difficult to elaborate. There are, however, two kinds of models of the Bachelor's/ Master's/ tertiary degree programmes in all disciplines and fields of knowledge: those that are more academically-oriented and those that are more professionally-oriented. This situation is important to remember when learning results are the target of accreditation.

If one believes, for instance, that universities should give students competencies for lifelong learning (*e.g.*, abilities to acquire and to use knowledge), this requirement should also be considered in the evaluation. The learning of readiness for change and the mastery of problem-solving skills are also examples of learning goals that should be included in the evaluations of teaching and learning. The need for co-operative learning, communication, and social skills should also be in the focus of the evaluation of instruction.

It is surprising to find that, in some cases, research and teaching are evaluated simultaneously. It could be very natural for a university that the same team of professionals could evaluate both the level of teaching programmes and the level and relevance of research. It is important, however, to use pedagogical experts for the evaluation of education. Some universities are using the concept of research-based teaching. With such an example, it is difficult, in practice, to separate the two basic tasks of universities: teaching and research.

One central role of evaluation and accreditation is helping to plan and to develop course programmes. A list of standards or criteria that includes the most important items on how to develop course programmes can operate as a check list for those who are responsible for planning and managing them (see Figure 1).

## 5. REFLECTIONS

This study suggests ways of establishing the main focuses of programme evaluations and accreditation in Western Europe. However, it is not possible to judge how useful the evaluations have been. Whether or not accreditation can achieve all its set objectives is still an open question. For example, has the first round of accreditation been useful? The conclusions from Germany and the United States, for example, are that the main reason for having negative statements in regard to accreditation is related

to external conditions such as limited resources. Very few programmes or institutions have been abolished because of unclear vision or mission statements, bad instruction, or weak co-operation with employment. So, it could be useful to analyze what the use of accreditation is for the remaining 90 percent of the cases that have been accepted.

Certain reflections on the standards and criteria as well as on the questions used in programme accreditation and evaluation in Western European countries are presented.

### *5.1. Diffusion of Standards*

Standards and recommendations for the quality assurance of higher education are being drafted in various countries with inconsistent concepts. The current contents, given sets of concepts and programme guidelines, reflect the history and the context of quality assurance and evaluation in the respective countries. In addition, standards vary from fairly general concepts to very specific prescriptions. In some sections of the reference material, the terms used form a logical and chronological entity in which standards set for study programmes have been used as criteria and these, again, have been reformulated as questions of self-evaluation. Some parts of the reference material have listed standards and questions of self-evaluation in terms of themes, without defining their links.

The question still remains: What evidence can be used for evaluations? If one tries to evaluate the mission or vision of one programme, is it sufficient that these be clearly mentioned in certain documents or should all levels of the staff, and even students, be able to refer to them? Or should they be viewed in the context of the curriculum, instruction, or learning results? If they are used in connection with teaching, how can they be evaluated?

In many cases, the kinds of evidence on which accreditation and evaluation conclusions are really based are not clear. The evaluators normally know what should be evaluated, but only they know what is good enough to be evaluated. So, the results/recommendations or conclusions are dependent on the expertise of the evaluators. A central question in peer reviews is also one of whether or not professionals in different subjects are really capable of evaluating instruction or if they are only competent to evaluate the contents of the curriculum? University researchers do not normally have good pedagogical training.

### *5.2. Lack of a Theoretical Basis*

A theoretical background for the selection of targets/standards/criteria seems to be lacking. Rather, standards seem to have been collected from earlier evaluations, with certain regroupings of the definitions and new additions on the basis of personal experience. It is not easy to ascertain if modern learning theories (constructivism, etc.) can be understood as affecting the targets of evaluations. An example of a possible theory is the

development of professional competencies. How are knowledge and competencies constructed? How do students learn? How can the curriculum enhance learning? The creation of an evaluation theory could be one important project for the future.

### *5.3. Evaluation of New Programmes*

In some countries, only new programmes are accredited. Then the question is what is really accredited? In any case, only the planned input variables can be measured and evaluated. If the learning results were to be evaluated, the programme would have had to be in operation at least X years (where X is the length of the programme to be accredited + two years). At that point, there would be at least two cohorts of graduates to provide adequate data for evaluating programme policies, procedures, and the placement of graduates.

### *5.4. The Context Is Changing but how about the Evaluations?*

It seems quite difficult to create any kind of stabilized evaluation system in any country. Over the last five years, all the Western European countries have been changing their evaluation systems a situation that reveals something of the complexity of the context in which higher education is functioning. The situation is also similar elsewhere. El-Khawas (2001) has mentioned – that "One sign of this complexity can be seen in the continuing revisions of approaches made by many countries, even those with lengthy experience in assessing quality. Most countries have procedures, but most would concede that they are not perfect".

The role of the universities is changing in many countries. One clear example is the growing role of their regional impact. In some regions, co-operation among universities, municipalities, and the labour market is growing. Accreditation and programme evaluations are normally considered in isolation in terms of their environments/contexts. Learning results, for instance, deal only with individual learning, not with the effects of the results on the region in which the university is functioning.

It is also surprising that little development in the standards of programme evaluations has taken place during the last ten years, even though society itself is changing very rapidly. No radical changes in the approach or the focus of evaluation have taken place since the so-called European Pilot project of 1994-1995. Some targets of evaluation have been expanded, and some details have become more sophisticated. Should globalization, internationalization, socio-political changes, changes in working life, new visions of human resource development, and the use of e-learning not have impact on the standards, criteria, or targets of evaluations? Nevertheless, the evaluation of distance learning has been developing, for instance, in the United Kingdom (QAA, 2002).

The Bologna process also creates pressure with its emphasis on a unified European Education Area and on a reform of study programme structures (the so-called 3+2+4 model). An increase in student mobility

and demands for additional credit usage will increase pressure for a more determined approach to standardization and accreditation in the near future.

The creation of standards – statistical standards, in particular – can be problematic for creative and innovative higher education institutions. If the goal of the institution is to be innovative, that is, to transfer something that already exists into something else of higher quality, it may be counterproductive to expect such an institution to work toward pre-determined standards.

### *5.5. So Many Details*

In some countries, the accreditation and quality assurance of programmes and institutions are so sophisticated and so developed that they include minute details. It may be difficult, in such cases, to get an idea about the quality or the comprehensive shape of the item. Quality is not a sum of specific details, but a meaning given to it on the basis of the reciprocal relations of individual qualities, which can be interpreted in relation to the sphere of activities.

One central question is left open in most evaluations. If there are 30 to 120 different questions, criteria, or standards in one evaluation, from where does the final conclusion come? How does one weigh different content areas? How does one reach the final conclusion from a large number of details?

An ultimate conclusion to be drawn from accreditation and evaluation is basically one of a combining of functions among evaluators: those being evaluated, the situation, the context, and the time. The concept of quality is always subjective, as it depends on the above-mentioned factors. Standards do not recognize creativity, exceptional solutions, or variations. It is tempting to define quality as a standard, but standards require a certain kind of stability, and their development requires compromises among various viewpoints. Standards must be somewhat conservative, generally approved by many interest groups and experts, so as to achieve consensus. The development of standards is also very time-consuming, especially if international working groups prepare them. These hurdles may result in outdated standards, when, at least, agreement in regard to them has been achieved. To change standards is time-consuming. Quick adaptation to new situations is therefore difficult.

## 6. CONFLICTING DEMANDS

When one is developing national or international accreditation standards, many conflicting demands arise. The following are certain examples.

- Purpose provides a more accurate insight, for quality *versus* quality is not defined.
- Controlling minimum level *versus* the minimum level is not defined.

- How does one respect local, regional, or national diversity while accepting harmonization/convergence?
- How does one set a balance between institutional autonomy and the demands of national/international accountability?
- How is control of and links to funding and recognition reconciled with development?
- How does one reconcile the flexibility to create new programmes and teaching arrangements with the use of nationally or internationally accepted standards;
- How does one deal with the conundrum that criteria/standards must be broad enough to allow for variations with the requirement that they be precise enough to allow objective assessment.

It is recognized that programmes have different missions and adopt different approaches to achieve their objectives. It is widely accepted that any system of accreditation or evaluation should respect the multiplicity of programmes. For this reason, quality is often assessed in terms of the extent to which a programme achieves its own goals. This degree of achievement is normally referred to as the "fitness-for-purpose" approach. But how should standards be set if one, for instance, accepts an idea of mission-based accreditation? A mission is necessarily related to the structure within which programmes are set up and executed. For this reason, the institutional setting and the historical development of the programme are important matters.

Also, the educational systems at university level vary among European countries. These differences in the accreditation system must be taken into account so far as they impose constraints on the programme.

The 1998 UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education recommended the development of comparable and internationally recognized quality standards in order to push the convergence process forward. On the other hand, the Bologna Declaration of 1999 states that the approach of individual nations to quality assurance must be respected and that any European dimension in accreditation arrangements must rest on national systems. A balance between joint European quality standards and national approaches is still taking shape.

It is currently difficult to create a credible survey of Western European usage of standards and criteria owing to the fact that new source materials along with new framework and term definitions are being published almost constantly. New strategies are being developed, and the older ones are being given new adaptations. Of these new trends, the standards related to the results of learning seem to be on the rise, at the moment, and under development in several countries.

*REFERENCES*

BLOCH, R., and BURGI, H. "The Swiss Catalogue of Learning Objectives", *Medical Teacher* 24 2 (2002): 144-150.

BRENNAN, J. and SHAH, H. *Quality Assessment Made to Measure: Protocol for the External Assessment of Educational Programmes (2000-2005).* Utrecht: VSNU, 2000.

EL-KHAWAS, E. "Who's in Charge of Quality? The Governance Issues in Quality Assurance", *Tertiary Education and Management* 7 2 (2001): 111-119.

ENTWISTLE, N., SKINNER, D., ENTWISTLE, D., and ORR, S. "Conceptions and Beliefs about 'Good Teaching': An Integration of Contrasting Research Areas", *Higher Education Research and Development* 19 1 (2000).

HÄMÄLÄINEN, K., *et al. Quality Assurance in the Nordic Higher Education – Accreditation-like Practices*. Helsinki: European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2001.

HARDEN, R. M. "Learning Outcomes and Instructional Objectives: Is There a Difference?", *Medical Teacher* 24 2 (2002).

ROBERTSON, J., and BOND, C. "Experiences of the Relation between Teaching and Research: What Do Academics Value?" *Higher Education Research and Development* 20 1 (2001).

THE QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION. *Guidelines for Preparing Programme Specifications 2000* <http://www.qaa.ac.uk>.

THE QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION. *Guidelines on the Quality Assurance of Distance Learning 2002* <http://www.qaa.ac.uk>

WESTERHEIJDEN, D. F. "*Ex oriente lux*?: National and Multiple Accreditations in Europe after the Fall of the Wall and after Bologna", *Quality in Higher Education* 7 (2001):65-75.

# II. The Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education in Central and Eastern Europe

*IOAN MIHAILESCU*

The academic assessment and accreditation of higher education institutions and of their course programmes are recent developments in Central and Eastern Europe. Since 1990, higher education assessment and quality assurance have become a common concern for all European countries alike. Various national systems have worked out, or are currently drawing up, systems aiming at ensuring the quality of national higher education and at bringing it into line with the procedures used in other countries, thus facilitating the recognition of higher education credentials at international level.

## 1. THE NEED TO INTRODUCE QUALITY ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION INTO HIGHER EDUCATION

The introduction of quality assessment and accreditation systems into higher education in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe was determined by a combination of several factors:

### *1.1. Circumstantial Factors*

- The chaotic boom of schools, faculties, and students in the early 1990s. More often than not, this rapid expansion took place in the absence of basic resources.
- The emergence of a large number of private universities in the absence of a legal framework regulating their organization and functioning.
- The introduction of certain higher education reform programmes compelling both traditional and newly established universities to make significant changes, so far as their organization and functioning were concerned.

### *1.2. Long-Term Factors*

- The generalization of efficient and competitive mechanisms at the level of the whole of society, higher education included.
- The need to increase the accountability of universities to their sponsors.
- The need to assist higher-education institutions in identifying their weak points and in improving the quality of their services.
- The need to promote the quality of certain course programmes among applicants, against the background of increasing numbers of offerings of course programmes in higher education.

- The need to render the use of public funds more efficient, given the rising demand for funds and their limited availability.
- The setting of objective criteria for the distribution of public funds to the universities, by taking into consideration their qualitative performance.
- Increased freedom of movement abroad for students and graduates and the need to validate and recognize their credits, education certificates, and degrees, thus guaranteeing the quality of the course programmes offered by local universities.

Most of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe have implemented assessment and accreditation mechanisms for higher education course programmes and institutions. In a first stage, these mechanisms focused mainly on circumstantial factors, trying at the time to distinguish between reliable and unreliable institutions, faculties, and course programmes. That first stage lasted until 1996-1998. After 1998, the assessment activity focused on long-term needs.

## 2. THE FUNCTIONS OF QUALITY ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION

The academic assessment and accreditation system in the Central and Eastern Europe has the following functions:

- To assist higher education institutions in clearly defining their missions and goals;
- To assist higher education institutions in correctly evaluating the resources and capabilities necessary for meeting the goals they have set for themselves;
- To boost performance among higher education institutions by means of periodic assessment;
- To provide objective principles for financing higher education institutions and to set objective criteria so that funds are distributed according to achievement;
- To protect the community from institutions unable to achieve their missions and to respect their commitments;
- To establish the legal framework under which the State can validate and recognize the degrees and education certificates awarded by public and private institutions;
- To propose that the government create new faculties and departments and that the Parliament vote the legal basis for the founding of new universities; to propose to both Government and Parliament the closing of faculties, departments, and universities that, following repeated evaluations and warnings, have failed to meet minimum quality standards;
- To assist higher education institutions in improving their activities and structures;
- To bring the academic assessment and accreditation systems in the Central and Eastern Europe into line with the systems used in the

countries of the European Union and/or in other developed countries.

The academic assessment and accreditation systems vary a great deal from one country to another. Despite the differences, however, these systems meet the demands and needs of several types of agents: universities, potential students and their families, higher education graduates, governments, and the future employers of university graduates.

During their periods of initial activity, academic quality assessment and accreditation agencies in Central and Eastern Europe concentrated on the following:

- Meeting the basic standards for implementing course programmes and the functioning of higher education institutions;
- Offering consultancy services to higher education institutions in preparing their new programmes;
- Attempting to evaluate and establish a hierarchy of higher education course programmes and institutions;
- Experimenting with the use of the hierarchy of course programmes and institutions, mentioned above, in the funding of State institutions (an experimental procedure introduced in Romania in 2002).

Generally speaking, however, these quality assessments and hierarchies have no influence on funding formulae.

## 3. THE ORGANIZATION OF QUALITY ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION

As a general remark, the task of quality assessment and accreditation is devolved on special assessment councils and commissions. Council members are usually selected from among experts proposed by the higher education institutions themselves. In some countries (for instance, Romania), the accreditation councils are validated by the national parliaments. The councils work with expert commissions and committees specialized in all the fields of learning: the sciences (mathematics, physics, chemistry), the environmental sciences, engineering, the agricultural sciences, veterinary science and forestry, medicine, pharmacy, dentistry, social sciences, the humanities, law, economics, the arts and architecture, physical education and sports, journalism, and political science.

The accreditation councils employ experts both on a part-time basis and as full-time personnel.

### *3.1. Quality Assessment and Accreditation Procedures*

In keeping with the legislation of given countries, all higher education institutions and course programmes are subject to quality assessment procedures. Usually, the assessment and accreditation procedures used by the countries in the region entail several stages, as detailed below.

### 3.1.1. PROVISIONAL AUTHORIZATION

Institutions implementing a new course programme or administering a new faculty or college must apply to the local accreditation council for provisional authorization. Such is the case of traditional universities, that intend to expand their activities to include a new area, or of newly established institutions aspiring to gain university status. The applications forwarded by various new institutions may refer to one or to several course programmes. To be granted provisional authorization, course programmes, faculties, or colleges have to undergo an evaluation. Provided the programmes meet the minimum legal quality standards, the Accreditation Council draws up a report and proposes the granting of a provisional authorization.

The provisional authorization is valid until three student cohorts have graduated from the respective course programme(s). Meanwhile, each programme is periodically evaluated to establish whether or not it still meets the conditions on the basis of which the provisional authorization was granted. If the programme is judged to be failing to comply with the basic performance conditions, the provisional authorization is withdrawn and the programme is terminated. Until being accredited, newly established institutions are not allowed to award, in their own names, degrees and/or educational certificates. Accredited universities are exclusively entitled to organize graduation examinations and to award degrees and educational certificates. Students having completed a provisionally authorized programme must take their graduation examinations at an accredited institution that will also award them their degrees and educational certificates.

### 3.1.2. ACCREDITATION

Provisionally authorized course programmes, which have proven, while in operation, that they meet legal criteria and standards, enter the stage of accreditation. Following repeated evaluation, the Accreditation Councils will draw up a report including the proposal for accreditation. Once accredited, the respective university is given full autonomy and the right to award legally recognized degrees and educational certificates.

### 3.1.3. PERIODIC EVALUATION

In many countries in the region, the laws stipulate that all universities (faculties, colleges, and course programmes) must be evaluated every five years. In case a course programme is reported not to be meeting the necessary quality criteria and standards, a one-year period of probation is granted so that the institution can address its problems. If, by the time the period of probation expires, the institution has not met the quality criteria and standards, the respective programme is gradually terminated (the university being forbidden to enroll new students). If all the programmes offered by a given university are found to have failed to meet the quality

criteria and standards, a report is drawn up on the basis of which the institution is closed by law.

### *3.2. The Mechanisms of Academic Assessment*

#### 3.2.1. INSTITUTIONAL SELF-EVALUATION

Higher education institutions draw up their self-evaluation reports based on handbooks elaborated by the national councils.

A self-evaluation report contains information on the university as a whole and on the faculty/department/college and its course programmes. According to country-specific regulations, self-evaluation must be a constant practice in all universities. At the level of each faculty, a team of teachers and students is responsible for the constant assessment of course programmes. At university level, the pro-rector coordinates the institutional self-evaluation groups. Members of the respective academic community mainly carry out the self-assessment activity. Some universities also work with experts from outside the university, from the same country, or from abroad, but that is not the general rule.

#### 3.2.2. EVALUATION BY SPECIALIZED COMMISSIONS

The self-evaluation reports presented by the applicant institutions are the starting point of the evaluation process carried out by the National Councils. Depending on its type, each course programme is assigned to a specific commission specialized in the respective area. If the concerned commission lacks the needed experts, so-called temporary domestic or foreign experts are employed. These experts come from universities and professional associations, or they may be prestigious professionals from outside the university community. Working with experts from outside the university helps in correlating academic assessment activities with the requirements of the labour market.

The assessment commission analyzes the self-evaluation report, and, if necessary, asks the institution for additional information. The most important part of the assessment process is the fact-finding visit to the institution under evaluation that includes the commission specialists and the external experts. Their task is to investigate whether or not the data and information supplied by means of the self-evaluation report are consistent with the reality observed in the respective institution. The visiting team examines whether the criteria and standards stipulated by law or established by the National Councils are fulfilled, and hold discussions with the students and teachers of the institution. Student opinion is also taken into consideration. First-hand comments are made regarding teaching activity, but no reference is made to student performance. Also, the visiting commission makes certain recommendations to the respective institution with a view to improving various aspects and eliminating dysfunctions.

The visiting teams include reputed experts in a given field. The activity of these teams is regulated by norms established by the National Councils.

The fact-finding visit to evaluate an institution or a course programme follows a specific agenda. The visiting team may be authorized by the head of the expert commission or by the National Council to inquire into a particular aspect of the activity of the institution. (Such situations appear especially when the review of the self-evaluation report raises certain doubts as to the reliability of the information supplied or when the data included in the self-evaluation report along with subsequent entries fail to make clear whether or not a certain quality standard has been met.)

When new experts join the visiting team, they are briefed in advance on evaluation procedures. Also, inquiries are made to rule out the possibility of conflict of interest. Lists of hundreds of experts are available to the National Councils, and the members of evaluation teams are selected according to professional competence. The visiting teams consist of three-to-five experts for every course programme. In special cases, the numbers of team members can reach fifteen. Usually, the average amount of time devoted to each course programme amounts to two days. Under more difficult circumstances (course programmes covering a larger area, implying a complicated education and research infrastructure), the expert team can extend its visit to up to five days.

The visiting team, led by its coordinator, draws up a report and presents it to the management of the university under evaluation. The management of the university countersigns the report and lists any objections, in writing, as the case may be. The conclusions of the visit are submitted to the Expert Commission at the National Council, which, in turn, draws up its own report based on the analysis of the self-evaluation report and on the visiting team report. Later, the report is discussed at the plenary meeting of the expert commission. The report reviews the degree to which quality criteria and standards have been met and concludes with a proposal to grant or decline authorization or to grant or withdraw the accreditation.

### 3.2.3. EVALUATION BY THE ACCREDITATION COUNCIL

The report presented by the expert commission is discussed at a plenary meeting of the Accreditation Council. If considered necessary, it may be sent back to the expert commission for complementary information. In the case of cross-discipline course programmes, other expert commissions are called upon to offer their opinions. However, there is only one main commission that works with other consulting commissions.

The National Council elaborates its own report based on the reports of the expert commissions, the self-evaluation report, and the approval of the experts. The National Council decides upon authorization, accreditation, or the withdrawal of accreditation of a course programme/college/faculty. The report may include recommendations for the organization and implementation of a certain course programme. By means of periodic controls, the National Councils make sure that these recommendations are observed by the higher education institutions.

The evaluation activity conducted by certain National Councils also takes into account the professional evaluation criteria used by various professional associations. Their role varies largely from one profession to another. Professional associations are very powerful groups in, for instance, the medical and legal fields. Practicing one's profession in these fields is conditioned by the individual professional evaluations made by the respective professional associations. For this reason, the assessment of medical programmes has been conducted with assistance offered by experts from medical institutions.

#### 3.2.4. APPROVAL BY THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

In some countries, the report drawn up by the National Accreditation Council is submitted for approval to the Ministry of Education. In case the Minister disagrees with the proposal put forth by the Accreditation Council, he or she returns it to the Accreditation Council for a more thorough analysis.

#### 3.2.5. NOTIFICATION OF THE APPLICANT INSTITUTIONS

The reports of the National Council and the expert commissions along with the approval of the Ministry of Education must be communicated to the institutions that have requested evaluation. Although considered as public documents, the reports may be made public only with the express agreement of the Accreditation Council and the institution to which the reports refer. A higher education institution that believes that it has been prejudiced by a decision of the National Council can appeal the decision to the Ministry of Education, to the Government, and to the courts. If the institution wins the appeal, a new team of experts repeats the evaluation process.

General information on the assessment and accreditation parameters and standards, the assessment procedures, and the list of authorized and accredited programmes and institutions are available on the Web pages of the National Accreditation Councils and the Ministry of Education.

#### 3.2.6. APPROVAL BY THE GOVERNMENT AND/OR PARLIAMENT

In some countries, the Government or Parliament takes the final decision as to provisional authorization or accreditation. The National Accreditation Council plays a decisive role in the evaluation process, the proposals of its membership usually being accepted by the Ministry of Education and by the Government. Therefore, the decisions of the National Accreditation Council are more likely to be backed by government decisions and laws.

## 4. PARAMETERS AND STANDARDS FOR SELF-EVALUATION AND ACCREDITATION

The information requested in the self-evaluation reports falls into several categories that also includes the groups of criteria by which the quality

assessment is made. The lists of standards vary among the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. However, certain criteria are common to all national accreditation mechanisms and are frequently employed in the accreditation procedures in Western Europe, the United States, Canada, and Australia.

### *4.1. Basic Quality Standards*

#### 4.1.1. ASSUMED MISSION AND OBJECTIVES

– *Mission*: the mission of the higher education institution; the mission of the faculty, the department including the course programmes; the mission of the course programme.
– *Objectives*: the objectives of the course programme; the possibility to carry out the course programme.
– *Strategies*: the starting point (traditions, local needs, and pre-existing forms); long-term strategies aimed at accomplishing the mission and objectives set by the university and the course programmes.
– The *correlation* of course programmes with attainable objectives.
– Domestic and international *co-operation* with a view to accomplishing the mission and the assumed objectives.

#### 4.1.2. THE STUDENTS

– *Admission of candidates* (the method for the evaluation and the selection of candidates):
  • Higher education institutions should use a clearly defined procedure for student selection.
  • Admittance conditions and criteria must be made public before the entrance examination takes place.
  • Only candidates able to complete a university course programme should be admitted.
  • The minimum qualification for admission is the high-school graduation examination (the *Baccalauréat*) or the equivalent.
  • The selection procedure must highlight the skills and motivations of candidates.
  • Selection must be based on competition.
- *Students*: The distribution of students among the departments must be undertaken according to learning types and levels.
- *Graduates*: The grades obtained by students on their final examinations, the positions of graduates on the labour market, and the correlation of the number of students with the demands of the labour market are all taken into account.

### 4.1.3. THE CONTENT OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

*THE CURRICULUM*

- The curriculum should be consistent with the declared mission and objectives.
- The distribution of subjects in the curriculum should be consistent.
- The choice of subjects in the educational plan should facilitate the fulfillment of the assumed objectives and missions.
- The subjects should complement each other.
- Subject complexity should increase gradually.
- The weights of mandatory and optional courses and of general and specialized courses should be in equilibrium.
- Opportunities to specialize should be offered to students.
- Theoretical and practical training should be distributed evenly.
- The extent to which the content of courses reflects the level of science development in the respective field should be taken into consideration.
- There should be recognized methods in place for keeping the curriculum up-to-date.

*THE ANALYTICAL PROGRAMMES*

- A correlation should exist between the analytic programmes and the declared mission and curriculum.
- The nature of analytic programmes should be appropriately scientific.
- The methods for evaluating student knowledge should be adequate.
- Ways should exist for co-ordinating various analytic programmes within the curriculum.

*TEACHING AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES*

- The learning methods used for each course should be compatible.
- Means for the constant evaluation of the learning and teaching methods used by the respective higher education institution should be in place.
- Tutorials should be available and used.
- Information and communication technology should be widely used in the learning and research activities.
- Educational support should be offered to students according to their skills and achievements.
- Students capable of high performance should be identified, encouraged, and stimulated.

*TEACHING AIDS*

- Lectures, handbooks, and other manuals should be viewed as good teaching aids.
- Teaching aids should have appropriate scientific content.

*STUDENT EVALUATION*

- The evaluation methods should be adequate.
- The results of constant evaluations should be combined with those of final evaluations.

- Evaluation should create an objective hierarchy based on real performance.
- Ways to stimulate self-evaluation should be identified.
- The extent to which evaluation boosts student performance and learning motivation should be known.

*THE USE OF THE EUROPEAN CREDIT TRANSFER SYSTEM (ECTS)*

- A number of credits should be assigned to each subject.
- The success of credit transfer among the faculties and departments of a university should be known.
- The procedures for transferring credits among universities at country level should be in place.
- The procedures for transferring credits at European and international levels should be in place.

### 4.1.4. THE TEACHING STAFF

– Structure of the teaching staff (level of teaching, age group, teaching and scientific qualifications).
– Compliance with the laws in force regarding teaching positions: criteria for applying for and holding teaching positions, applying for teaching positions.
– Coordinating the qualifications of the teaching staff with the positions they hold.
– Systems of periodic evaluation of the performance of the teaching staff:
  - evaluation methods;
  - evaluators;
  - frequency of evaluations;
  - consequences of evaluation.

The numbers of teaching staff members and the structure of the staff must be correlated with the numbers of students. The analysis varies according to the type of course programme and the level of studies offered (undergraduate, graduate, postgraduate).

### 4.1.5. RESEARCH

– Research activities are organized within the university/department/course programmes.
– Adequate human resources are involved in research.
– The funding of research is adequate.
– The outcomes of research include the following: significant achievements; a known number of quality publications; institutional means for evaluating the results of research; an effort to capitalize on the results of research;
– The scientific results obtained by the university/department/programme are recognized nationally and internationally.

#### 4.1.6. THE INFRASTRUCTURE

- The infrastructure includes teaching and research locations (owned and/or rented, including laboratories).
- Equipment must be appropriate for use in lecture and seminar halls. There should also be laboratory equipment, library equipment, and other equipment (computer centers, research units, multimedia centers, publishing houses, experimental centers, etc.).
- Social services and facilities for students should include hostels, canteens, sports centers, cultural services, etc.
- Social services and facilities should also be provided for the teaching staff.

#### 4.1.7. FINANCIAL AND MANAGERIAL ACTIVITIES

- Funding;
- Earnings;
- Investing for development;
- Assurance of financial accountability;
- The managerial skills of the senior staff (dean, rector, etc.);
- Methods used with a view to implementing course programmes and administering faculties/universities;
- The relationship of the university with the local community.

### *4.2. Process and Result Standards*

In most countries, the parameters and standards at the basis of quality evaluation and accreditation cover the educational process itself and, to a lesser extent, its results, *i.e.*, the efficiency of higher education. The basic assumption is that if a university has a proper infrastructure, well-equipped libraries and laboratories, computer networks, and a reasonable number of qualified teachers, then it meets the quality standards and may be accredited. The aforementioned factors are necessary prerequisites for any educational process, but they alone do not guarantee its success. A more recent trend, seriously taken into consideration in most countries in Central and Eastern Europe, places stronger emphasis on post-graduation parameters and standards, *i.e.*, on the evaluation of the results obtained by universities. These results refer, first and foremost, to graduates. Their "quality" is assessed according to various criteria.

*The success rate in school* (numbers of graduates *versus* numbers of students admitted to the university). The rate is irrelevant unless all higher education institutions have similar requirements. If this parameter is introduced as a means of monitoring the quality of the course programmes, certain less performing universities will be tempted to be more "generous" and to demand less of their students. This criterion is only recommended for national graduation examinations.

*The rate of employment of new graduates* (in the first month, in the first three months, in the first six months, in the first year after graduation). The time required for a graduate to find employment is an important indicator of the recognition that a university enjoys.

*The employment of graduates in relation to the social prestige attached to them.* This parameter is used more in an illustrative way, as no classifications have been made of the institutions that employ new graduates. Some institutions are prestigious owing to their ranking positions within a certain hierarchy (the parliament, government, the presidency). Others have gained prestige owing to their scientific reputation (major universities or important research institutes); yet, some others are famous for the salaries they offer (multinational companies, banks, insurance companies). This parameter cannot become operational, nor can it be used to distinguish among universities. It can only be used by a university as a promotional and advertising means to boast about how many of its former students have found good jobs.

*The number of graduates who have found employment abroad with prestigious universities and research institutes.* This criterion is relevant when trying to obtain the international recognition and validation of a degree and may emphasize the international prestige of a higher education institution. The criterion is used in an illustrative way, its strict application being likely to motivate universities to make a goal of the emigration of graduates to other countries, which would have negative consequences for the countries of origin.

*The correlation of the educational flow in a university with the demands of the employment market.* A university is not a mass-producing factory, unconcerned with the ways in which its products are placed on the market. Apart from its scientific and cultural mission, the university also has a vocational mission, namely to train a workforce that can be absorbed at the level of the whole of society. The correlation of the number of graduates completing a certain course programme with the dynamics of the employment market is an important criterion of evaluation for universities, which should not, however, be exaggerated, as the university also has a relative autonomy from the employment market, a status allowing it to invent new professions and qualifications and to impose them on the labour market.

Universities must correlate their educational offer with the dynamics of the employment market at national and European levels. There are, no doubt, fields of lower demand on the labour market which could be negatively affected if the educational process were to be evaluated in direct proportion to the employment market. There is no clear and immediate demand, for instance, for fundamental research, but leaving this activity out of universities could seriously impair the long-term development of future technologies. Certain academic fields must be protected from the circumstantial fluctuations of market demands.

Mechanisms that regulate university flows according to the supply and demand of the labour market have not proven to be very effective. The rigid

application of the principles of the so-called entrepreneurial university has led to the abandonment of certain expensive specialized departments in favour of less costly departments (law, economics). Such a practice explains the overproduction of graduates specialized in certain domains, a situation leading to additional retraining costs, sometimes immediately after graduation. Given the huge costs of higher qualification and the fact that a given specialization may be limited to only one profession (that of dentistry, for instance), while the employment offer for this qualification is scarce, the overproduction of graduates is a serious shortcoming. Under such circumstances, it is worth considering the idea of a policy or strategy regulating educational flows at national level, and, in the future, maybe at European level, as well.

*The correlation of educational flow with the demands of the European employment market*. With the advancement of European Union enlargement, there has been an increasing need for higher education qualifications that can be recognized across the continent. Certainly, the university-trained workforce will continue to be employed mostly at national level, but the increasing cross-border movement should be given increased attention. The European dimension of the employment market calls for curricular changes and adjustments to European demands, in terms of scientific content, vocational abilities, and cultural training. Despite many common elements, European culture is still very heterogeneous at national and regional levels. This diversity must not be wasted, as it is an extremely valuable factor, but neither should it become an obstacle for pan-European mobility. The precise balance between the European, the national, and the regional remains a topical issue, with unpredictable developments.

University involvement in *adult training and educational processes* has become a widely recognized principle in Europe, involving companies, universities, and the State. Adult education is an important line of action for universities, especially in the context of demographic decline, an aging population, the rapid pace of the generation of new knowledge, and the rapid changes in the way people practice their professions. The costs of adult education should be distributed among the State (if for no other reasons then simply to avoid unemployment triggered by the attrition of certain professions), companies (interested in maintaining the conditions of competency required by given qualifications), and individuals (motivated to maintain their employment, to earn a promotion, or to increase their incomes by acquiring a higher qualification or by retraining).

In relation to the main qualification, Universities must treat adult education differently as a mass process. While the main qualification focuses on developing the necessary abilities and skills, on intellectual and cultural development, on the year-long interaction between teacher and student, on bringing together academic training and scientific research, adult education is characterized by constraints of time and interaction.

Adult programmes start from the assumption that adults have completed their intellectual and cultural development; so, the emphasis is

laid on density (more training in a shorter period of time), selectivity (the introduction into the respective training programmes of those elements instrumental in professional retraining or updating), the practical aspects of the qualification, and customization (the design of programmes according to the type and level of the main qualification). The learning experience, not necessarily acquired in a university, can be recognized and validated by a new qualifications. Flexibility and adaptability are basic conditions for adult course programmes.

Evaluating a university by its results is a complex issue, implying more than the few parameters analyzed so far. The important parameters are the results obtained in research, publications, acknowledgement of cultural contributions, etc. These points refer mainly to the quality of the teaching and research personnel and to the scientific and cultural prestige of an institution. However, these parameters are less relevant in the evaluation of students and graduates.

Information and communication technologies require a large number of standards and parameters. Their increasing number does not necessarily imply more objective and refined evaluations. Experience in the field of quality assessment, in Europe and worldwide, shows that the diversification of evaluation standards and parameters, although a tempting factor in many countries, has not improved the evaluation process itself. On the contrary, the growing sophistication of evaluation procedures has led to significantly higher institutional costs (the preparation of self-evaluation reports, constant monitoring by expert commissions, the publication of reports), and has generated dissatisfaction among the evaluated universities that are being forced to employ increasingly large amounts of funding and resources for a goal that seems to be ever beyond reach.

The reasonable solution is, on the one hand, to devise more flexible quality assessment procedures and mechanisms, settling for a small but significant number of parameters and standards of external evaluation (from outside the institution), and, on the other hand, encouraging higher education institutions to develop their own quality assurance mechanisms.

A similar proposal was made at the second conference of the European Association of Universities, held in Denmark on 19-20 April 2002. The report presented by Professor Dirk van Damme of the University of Ghent argues for the need to redesign external evaluation systems into less bureaucratic, less costly, and less detailed procedures, focusing more on results, encouraging innovation, and keeping abreast of the changing world environment.

Evaluation parameters and standards are instrumental in quality assurance. The issue of standards is very complicated at national level as well, but it becomes all the more so when the object is to establish a common set of standards and parameters at regional and European level. Over the last four years, Ministers of Education insisted in Paris, Bologna, Salamanca, and Paris on the unification of the standards at European level and on the creation of pan-European mechanisms and organizations

for quality assurance. Efforts have not been spared to this end, yet the results are quite modest. Several explanations can be given for this slow progress:

- Against the background of European Union enlargement, education remains an area in which the states wish to retain their autonomy.
- Higher education is highly diversified in European countries.
- Universities wish to preserve their specific traditions which might be lost if a standard unification were to be achieved.
- European universities are autonomous. Even in the countries in which the State plays an important role in the supervision of universities, they remain mainly independent.
- Certain standards are based on statistics collected outside the university. Some countries do not possess much available data, and they are not likely to be supplied with them in the near future.

The idea of unifying quality standards at European level has been abandoned, at least for the short- and medium-term. The solution embraced for the moment is to come to terms with the diversity of quality assessment standards and criteria, to secure a certain coordination of national evaluation procedures and mechanisms, to rely on the national accreditation agencies, and acknowledge the results of their evaluations.

Growth in employment abroad and international mobility, the greater compatibility of qualifications, the creation of national mechanisms for quality assurance and their harmonization with European and international standards, tougher competition at national and international levels – all are complex processes, with possible contradictory outcomes, which should not be regarded as wonder solutions to the problems facing higher education in Europe.

Recently, concerns regarding quality in higher education have referred less than before to external evaluation and the set of standards and parameters that it requires. Efforts are now being concentrated on creating an institutional culture of quality and on introducing certain institutional mechanisms for quality assurance and management. The participants in the conference of the European Association of Universities held in Denmark, on 19-20 April 2002, agreed that the internal quality assurance system must cover eight main aspects:

- *The internal evaluation of the curriculum*. The university management has the strategic role of monitoring the internal evaluation, while the university departments/chairs are in charge of implementing and adjusting the results of the evaluation.
- *The internal evaluation of auxiliary scientific services*.
- *The internal evaluation of teaching and learning activities*. The internal systems of quality assurance must focus on developing a learning system rather than on sanctions. Teachers must be persuaded to use teaching and learning processes. It is necessary to systematically expand and apply the system of student teacher

evaluation. The universities must penalize bad teaching and boost performance. It is necessary to strengthen dialogue between universities and the future employers of students.

- *The internal evaluation of the decision-making process*. The main lines of action are the following: enhancing responsibility at all institutional levels, reconsidering the student role in the decision-making process, reducing corporative tendencies (the fragmentation of the university into autonomous departments and faculties) and reconstructing the academic community, creating a balance of power among the managing structures (the senate, the rectorate, the faculty councils and the departments and chairs), and setting up a quality assurance body that is independent of the university management.
- *The internal evaluation of research management.* Universities must focus more on designing strategies and policies in the field of scientific research, and less on the distribution of research funds. Evaluation criteria must be applied to the results of research.
- *The internal evaluation of human resources*. Clearly set criteria must be used for appointing and promoting the teaching staff. A balance must be achieved between teaching and research results. Salary scales must be transparent. There should be a combination of short- and long-term working contracts. Management training programmes should be set up for deans.
- *The implementation of the Bologna process*. The process that started with the Declaration of Bologna is a great opportunity for university reform. The obstacles impeding the application of this declaration need to be analyzed. The possible openings on the employment market for three-year course programme graduates should be publicized. The application of the Bologna principles will not bring about standardization, but a harmonization of education systems throughout Europe.
- *The evaluation of partnerships*.

### *4.3. The Need for Institutional and System Analysis*

The institutional evaluation of course programmes by means of standardized procedures may run the risk of oversimplification. Apart from standard procedures, one must resort to more thorough institutional analysis as well. Institutional analysis may work with the same parameters used in evaluation procedures. The difference lies in the fact that the analysis is focused on a single institution and its characteristics. Analysis teams are made up of experts from within and outside the institution. The time devoted by external specialists to institutional analysis exceeds the duration of an evaluation procedure. Institutional analysis has to meet the needs of the institution. Its weak and strong points must be identified, and an action plan aimed at improving the overall situation of the institution should be adopted).

Institutional analysis has to be complemented by an analysis of the entire higher education system. The individual assessment of a course programme or institution (even when a comparison with other programmes and institutions is made), overlooks problems that are only obvious at the level of the entire system (national structures lacking student flow, territorial disparities, uneven access to higher education on the part of young people coming from certain professional groups and geographical areas; increasing the competition of national universities on the international academic market).

System analysis may prompt certain educational strategies. These national strategies may guide institutional strategies and even function as reference points in negotiating institutional contracts in countries using this procedure. It is true that the sum of institutional strategies worked out individually, independently from one another, no matter how well conceived they may be, is not tantamount to a coherent national higher education strategy. Eventually, it is the task of government to draft national strategies, even though they are based on institutional and system studies conducted by university experts. There has been a growing need for such strategies, owing both to domestic factors and to tougher competition on the foreign academic market.

The need for these strategies has been proven by the recent example of certain countries in which specialized committees have been created to draw up reports on education and higher education. In some cases, these reports were used to readjust and redirect national education policies or to pass new laws.

Quality assessment by means of standard procedures and institutional and system analyses do not contradict each other; on the contrary, they complement one another. Moreover, system analyses could guide evaluation and accreditation procedures.

### *4.4. Quality Assessment and Accreditation in the Context of Paradigmatic Changes*

The most widespread university model in the Nineteenth Century and throughout most of the Twentieth Century was Humboldt's university model. This model was successful so long as certain conditions were met:

- few and very selective universities;
- no competition among domestic and foreign universities;
- partial university funding from the state budget;
- universities as the most important, if not the only centers of scientific, technological, and cultural innovation.

Models, other than the Humboldtian University, that have compelled recognition, have included the model of the university as an institution in service to the community, and more recently, the model of the entrepreneurial university. Nowadays, most universities display a combination of the three models.

The expansion of academic assessment and accreditation procedures has been associated with the relative decline of Humboldt's university model. According to the model of the university as an institution in service to society, the State ends up being the main or the sole source of university funding, the only exception to this rule being the existence of several private universities. Public funds were under a great deal of pressure from the universities. Under these circumstances, the state started taking a more active interest in the way in which universities were administering public funds. Although universities invented academic assessment and accreditation procedures, they are largely supported and encouraged in these endeavours by State institutions that regard them as a means of enhancing university responsibility in using public funds and of increased efficiency of fund management.

The response of the people in academic circles to quality assessment is varied.

On the one hand, there are supporters whose favourable attitude has a variety of motives: the sincere wish of teachers to enhance the quality of higher education, discontent with the undifferentiated treatment of universities by the State that disregards their uneven performances, worries that higher education is turning into a mass product (related to the declining quality of mass higher education), the relatively low level of funding of traditional universities (also considered the most prestigious ones), the dispersal of public funds among an increasing number of new universities and students, and the hope that the possible hierarchies established by means of quality assessment procedures will lead to a redistribution of funds according to quality.

On the other hand, there are people in university circles who display an indifferent or hostile attitude towards quality assessment procedures that they view as a violation of university autonomy. Since quality assurance is an unquestionable goal, even if sometimes accepted only formally in order to observe social conventions, opposition to the systematic application of quality assurance procedures is displayed by other means, especially when a redistribution of funds to the universities may be in store.

The introduction and constant use of academic assessment and accreditation procedures is viewed as somehow having restricted the autonomy of universities. It should be noted, however, that this autonomy has always been limited: medieval universities were accountable to the Church (in point of curriculum and ideology). The universities as institutions in service to the community are accountable to the State institutions that provide the funding (accounting for the efficient use of public funds allotted by the state). The entrepreneurial university has fewer responsibilities in regard to the state and more in regard to its economic partners. This type of university is concerned with the quality of its "products" and their behaviour on the scientific, technological, and employment markets.

The set of parameters and standards used in academic assessment and accreditation procedures also depends on the importance of the three

university models within the national higher education system. With a dominant Humboldtian model, the parameters and standards related to the content of education and scientific research will prevail. A predominant model of the university as an institution in service to society will focus on parameters and standards evaluating the efficient use of public funds, while with a prevailing entrepreneurial model, parameters and standards evaluating post-graduation results, including scientific innovation, technologies, and a highly qualified workforce will stand out.

The list of quality parameters and standards relevant at European level must take into account the wide diversity of university paradigms, both within and outside countries. It is highly unlikely that a single university model (say, the entrepreneurial model) will manage to become dominant all across Europe. Indeed, that would not be a desirable outcome; rather, it would represent a restriction of the variety of university structures and ideologies leading to an impoverished national education system. The major asset of higher education in Europe is precisely its great diversity. It is true that this diversity makes it more difficult to apply standard academic evaluation and accreditation procedures. However, it should by no means be sacrificed for the sake of an easier application of some quality evaluation standards.

## 5. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

Universities have inherited a system by which the teacher-student tradition, in no way an élitist one, although inaccessible, *de facto*, to the wider masses, has become available to a larger number of people. At this point, the emphasis is on the quality of teaching.

Nowadays, there is a tendency to focus on formal procedures, and even more so, on the degree itself as an administrative event. In some circles, it is believed that the so-called “progress” made in this respect is more of a deviation.

The quality of a university is, first of all, associated with the quality of the people working in it (teaching staff, students, researchers, and administrative staff). Therefore, the evaluation of the curricula vitae of university staff members – a favourable evaluation being cherished by the wider public, the media, and parents – is vital for the evaluation of a university, along with student competence that is tested by means of the entrance and exit examinations. Secondly, but of no less importance for the future, come material resources, institutional processes, curricula, modules, and programme content that must be evaluated. Finally, institutional policies play a major role in future development, but an evaluation based on future forecasts is not legitimate. The evaluation must refer to the present, to the current academic year.

If mass higher education starts gaining ground, quality criteria for solid mass in Central and Eastern Europe, higher education must be defined very clearly. Therefore, criteria, such as the capacity to ensure student

contact with the best teachers and the enhancement of awareness of research issues and of the level of tutoring, are worth considering. Quality criteria inspired by the popularization of science as practiced by the *Learning Channel* of BBC-2, *Arte*, and other television channels, concerned with open and long distance education, may be considered in the case of mass education. It is important for students to become acquainted with the spirit of the subject, with the scientific vision, and with the characteristic scientific approach, and not be exposed to distorted concepts and ignorant simplifications that will hinder their later development, in case they wish to leave the realm of mass education and enter a specialized educational area.

In this context, the national dimension of evaluation/accreditation becomes relevant, for the possibility of direct contact with social reality and the legislative context appear. International evaluation/accreditation turns into a formal procedure, or, in the case of longer contacts with evaluators, into such an expensive procedure that it is no longer an option.

If National Accreditation Councils can guarantee international bodies, the reverse is also true. By becoming international, a process does not automatically become transparent as well. On the contrary, exposure to the media may lead to oversimplification, reduction to stereotypical levels, and preconceived ideas. As far as higher education is concerned, the authorized opinion of a specialist body is necessary and sufficient, without ruling out the possibility of further examinations by the media and the institutions of civil society.

Moreover, the evaluation must be constructive, formative, *i.e.*, guiding the evaluated activity at all times. A simple one-off validation is not acceptable. A national institution, such as the University, subordinated to a major public service, offers a better option than an international validation that can only be functional.

The existence of international accreditation is not without consequence on the higher education market, so long as it is optional and informative. Just as on the food market, the French talk about *malbouffe*, or *fast food*, we shall soon be talking about fast teaching, or *maléducation*. The task of identifying the producers of "hollow" degrees operating at international level can be shared between national and international bodies. From that moment on, the task of eliminating them efficiently is taken over by the State authorities.

National evaluation systems can assume an international dimension by networking and by joining organizations that promote competence and benchmarking. These organizations are also in charge of advising the government on the adoption of laws that should not restrict mobility but prevent the suppliers of fraudulent university services from working freely.

The internationalization process has already gone through important stages in the field of academic assessment and accreditation. The standards of assessment and accreditation are shared by European countries, as well as by the United States, Canada, and Australia, that have put into place specific mechanisms.

Interuniversity co-operation, quite close among European countries, including even the mutual recognition of degrees, curricula, etc, also plays an important role in preventing fraud in this domain.

Although achieving remarkable results in some countries, becoming a guarantee of quality for accredited institutions, academic assessment and accreditation institutions have not escaped bureaucratic tendencies. The larger number of evaluation standards and criteria, the increasing demand for additional, and frequently useless data from the evaluated institutions, the perfunctory use of evaluation procedures, especially in the case of large universities, are typical problems. There is also a tendency to standardize course programmes as well as a certain reluctance to innovate in education.

The evaluation of the programmes provided by new education suppliers must be based on certain minimum classic standards, but also entail a flexible and lenient perspective. Possible deviations and errors can be addressed by carefully monitoring the first stages of the programme or by terminating it if it seriously violates national academic standards.

Apart from this function, the mission of national academic assessment and accreditation standards is to protect students from offers of educational scams. This responsibility can be fulfilled by making the official list of accredited institutions and programmes public, by requiring institutions to inform students of their status, and to state in the study contracts, that institutions conclude with future students, whether or not they are accredited and the legal grounds of accreditation, as the case may be. Additional ways of fulfilling this responsibility include the publication of periodicals by assessment and accreditation agencies and the ministries of education on the stages of the accreditation process, the creation of databases offering information about institutions and course programmes, and the penalizing of suppliers of fraudulent educational offers. Since fraudulent educational offers have become a worldwide issue, an international control and warning system should be put into place.

Given previous attempts to introduce European standardized mechanisms for academic assessment and accreditation, the best solution for the coming period is to set up national independent institutions founded on common European and international principles. Thus, institutional autonomy could be preserved, while the undesired and expensive uniformity of higher education in Europe could be avoided. A pan-European institution of academic assessment and accreditation, with great decision-making powers, would more likely damage than contribute to the harmony of course programmes and quality assurance. Such an agency would entail huge costs (translations into foreign languages, salaries for foreign experts, etc). The European association and the regional associations of national quality assurance and accreditation agencies are sufficient to secure the transparency and the harmonization of national mechanisms responsible for the quality assurance of higher education at the international and system levels.

# III. Uses of Indicators in the Processes of Accreditation and Quality Assessment in the Countries of Central and Eastern Europe

*LÁSZLÓ V. FRENYÓ and CHRISTINA ROZSNAY*

## 1. RECENT HISTORY AND CURRENT STATUS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Following the 1989-1990 régime changes, Central and Eastern Europe underwent fundamental political and socio-economic restructuring. The region is still undergoing considerable transition, a phenomenon that certainly also applies to higher education.

The Central and Eastern European transformation in this region, however, has experienced a delayed reactivity. Owing to the consequences of the totalitarian system of the past, it has been somewhat isolated even from the effects of globalization; however, the level of isolation has varied from country to country. Its diversity aside, the region as a whole was collectively very late in joining the globalization-driven transition process (Frenyó, 2000). Beyond the significant changes in the political system, considerable progress has also been made toward the development of a market economy. An overall change in mentality, on the other hand, will still require a considerable amount of time.

The rapidly changing economic structure – as a part of globalization – brought new terms of reference and new realities to the world of higher education. These included market mechanisms, decentralization, and the shift of organizational structures. The various higher education systems still maintain a great deal of the Humboldtian tradition (Darvas, 1995, pp. 245-286. Funding, general organizational issues, and legal control are in the hands of a dominant state apparatus, while at the institutional level, power is mostly wielded by academic senates that have very limited understanding of strategic thinking and certainly an interest in opposing any radical changes that adaptation to the rapidly transforming environment of a knowledge society might require. The position of rector is mostly considered to be the proper reward for a senior professor, for a lifetime of academic production. This person, then, acts as "*primus inter pares*" (Barakonyi, 2001, pp. 26-27).

Nevertheless, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe began to restructure their higher education. Especially important were efforts made to establish very reliable legal frameworks. Within a few years after the changes, many countries had drafted new higher education laws or had

introduced substantial modifications in their existing regulations. All of these laws have been amended more than once.

Among the fundamental assets of the new framework was the re-awarding of autonomy to higher education institutions. Closely linked to the reaffirmation of autonomy was the development of legal conditions conducive to the establishment of national accreditation agencies. Provisions for the latter were included in most of the laws in question in exchange for increased institutional autonomy.

Apart from the autonomy gained by higher education institutions in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, a relatively high degree of external, financial, and structural control still remained. Various levels of legislation determine such aspects of higher education as the basic content and structure of curricula (*e.g.*, "national qualification requirements" in Hungary, lists of study fields in Poland), enrollment numbers, and/or normative financing.

Although coming from different roots, the globalization-related social trends of higher education in the 1990s were the same, in many respects, in Central and Eastern Europe, as they were in those of Western Europe. While in the preceding decades admission to higher education was the privilege of a narrow layer of the appropriate age cohort and was strongly controlled by central entrance examinations, the student numbers of the last decade increased enormously. In Hungary, the number of students enrolled in higher education institutions rose by over 30 percent between 1990 and 2002 (Hungarian Ministry of Education, 2002). In Poland, the ratio of 18-to-24-year-olds rose from nearly 10 percent of the total population in 1990-1991 to over 32 percent in 2001-2002 (Chmielecka and Dabrowski, 2003). In the Czech Republic, the number of students in higher education doubled from 1989-1990 to reach 34 percent of 19-year-olds in 2000-2001 (Beneš and Šebková, 2001, p. 10). As a consequence of the above, the student/teacher ratio increased considerably, approaching OECD levels (in Hungary from 6.2 in 1990 to 16.5 in 2002) (Hungarian Ministry of Education, 2003, p. 1). The entire higher education sector, however, both at system and at institutional levels, was unable to meet the requirements of the new challenges, the result of an outdated infrastructure and curriculum and an inadequately prepared teaching staff.

Allocations from State budgets to support higher education took the form of a kind of formula funding (often called normative financing), *i.e.*, distributing the resources according to student numbers and various other indicators, like quantity of research and development infrastructure. In principle, normative financing gave the university or college more flexibility in utilizing its funding, but was, in fact, still rigid, since most of the sums provided by the State budget were earmarked. Additional weaknesses of the system were the unreliable and frequently changing funding mechanisms. Worst of all, the total amount of available funds was not sufficient to sustain the adequate functioning of the institutions, especially in view of the expansion of student enrollments.

In addition to the above, higher education in Central and Eastern Europe is further troubled with inefficient governance and administration as well as with a lack of strategic vision at system and institutional levels. Strengthening the steering core (Clark, 1998), therefore, is inevitable and should lead to the separation of high-level managerial competencies from academic competencies. In the rapidly changing and heavily competitive higher education market of today, university governance and management must include a certain degree of entrepreneurialism. Recent developments in the region are promising in this respect.

## 2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF AND RECENT TRENDS IN QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE SINCE 1990

The discussion about quality concerns and quality assurance in Central and Eastern Europe needs to be viewed in parallel with the extension of institutional autonomy as a pan-European development. Both discussions have provided grounds for the introduction of accreditation into Western European countries that already had quality evaluation systems in place (Reichert and Tauch, 2003: 74). The main issue, both in Central and Eastern Europe and in Western Europe, is accountability to society. The difference between the two regions may be the degree to which governments are regarded as the intermediaries for society.

Coupled to the awarding of autonomy to higher education institutions, the Central and Eastern European countries introduced quality assurance in the form of accreditation at national level as a tool to safeguard the quality of education. Albania, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, the Russian Federation, and Ukraine, all have central accreditation commissions. They are responsible for accrediting institutions and/or course programmes on a regular, cyclical basis. The question of the introduction of accreditation *versus* quality evaluation in Central and Eastern Europe in the first half of the 1990s, when the opposite was still prevalent in Western Europe, has been discussed in a number of studies (*cf.* Campbell and Rozsnyai, 2002, pp. 60-61). The need to redesign some of the educational strands, including the assurance of the comparability of educational provision with that undertaken in the Western countries, and the need for quality control in the face of rapidly expanding access to higher education, stand as the most prominent arguments for the introduction of accreditation in Central and Eastern Europe.

Having valid accreditation means that an institution or programme has been given the "right to exist", a yes/no decision only governments may grant (Schwarz and Westerheijden, forthcoming). The – partial – relinquishing of government control after the regime changes of 1989-1990 favoured accreditation for assuring the quality of higher education over the more open-ended instrument of quality evaluation. In addition, several Central and Eastern European countries, especially Romania and Poland,

feared the proliferation of private higher education institutions the educational quality of which they hoped to control, making accreditation a prerequisite of state recognition (Campbell and Rozsnyai, 2002, pp. 15-16, 78). "In Central and Eastern Europe, minimum levels had to be redefined and especially preserved in the face of 'rogue providers' (private higher education was received with a good dose of skepticism), making accreditation a perfectly sensible option" (van der Wende and Westerheijden, 2003).

The evaluation, improvement, and certification of "quality" are core constituents of the Bologna Process of convergent reforms towards a coherent, compatible, and competitive European higher education area (Haug, 2003). "...The most widely debated issue across Europe is the relation between and respective advantages of quality evaluation *versus* accreditation, although the two are seen to be complementary by many representatives" (Reichert and Tauch, 2003, p. 81). The assertion that evaluation is an *ex post* quality judgment while accreditation is an *ex ante* one is also losing its footing, since accreditation is very often (and in almost all the countries of Central and Eastern Europe) conducted on a cyclical basis and reviews existing factors (even though the effect of its judgment is *ex post*). The concept and implementation of "accreditation" in the two regions of Europe is becoming more alike. As democracy and the growing awareness of individual rights and responsibilities by social players is taking root in Central and Eastern Europe, accreditation is outgrowing the rigid confines of external control. The emphasis today is put on the purpose and the effectiveness of accreditation, and much less on *why* accreditation is becoming the preferred instrument for quality assurance in Europe, East and West. "Of particular interest for the current European discussion may be those countries which already have a tradition of quality evaluation but decide to add accreditation procedures to it. According to public statements by quality assurance agencies and higher education representatives, the main added value of accreditation in these countries consists in the application of benchmarks and the attribution of a quality label, the label being viewed as a currency that can be used in the wider world, which is also the reason for the popularity of accreditation in most of the accession countries" (Reichert and Tauch, 2003, p. 81).

## 3. NETWORKING: A POWERFUL TOOL IN QUALITY MANAGEMENT

Benchmarks are increasingly used also as *quality management instruments* in co-operation with several actors, including international ones. Examples are the Cluster Network, the Coimbra Group, and Universitas 21. The actors include a comparative element in their evaluations, which serve as a marker or indication of "best practice", against which the others in the group can establish themselves (Reichert and Tauch, 2003). The European University Association has set benchmarks for quality management at higher education institutions, which stress the international dimension,

internal quality assurance, and the external dimension of a higher education institution in its relationship to stakeholders and the public (Campbell and Rozsnyai, 2002, pp. 163-164).

## 4. NATIONAL EXAMPLES OF THE USES OF STANDARDS, CRITERIA, AND INDICATORS

Standards and criteria, as well as benchmarks and indicators, can be explicitly set by law and/or the accreditation commissions themselves, or can be merely implicit. Usually, they are a combination of both.

Their application is widespread in all of the Central and Eastern European countries, but the degree to which they are explicitly set varies considerably (Campbell and Rozsnyai, 2002, pp. 119-127). They must be understood within the context of the given national system, particularly in regard to the hierarchy of the various levels of legislation and regulations.

### *4.1. Hungary*

In Hungary, for example, the *Higher Education Act* sets the general framework for higher education institutions, defining the criteria for what constitutes a college and a university. The definitions include the indicators that state the minimum number of course programmes that each type of institution must offer in a set number of areas of study. At another level of legal hierarchy, *government decrees* are issued regarding national qualification requirements, they being standards for undergraduate and graduate study programmes. (They are more specific than qualification frameworks but broader than subject benchmarks in the United Kingdom.) At the Committee level, the Hungarian Accreditation Committee frames its *by-laws*, which extend to accreditation methods and procedures, and establishes its accreditation requirements, as described above, which relate to the minimum factors an evaluated institution or programme must demonstrate for it to be considered of sufficient quality. In both cases, the documents, criteria, and standards of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee are used together, sometimes indistinguishably. For institutional accreditation, the Hungarian Accreditation Committee also issues a *guidebook*, which lists the areas and specific aspects or items reviewed in the accreditation process, as well as the expected outcomes of these aspects – another set of standards and criteria (however, of course, not in contradiction with its accreditation requirements) (<http://www.mab.hu>).

### *4.2. Latvia*

Another example taken from a country of Central and Eastern Europe of how standards are established and used is that of Latvia. Here, the *Short Guidelines for Evaluation Commission Members* state that “Specific standards exist only for some study programmes.... Therefore, Evaluation Commission experts are asked to rely mainly on their qualifications and experience to prepare their conclusions, drawn from the following sources:

- standards, if they exist;
- self-evaluation reports, other documents – study programmes; subject descriptions; lists and curriculae vitae of academic staff; dissertations, theses, essays, student examinations, etc.;
- equipment, resources used for the realization of study programmes;
- results of surveys of opinion of students, graduates, and employers;
- various visits and interviews".

*4.3. Romania*

The Romanian National Council for Academic Assessment and Accreditation sets up expert committees for various disciplines. They establish the criteria of assessment "by dividing the performance indicators into five categories:

- Teaching staff
- Curricula
- Infrastructure
- Research activity
- Financial activity.

[These committees establish] the thresholds of the performance indicators for each criterion, which are named standards of quality. The standards are different for the stages of evaluation...."

*4.4. The Czech Republic*

The Accreditation Commission of the Czech Republic conducts study programme accreditation based on criteria set down in a ministerial decree on "the contents of application for study programme accreditation". Very detailed evidence is required of applicants for various aspects of their provision. The expert committees of the Commission set their own, explicit and implicit, standards, *i.e.*, quality requirements, for each item (see <http://www.ceenetwork.hu>).

## 5. LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FROM INTERNATIONAL SURVEYS

A 2002 survey of accreditation agencies in sixteen countries of Central and Eastern Europe revealed that criteria, standards, and methods for conducting assessment are set *in eleven cases* by the respective agency or accreditation council based on legislation. In *another five*, the expert team sets them (Campbell and Rozsnyai, 2002).

Reviewing the sources available, the conclusion can be drawn that most of the Central and Eastern European countries elaborate aspects or certain elements that accreditation should encompass, but very few countries have explicit standards and/or criteria, or minimum requirements defining their level of quality. In the examples cited above, Latvia is placed on one side of the spectrum, with expert committees setting their own standards if they want to do so, but working mostly with implicit standards based on their own judgments of quality. Hungary

stands at the other end of the spectrum, with explicit standards defined and made publicly available on its Website.

This observation would seem to contradict the expectation, mentioned earlier, that accreditation will be conducted against a predetermined set of standards and criteria. To state the matter differently, while (many of) the evaluated aspects are always predetermined – as they are set down in the guidelines for the self-evaluation report required of the applying institution or programme – the standards of quality assessment are most often not explicit. This lack of explicitness can be both good and bad. A lack of pre-set standards (in the set of expected, minimum quality levels) provides the (peer) review team with the flexibility to rely on its own expertise and judgment, but may leave the evaluated institution or programme up in the air regarding the fairness and transparency of the judgment. At the other end, criteria and standards may be overly detailed, giving the expert team little leeway for subjective conclusions and making the process extremely bureaucratic.

The independence of the accreditation commission in issuing its judgments is crucial. In Hungary, the Higher Education Act (Section 74, § [2] Act LXXX/1993 on Higher Education <http://www.om.hu>) states that the Minister of Education can only override the decision of the Hungarian Accreditation Committee on legal and procedural grounds and only by publicly stating his or her reason for doing so. In the Czech Republic, the Statute of the Accreditation Commission states that the Minister may not grant accreditation if the Commission has reached a negative decision (Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports of the Czech Republic, 1998).

The ENQA Survey of thirty-four agencies in twenty-four European countries indicates that "in 23 cases the experts are involved in the preparation of guidelines for the site visits" (in five cases without the assistance of the agency) (Holm *et al.*, 2003). In light of the survey of Central and Eastern Europe, which specifically asked who contributed to working out the "criteria for assessment", it is possible that the term, "guidelines", may also have implied standards or criteria for certain respondents of the survey.

It should be noted that a number of agencies in Central and Eastern Europe use foreign experts in their reviews. The survey of these agencies indicated that seven agencies *sometimes* use foreign peers while the Baltic countries *always* include foreign reviewers on their teams (Campbell and Rozsnyai, 2002, pp. 119-127). The use of foreign experts can be understood as raising the standards and level of transparency applied to evaluation and accreditation.

## 6. FUTURE PERSPECTIVES FOR QUALITY EVALUATION AND ACCREDITATION: A EUROPEAN CONVERGENCE

There is a growing need for a certain degree of Europe-wide harmonization of quality evaluation and accreditation.

The ENQA Survey allows for "implicit criteria of good practice, which are often formulated through the guidelines for self-evaluation by the agency,

or by the expert panel while writing the report, but are not explicitly set out in writing" (Holm *et al.*, 2003). At the same time, the latest Bologna follow-up meeting, called for "an agreed set of standards, procedures, and guidelines on quality assurance" ([Berlin] Communiqué, 19 September 2003) that must hence be made explicit. It certainly does not mean, however, that a single supranational European organization should handle all the overall quality issues.

As far as methodology is concerned, the ENQA Survey indicates that the "four-stage model" is the generally accepted mode of procedure. It encompasses the following:

- autonomy and independence in terms of procedures and methods concerning quality evaluation both from government and from institutions of higher education;
- self-assessment;
- external assessment by a peer-review group and site visits;
- publication of a report."

The authors go on to state that "The four-stage model is today generally accepted as the shared foundation of European quality assurance... (Holm, *et al.*, 2003). It is evident that there is convergence in Europe so far as the general methodology of quality evaluation and accreditation is concerned. At the same time, the development of a shared methodology, guidelines, and procedures, in detail, is a much greater challenge.

Even more challenging is the development of shared standards and criteria, indicators, and benchmarks. A number of projects are underway in Europe to explore this issue. Two examples focusing on educational content are the so-called "Dublin Descriptors" initiated by the Joint Quality Initiative <http://www.jointquality.org/framework_action.html>, which identify comparable outcomes for levels of study programmes, and the Tuning Project <http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/educ/tuning/tuning_en.html>, which aims at defining competencies at the discipline level. For quality assurance practitioners, examples are the Transnational European Evaluation Project (TEEP) <http://www.enqa.net>, organized by ENQA, which aims at identifying existing practices and developing a common methodology for quality evaluation across Europe; or the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) <http://www.aneca.es/communic/docs/boletines/boletin11/doc11/final_agreemnt111103.pdf>, which involves eight Western European accreditation agencies that, in the four years of projected lifetime, will attempt to define a model for mutual recognition of accreditation in other countries. The ENQA Survey was intended to be continued for similar purposes, but, at the time of this writing, no decision had been made about its feasibility in light of many similar projects that were underway.

The European University Association (EUA) <http://www.eua.be/eua/> launched its Quality Culture Project in 2002, with the stated aim of

installing internal quality assurance within higher education institutions. Added benefits are, again, the definition of a common background for quality assurance and its mutual recognition based on shared principles and methodologies. Working reports reveal that the project is getting at the heart of higher education quality and exploring the purpose of dealing with quality. A key element is a change in attitude toward quality, a quality mind-set whereby the quality issue is viewed as a driver for change, a flexible tool for institutional managers and all actors in a perpetual quality exercise to look at their activities by checking their effectiveness and pursuing betterment. All the projects mentioned, and there are several others, also involve strengthening the definitions of standards and criteria, benchmarks, and indicators.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

Higher education in Central and Eastern Europe began to participate in the trends of global transformation quite late but has made considerable progress over the last decade. Preserving and improving quality was certainly a prominent driving principle for these countries while they were establishing their new higher education framework. Tackling the issues of quality evaluation and accreditation was undoubtedly a learning-by-doing process, resulting in the establishment of solid national quality control mechanisms. The systems and their structures are quite heterogeneous, yet they are sufficiently developed to be ready for any further integration into the European higher education area.

It has not been the aim of this short study to analyze the core concept of quality. On the contrary, the emphasis has been on the less elusive terms of *standards* and *criteria* and *benchmarks* and *indicators*, "ranging from pragmatic fitness for purpose approaches to notions of academic excellence and élitism" (van der Wende and Westerheijden, 2003, p. 200). As an overreaching description of higher education quality, the following approach is worth considering: "The quality of higher education can be defined in various ways as: excellence, 'zero defects', 'total adequacy', capacity for ongoing improvement, minimum standards, marketability, or competitiveness. Every approach has its contextual justification. Quality starts by ensuring minimum standards. It extends to the capacity of ongoing improvement and includes a competitive dimension at the national and at international levels" (Campbell and Rozsnyai, 2002, p. 163).

Quality assurance evaluation, assessment, and accreditation, all attempt to establish the existence of or the lack of quality, that elusive attribute of higher education. Standards and criteria, benchmarks, and indicators are elements in the definition of quality. If quality, in general, is elusive, the quality of a specific aspect of higher education is less so. For this reason, the standards and indicators are usually narrowed down to focus on the specific object of the exercise. Owing to the subjective factor included in judging quality, there will always be an exaggerated demand in

the amount and types of information required of the applicants and set down in quality guidelines, in order to provide ample evidence for subjective judgments to be made. There must always be room, as well, for the implicit factor in quality assessment, since no predetermined guidelines are able to extend to all the features that make up quality.

"At the same time, the concern for quality, which seems to be a shared ground of action on the Bologna stage, is also the scene of underground and explicit struggles to redefine the respective role which public authorities, universities, and society should play in defining higher education in the future" (Reichert and Tauch, 2003). The emerging paradigm is a higher education that is less dependent on government support but more responsible for the quality and feasibility of its products and services. The challenge now is to bring the core function of what was once only élite higher education to mass higher education, which is the shaping of a socially responsible civil society. Standards, benchmarks, criteria, and indicators have to be flexible to adapt to changing conditions and requirements while remaining constant enough to ensure transparency and comparability.

*REFERENCES*

BARAKONYI, K. "What Is Wrong with the Hungarian University Management?", *International Higher Education* 23 (Spring, 2001): 26-27.

BENEŠ, Josef, and ŠEBKOVÁ, Helena. *Tertiary Education in the Czech Republic: Country Report*. Prague: Centre for Higher Education Studies, Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports, 2001.

CAMPBELL, Carolyn, and ROZSNYAI, Christina. *Quality Assurance and the Development of Course Programmes*. Bucharest: UNESCO-CEPES, 2002.

CHMIELECKA, E., and DABROWSKI, M. *Accreditation in the Framework of Evaluation Activities: A Comparative Study in the European Higher Education Area - Country Report – Poland*. Warsaw: Foundation for Promotion and Accreditation of Economic Studies, 2003.

CLARK, B. R. *Creating Entrepreneurial Universities: Organizational Pathways of Transformation*. Paris: IAU Press, 1998.

DARVAS, P. "Governmental Reforms in Hungarian Higher Education", in, J. MARCH and P. SABLIFF, eds. *Reform and Change in Higher Education: International Perspectives*. New York: Garland Press, 1995.

FRENYÓ, V. L. "Democratic Inefficiencies in Higher Education Governance and Management in Transition Societies of the Former East Block", *in, Salzburg Seminar Universities Project Final Report 1997-2002*, Salzburg: Salzburg Seminar, 2002, pp. 35-38.

HAUG, G. "Quality Assurance/Accreditation in the Emerging European Higher Education Area: A Possible Scenario for the Future", *European Journal of Education* 3 (September 2003).

HOLM, T., SORUP, R., BIERING-SORENSEN, M., and THUNE, C. *Quality Procedures in European Higher Education, an ENQA Survey*. The Danish

Evaluation Institute. ENQA Occasional Papers. Helsinki: European Networkf for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2003.

HUNGARIAN MINISTRY OF EDUCATION. *A Magyar Felsootkatás modernizációját, az Európai Felsookatási Térséghez történo csatlakozását célzó felsooktatás-fejlesztés koncepcioója* [Concept for Modernizing Hungarian Higher Education and Developing Higher Education in Order to Join the European Higher Education Area]. Budapest: Ministry of Education, 8 December 2003 <http://www.om.hu> (draft).

HUNGARIAN MINISTRY OF EDUCATION. *Statisztikai Tájékoztató Felsooktatás 2001-2002* [Statistical Information for Higher Education 2001-2002]. Budapest: Ministry of Education, 2002. <http://www.om.hu/letolt/felsoo/stat_felsoo_2001_2002.pdf>

HUNGARIAN MINISTRY OF EDUCATION. *Statisztikai Tájékoztató Felsooktatás 2002-2003* [Statistical Information for Higher Education 2002-2003]. Budapest: Ministry of Education, 2003. <http://www.om.hu/letolt/felsoo/stat_felsoo_2002_2003.pdf>

*Realising the European Higher Education Area.* Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers Responsible for Higher Education in Berlin on 19 September 2003. <http:www.bologna-berlin2003.de/pdf/Communique1.pdf>

REICHERT, Sybille, and TAUCH, Christian. *Trends 2003: Progress Towards the European Higher Education Area: Bologna Four Years After - Steps towards Sustainable Reform of Higher Education in Europe*. Brussels: EUA, 2003.

SCHWARZ, S. and WESTERHEIJDEN, D., eds. *Accreditation in the Framework of Evaluation Activities: A Comparative Study in the European Higher Education Area* (forthcoming).

THE SECRETARIAT OF THE ACCREDITATION COMMISSION, MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, YOUTH, AND SPORTS OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC. *The Statute of the Accreditation Commission and Act No. 111/1998 of Higher Education Institutions on Modification and Amendment of the Other Act – The Enactment Connected with the Accreditation Commission*. Prague: Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports of the Czech Republic, 1998.

*Short Guidelines for Evaluation Commission Mermber.* Riga, 2002, *in, Endnote XXVI* <http://www.ainc.lv/kopmat/guide02.doc>

VAN DER WENDE, M., and WESTERHEIJDEN, D. "Degrees of Trust or Trust of Degrees? Quality Assurance and Recognition", *in,* J. FILE, and L. GOEDEGEBUURE, eds. *Real-Time Systems. Reflections on Higher Education in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovenia*. Enschede: CHEPS, pp. 178-206.

# IV. Accreditation in the Context of the Bologna Process: Needs, Trends, and Developments

*ANDRÉE SURSOCK*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Bologna Declaration – and the process of change that it is stimulating – is significant as a case study of how a large and diversified number of countries have been working together to facilitate the movement of students and graduates across national borders. As the process of globalization is proceeding apace, Europe provides an interesting example not only for other regions of the world but also for what might occur as global considerations of quality assurance are being discussed in international fora.[1]

The origins of the Bologna process are well-known. Four ministers from the largest countries of the European Union (France, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom) met in 1998 on the occasion of the 800th anniversary of the founding of the Sorbonne and declared their commitment to the harmonization of the European higher education structures. At the time, most observers and commentators noted that the Sorbonne meeting needed to be understood within the French political context. A reform-minded minister, Claude Allègre, was using the international scene and international actors to attempt to dislodge national obstacles to change. Regardless of these domestic considerations, however, the Sorbonne meeting triggered a process that has acquired its own momentum. The Sorbonne Declaration revealed a widely felt need for convergence and served as a key catalyst for change.

The following year, the initial group of four was enlarged to include twenty-nine ministers from across Europe, *i.e.*, beyond the narrower confines of European Union membership, who signed the Bologna Declaration at the University of Bologna. Ever since, Bologna has become the code word for a number of structural reforms that have the potential to affect almost all aspects of European higher education. It has become the spark that many actors had been anticipating to channel hitherto diffused and uncoordinated energies toward a common goal: the creation of a European Higher Education Area.

[1] For instance, the International Commission of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), the International Association of University Presidents (IAUP), the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), OECD, and UNESCO.

The ministers agreed to meet again in Prague, in May 2001, to take stock of progress to date. The yet again enlarged group (expanded to thirty-three in Prague) signaled that the reform process was well underway. The Prague communiqué reaffirmed the key elements of the Bologna Declaration and went further in introducing new action lines, among them a stronger emphasis on quality assurance, the main focus of this study.

As the inter-ministerial group expanded, the movement gathered strength. Increasingly, the Bologna process is proving to be a major stake for a variety of actors, with a variety of motivations. The stage – in a political and theatrical sense – has grown in importance. Deadlines have been set to punctuate the process. None of the key actors can afford to withdraw or hide. The process for arriving at agreements is complex. There is no acknowledged leader. The shape of the results to be achieved by 2010 is not specified beyond agreed upon goals and objectives, and sometimes, in the process of bargaining, negotiating, and advocating, national considerations are entangled with European ones. As a result, the process is buffeted by governmental changes as elections sweep new governments in and out.

How well one copes with such an open and unstructured process depends ultimately on the kind of actor one is. Those from NGOs appreciate the freedom it gives them to define the "terms of reference". Those from governments, who are used to executing ministerial orders, complain sometimes of the opacity of inter-ministerial pronouncements and the demands it places on their interpretative or creative problem-solving powers.

This ambiguity is particularly evident in the quality assurance discussions – in most instances, a politically charged area, rendered even more sensitive by the European dimension of the discussion. Not only is "quality... about power", as experienced observers have noted (Brennan and Shah, 2000), but also the issue of assessing and ensuring quality is viewed as one of the testing grounds for achieving the goals of a European higher education area by 2010.

Before proceeding, it is only fair to point out that the author is not an objective researcher on these questions. Rather, she is a staff member of the association that represents the European higher education sector.[2] She is an actor with a specific point of view who is involved in these discussions both directly and indirectly.

After briefly presenting the goals and objectives of the Bologna process, this study describes the instruments put forth to arrive at convergence and the tensions and problems that are emerging in the quality assurance discussions.

[2] The European University Association includes 663 members (individual institutions and conferences of rectors) in 45 countries.

## 2. THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA – MAIN GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND INSTRUMENTS

The main goals of the Bologna process are to create a European higher education space by fostering the mobility and employability of graduates and to strengthen the attractiveness of European higher education. These goals gained renewed importance when, at the Barcelona meeting (2001), the European Union prime ministers identified knowledge as a central characteristic for European society and a key political priority.

To achieve enumerated goals, the following objectives were identified:

- the design and adoption of a common frame of reference for degrees;
- the articulation of studies into undergraduate and postgraduate levels, with a stress on the employability of first-degree holders;
- the generalization of ECTS-compatible systems (ECTS referring to a European Credit and Transfer System);
- a European dimension for quality assurance.

Thus, these objectives imply improved information (including a common vocabulary for degrees and quality assurance procedures), convergent and compatible degree structures to allow for vertical and horizontal mobility, coordination in the quality assurance area, and a stress on the market relevance of higher education.

It is important to point out that, even before the Sorbonne meeting, the European Commission, the Council of Europe, and UNESCO had developed several instruments to facilitate student mobility. For instance, ECTS had been created within the ERASMUS student exchange programme: the Diploma Supplement had been devised; and the ENIC/NARIC networks, which coordinate the national recognition offices that are responsible for evaluating foreign qualifications, had been set up.

In addition, at the conclusion of the European Pilot Projects, in which external evaluation procedures were introduced into the European Union (1995), the European Commission funded the European Network of Quality Agencies (ENQA), a network that took several years to create, as discussions centered on its mandate, power, and autonomy from governments. It was agreed that the resulting network would have a limited remit and serve as a forum for the exchange of good practices.

All these initiatives are evidence of the vision and creativity of the supra-national bodies but also of their political limitations. Education is considered a national prerogative, and the work of the supra-national bodies in this area is governed by the principle of "subsidiarity", that is, they can launch initiatives as long as these consolidate and co-ordinate national policies. As a result, they work at the margins of an as yet un-constituted European higher education area. These initiatives neither affect the heart of national policies nor penetrate deeply into higher education institutions.

In addition, as is well known, any policy has unintended consequences. In the case of the supra-national bodies such consequences are amplified

by the fact that the bodies in question are forced to develop their educational policies through a variety of actors, some with vested interests in specific outcomes. Moreover, however worthwhile their initiatives have been, they cannot constitute robust policy reforms, since these have been piecemeal and have lacked enforcing mechanisms.

Nevertheless, these initiatives also increase pressure for national policy reforms by demonstrating the limitations of national outlooks. Having now been folded into the Bologna process, these initiatives have become a great deal more powerful than they used to be, if only because they have the merit of already being developed and mature.

The keystone of the Bologna process is the harmonization of degree structures so as to create a space for mobility. Europe has been characterized by the variety in terms of length and levels of its undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. Thus, a French student completes his or her first degree in three years, while a German student can take about double this time. The agreed-upon new Bologna structure is five years in duration for the first two cycles (BA/MA), with flexibility as to the combination: 3+2 or 4+1. In this context, European credits (ECTS), established in 1987, gain added significance as some countries are now introducing both the structural degree reform and ECTS, along with the Diploma Supplement. Not surprisingly, the Prague inter-ministerial meeting in 2001 recognized the pioneering work of the European Commission and gave it added importance and momentum.

Similarly, the Commission seized the issue of curricular content when it agreed to fund the “Tuning Project”, which sought to benchmark subjects and to address the question of learning outcomes and graduate employability. The “Tuning Project” has attracted widespread interest, in so far as it provides Europe with a “harmonizing” tool kit. It can be used to profile “European” curricula in terms of learning outcomes and to identify level indicators for the European BA and MA, both in generic terms and also in terms of specific knowledge, by discipline (*e.g.*, what should a European chemist know?). The project even conducted its own employability survey.

The combination of these initiatives is meant to affect the main aspects of European higher education – the degree structure, curricular content, and informational tools – with a view to promoting a European higher education area, and increasing its transparency, convergence, and attractiveness.

Needless to say, either in combination or alone, these initiatives have the potential to challenge national practices; throwing light on factors of differentiation rather than of convergence, of competition rather than of partnership; and generating contentious arguments rather than harmonious agreements. Indeed, *in fine*, the Bologna process is an attempt to strengthen the global market positioning of Europe. As such, it has the potential for throwing into relief the unequal development across Europe, whether it be regional or in terms of individual higher education institutions.

## 3. CHALLENGES AND TENSION POINTS

To help bring some sense to the current debate regarding the Bologna process, this section will take as its starting point the quality assurance discussions in the context of Bologna, and then proceed to examine the related issues of mobility and the attractiveness of European higher education.

### *3.1. Challenges and Tension Points in Terms of Quality Assurance*

At the moment, a range of quality assurance procedures, which can be categorized along a few key contrasting lines, characterizes Europe:

- evaluation as "fitness for purpose" or accreditation against mutually set standards;
- focus on institutions or on programmes;
- focus on outcomes, processes, or inputs.

The diversity of practices is matched by the diversity of actors: national quality assurance agencies but also transnational ones, such as the European University Association or professional accreditation bodies, some that are European (*e.g.*, EQUIS), and others that are not.

As such, this range of diversity is not exceptional and should not be understood as a major impediment for quality assurance Agency A to accept the results of quality assurance Agency B. After all, the American accrediting associations exhibit the same range of variety and accept their diversity. The main mechanism for recognizing the work of American associations comes through the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), which has developed a set of principles, against which the trustworthiness of each accrediting body is assessed and judged. These are to:

- demonstrate that the mission and scope of the organization are consistent with the CHEA Institutional Eligibility and Recognition Policy, including that a majority of the institutions and programmes accredited by the organization award higher education degrees. The Policy provides, in part, that the recognition process will place increasing emphasis on the effectiveness of accrediting organizations in assuring the academic quality of institutions;
- be non-governmental;
- accredit institutions that have legal authority to confer higher education degrees.
- have written procedures that describe, officially and publicly, the decision-making processes, policies, and procedures of the organization, that lead to accreditation actions, and the scope of accreditation that may be granted, evaluative criteria (standards or characteristics) used, and levels of accreditation status conferred;
- have procedures that include a self-evaluation by the institution and an on-site review by a visiting team, or have alternative processes that CHEA considers to be valid;

– demonstrate independence from any parent entity or sponsoring entity for making judgments related to accreditation status and have a specified and fair appeals process that authorizes continuation of [the] current accreditation status of the institution until an appeal[s] decision is rendered (CHEA, 1998).

By contrast, faced with the same variety of quality assurance procedures, the European Network for Quality Agencies (ENQA) focuses on four membership criteria that cannot constitute "recognition" *per se*, since they do not involve a judgment as to quality of the work of candidates:

– autonomy from governments and higher education institutions;
– a self-evaluation phase;
– a visit by an external panel;
– a public report.

The most challenging part of membership decisions consists in determining the degree of autonomy of applicant agencies. Apart from that task, judgment and interpretation cannot play an important role in these deliberations. In other words, the agencies are not assessed in terms of the quality and trustworthiness of their work, and such a framework cannot lead to bilateral or multilateral acceptance of the outcome of quality assurance procedures across Europe. Since governments have been reluctant to assign a meta-accreditation function to ENQA, this issue has remained unresolved.

In an effort to get around this stumbling block, a pilot bilateral recognition exercise took place in 2002, between the Finnish and the Danish quality assurance agencies. The procedure put in place was based on a self-evaluation and site-visits, with the result that the two agencies have agreed to accept each other's evaluation outcomes. While this scheme has potential for wider application, safeguards would have to be put in place to guarantee that the procedure would not be an empty exercise in "chumminess" or would not lead to a sub-regionalization of quality assurance (ENQA, 2002).

An attempt in 2001 by the then CRE (European Association of Universities) to discuss the desirability and feasibility of several options for a European meta-accreditation raised the temperature to such a high level that it forced abandonment of this issue. Every option presented drew the criticism of at least one key group of stakeholders. Apart from the higher education sector that did not grasp the window of opportunity that this project opened for it, the strongest opposition came from governments that recognized the potential for power curtailment at national level in any European meta-accreditation scheme.

More recently, two developments have displaced accreditation as an attractive concept and have increased interest in benchmarking. The "Tuning Project" and the OECD study of secondary education, PISA (OECD, 2000), have drawn attention to benchmarking as a way to measure and to increase both quality and convergence. Needless to say,

whatever concept or instrument is put forward is bound to produce a heated debate about its scope of applicability and its implications for maintaining a degree of diversity.

Ultimately, the inability to resolve this issue has to do with the balance of power between Europe and its constituent member states. Despite successes to date, and as long as Europe is an economic rather than a political project, it is hard to foresee when national governments might be willing to curtail their national educational prerogatives. Thus, it is a challenge to keep the parties to the discussion focused on a meta-QA level because it constitutes a threat to national quality assurance systems.

The difficulties encountered also have to do with a certain lack of political maturity regarding the concept of diversity in many European countries. To put it perhaps too bluntly, the traditional view of a public sector is that all "users" (in this case, learners) must be treated in a similar fashion and all government agencies (in this case, higher education institutions) must be governed in the same way. As a result, the political discourse glosses over existing differences, within and across national systems. The major challenge of the Bologna process, however, is to structure diversity in such a way as to allow for a range of national practices while promoting a degree of convergence. One size does not fit all: this is true within each national system and for Europe as a whole.

If this point of view were to be adopted, however, it would butt against the political identity of Europe as a unified whole. What is Europe? What is European higher education? Does it have any distinguishable characteristics? So far, these questions have remained unanswered. Yet they are at the crux of the major motivation for constructing a European higher education area: to increase the attractiveness of European higher education, which implies profiling it and positioning it in the global higher education market.

This challenge to imagination has its roots partly in the diversity of legal frameworks governing institutions. The degree of institutional autonomy varies across Europe as do the organizational structure and culture of institutions. In some systems, institutions are closely steered by the relevant ministry. In others, the autonomy of faculties is so great that global institutional identity is very weak. As a result, the capacity for self-regulation is curtailed and the institution cannot play its role in assuring quality. The institutional level, however, is the key condition for assuring quality in a meaningful way. As long as this reality is not recognized, quality assurance procedures will only have a limited impact on the ultimate goal of strengthening quality in European higher education.

The discussions are also muddled by the contrasting motivations of the different stakeholders. Those, the quality of institutions or of systems of which are not well known, would like a framework that would allow them to measure themselves against European performance indicators and thus demonstrate their quality. Others, the institutions and systems of which are recognized as leaders, will not accept a quality framework that would level down their differences. Still others, especially quality assurance

agency staff from countries with exhaustive procedures, cannot imagine accepting the outcomes of procedures less robust than their own.

As a result, discussions of European quality assurance frameworks end up in muddled debates that do not sufficiently distinguish the institutional, from the national or the European level. Indeed, it requires an effort of imagination to conceive of a European quality assurance area, of mechanisms or, of procedures, which would allow all three levels to play their appropriate roles.

Underlying these positions is a tension between the need to preserve diversity – diversity in national systems, diversity in institutions – and the need for compatibility. How to arrive at a solution that will be a compromise between diversity and compatibility is the challenge before Europe. How will Europe structure and manage diversity on a European scale? And, how will it do so while avoiding three pitfalls: *(i)* the stifling of diversity and innovation; *(ii)* the creation of a bureaucracy; *(iii)* the production of mechanisms that will generate quality assurance fatigue – and all the while preserving and extending institutional autonomy? And how will Europe accomplish this task if the goal is to promote quality, not simply to control it?

### *3.2. Challenges and Tension Points in Terms of Mobility*

To skirt these complex issues, the focus of attention is on a variety of administrative instruments that have been developed, but are not yet widely applied – ECTS, the Diploma Supplement, ENIC/NARIC networks – and to explore how these might be used in a quality framework. This administrative approach throws, into the ring, "experts" and quality assurance professionals, some of whom tend to view "their" instruments as the panacea for the construction of Europe and as the keystone for a European quality framework.

These instruments were designed to promote the mobility of students and graduates and, as such, they require agreement on a range of questions.

- Should degrees be assessed in terms of their equivalence or comparability? This question was resolved within the framework of the Lisbon Convention: higher education must look at comparability rather than equivalence.
- By extension, should transfer credits be evaluated in the same way?
- If the answer is yes, how can transfer credits be integrated into curricula that are not organized in credit units? How can transfer credits be used if curricula do not distinguish between required and optional credits? In such cases, there is little room for maneuver since the curricular structure becomes a straightjacket in which the transfer student tries to fit. A major issue facing European higher education today is that ECTS was developed as a mobility instrument instead of being used to restructure curricula. In

retrospect, this approach was one of taking the issue from the wrong end.

The question of the role of the ENIC/NARIC is also being raised. Specifically, to what extent should the result of national quality assurance procedures be taken into account by the ENIC/NARIC? What role should institutions play as part of this potentially triangular relationship?

It is clear that the ENIC/NARIC offices fill an administrative void as most European higher education institutions have no specialized transfer offices. Instead, they rely on thinly staffed international offices, which have to juggle multiple tasks and responsibilities, and cannot be expected to fully assist the transfer process. In other words, student support services are lacking. In many instances, students are left on their own to figure out where to go, what to study, and what will be transferred when they come back.

"Learning agreements", which constitute a form of contract before a student goes abroad, are not always respected. Most institutions do not have an internal code of practice for credit transfer or appeals procedures.

To put it briefly, from whatever side one takes up the issue of creating a space for mobility – even if one safely retreats into an administrative corner – political questions are raised which have to do with institutional autonomy, national prerogatives, and the political will to create a European higher education area.

The recipe for such an area must include a solid information base as well as a teaspoon of trust and a sprinkle of ambiguity to give all stakeholders a degree of elbowroom. This elbowroom is useful in order to allow for creativity, initiatives, diversity, change, and autonomy.

### *3.3. Challenges and Tension Points in Terms of Attractiveness*

To complicate the picture further, Europe, like other regions in the world, is in the throes of globalization. This trend affects the different regions within Europe in a variety of ways. For some regions and systems, globalization represents an opportunity to export educational services and to import students. For others, globalization represents the combined threats of brain drain and the penetration of foreign providers.

The Bologna Process calls for greater co-operation at all levels – inter-ministerial, inter-institutional – and brings stakeholders together to agree to solutions in a transparent and democratic manner. Globalization and its concomitant effect on the "marketization" of higher education mean that competition between national systems and within them is exacerbated. The push and pull of these two conflicting trends make the current situation difficult to manage and to interpret.

At heart, there is an ambiguity in the Bologna process and its goal of increasing the attractiveness of European higher education. What does Bologna represent in the context of globalization? This aspect has never been fully explored or articulated. As a result, there is a threat that the Bologna process could be highjacked by countries, regions, or institutions,

which could use it as a fig leaf for positioning themselves and their regional or institutional peers on the global market.

To ensure that the whole continent is brought on board, it might be more useful to recognize diversity: diversity of students and learners, diversity of institutional missions, diversity of academic profiles, and diversity of academic staff roles. In other words, before attempting to create a European space, the starting point would be to agree about the importance of the diversity within each national system and to organize structure and manage this diversity. Once diversity is accepted at national level, it would be easier to accept it at European level while working toward convergence.

The next step lies with one principle – the principle of subsidiarity – and one value – the value of trust.

The principle of subsidiarity means that the solution for a European dimension for quality assurance needs to take into account three distinct and inter-related levels:

- The first is the institutional level: What are the responsibilities of institutions in assuring quality internally? If they are not put in charge and do not integrate the need to assure quality internally, the whole quality assurance exercise turns into control and window-dressing, and runs the risk of backfiring.
- The second level is the national level: The diversity of national quality assurance approaches should not be an obstacle to a European dimension for quality assurance, which can be developed – appropriately – at the third level.
- The third level is European: As a first step, it is necessary to agree on a European code of practice for quality assurance agencies that will promote trust even if national procedures are different. This code of practice could include such generic principles as those specified in EUA (2001):
    - Any quality assurance procedure – whether evaluation or accreditation – must be geared at enhancement, which means that it must prompt institutions to develop internal quality measures and must emphasize self-evaluation as a key step in the procedure.
    - Quality assurance procedures must preserve institutional autonomy and diversity and foster innovation by evaluating institutions against their mission and strategic plans.
    - Quality assurance procedures must assure public accountability by *(i)* including stakeholders in the process; *(ii)* communicating the results to the public, and *(iii)* being independent of governments, interest groups, and the higher education institutions.
    - Quality assurance agencies must have guidelines that are transparent to the public and higher education institutions and must have specified and fair appeals procedures.

- Quality assurance agencies themselves must be evaluated, on a cyclical basis, in terms of the adequacy of the their resources and impact on institutions.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Obviously, this political agenda is unacceptable at the moment, since it is difficult to argue for diversity when convergence is the key principle. As Europe moves toward a European-wide discussion of quality, the first question to ask concerns the feasibility of transferring national quality assurance procedures to the European level. As should be clear from the above discussion, the answer is "no". This does not mean that European mechanisms for quality should not be developed but, rather, that Europe needs to think "outside the (national) box" and distinguish more carefully what needs to be apportioned at the institutional, the national, and the European levels. It is in this context that the principle of "subsidiarity" must be understood for its power to structure and determine both the feasibility of such a European quality framework and its attractiveness to national governments, institutions, and learners.

The principle of subsidiarity – that is, distinguishing between what should be done by institutions, national quality assurance agencies, and at European level – would allow the eventual consideration of the issue of the European dimension of quality in a constructive way. In order to succeed, however, an additional ingredient is noted – trust – and this is where a code of practice for quality assurance agencies would be useful.

In addition, to both avoid bureaucracy (and quality assurance fatigue) and to promote trust, Europe will need to tolerate a measure of ambiguity and to focus on its common elements rather than on the elements of differentiation.

It is only if institutions and national systems enjoy a certain degree of elbowroom that it will be possible to construct a European higher education that will be strong – strong in its quality, strong in its innovative capacity, and strong in its diversity. If Europe can manage these things well and do them rapidly, then it can hope to contribute to the creation of a European Higher Education Area as well as to influence international discussions related to GATS.

## *REFERENCES*

BRENNAN, John, and SHAH, Tarla. *Managing Quality in Higher Education*. Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000.

COUNCIL FOR HIGHER EDUCATION ACCREDITATION. *Recognition of Accrediting Organizations Policy and Procedures*. Washington D.C.: CHEA, 28 September 1998 <http://www.chea.org>.

EUROPEAN NETWORK FOR QUALITY AGENCIES (ENQA). *Occasional Paper No. 4*, 2002 <http://www.enqa.net>.

EUA. *Quality Assurance in Higher Education: A Policy of the European University Association*. Dubrovnik: European University Association, September 2001 <http://www.unige.ch/eua>.

ORGANIZATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT. *OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)*. Paris: OECD, 2000.

# V. Standards and Indicators in the Processes of Accreditation: The WASC[1] Experience – An American Higher Education Accreditation Perspective[2]

*JAMES R. APPLETON AND RALPH A. WOLFF*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This study provides a review of major reform efforts in regional accreditation in the United States, as demonstrated by the significant changes recently adopted by the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). Recognizing that numerous models are used in the processes of institutional and programmatic accreditation, a brief introduction to accreditation in the United States is provided. With this introduction as a backdrop, emphasis is then placed on the organization and recent experiences of the Senior College Commission of WASC, one of the regional accrediting associations in the United States, in its efforts to revise its Standards and Process of Accreditation. The changes undertaken at WASC represent part of a significant strategic review of the role and function of accreditation and quality assurance within the United States.

No assumption is made that another country would necessarily choose to adopt these same reforms, but they might serve as a basis for exploring changes in accreditation and quality assurance more broadly. It is understood that factors such as history, culture, governmental relationships, and the nature of educational providers within a country or region have a direct influence on the actual model of accreditation or quality assurance used in different jurisdictions, but as the Senior College Commission learned from its study of quality assurance in the United States and internationally, many of the same issues challenge quality assurance organizations throughout the world.

---

[1] Western Association of Schools and Colleges, 985 Atlantic Avenue, Alameda, California 94501, USA <http://www.wascweb.org>.

[2] This study has drawn heavily on materials developed by the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities, in the recent revision of its Standards of Accreditation, and on the WASC *2001 Handbook of Accreditation* (WASC, 2001). Therefore, credit should be given to the WASC Commissioners and the executive staff who gave unselfishly of their time and skills over the past six years to create a process that focuses more completely on educational effectiveness and on the institutional capacity to provide and sustain such effectiveness. Acknowledgement should also be given to Geoff Cox, who attended the April 2002 meeting of the Working Group and presented the first draft of the paper. He is a member of the WASC Commission and contributed significantly to the completion of this *Handbook*.

The discussion about accreditation in the United States benefits (with her permission) from remarks presented by Dr. Judith S. Eaton, President of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)[3] at a conference in Chicago, on 28-29 June 2001.

## 2. BRIEF COMMENT ABOUT ACCREDITATION IN THE UNITED STATES

Some form of accreditation has been operating in the United States for more than 100 years and is presently active in all fifty states. As outlined by Judith Eaton (2001), accreditation is an essential part of American higher education and educational policy. There are several objectives that are achieved through accreditation. In part, their evocation answers the questions: Why would higher education institutions choose to participate in such a process? What are the incentives?

- The State and Federal governments rely heavily on accreditation. Decisions to spend as much as $60 billion in student aid and other federal funds as well as billions of dollars in state funds are dependent upon accredited status. Institutions of higher education must be accredited by an accrediting agency that is recognized by the Federal government for these institutions to receive Federal or state financial aid for students. Federal and state funding cannot go to unaccredited institutions.
- Accreditation is fundamental to the professions, with State certification of professionals (*e.g.*, physicians and public school teachers) heavily dependent on whether or not students have completed accredited course programmes.
- It is fundamental to public decisions about the worth of higher education institutions: decisions by students about where to attend college and determinations by the public about whether or not an institution is considered to have "quality". It is generally understood, in the United States, that accredited institutions of higher education are of higher quality than those that are not accredited.
- Other countries rely on American accreditation procedures for verification of the quality of institutions and degrees.
- As an added plus, institutions that take this process seriously will benefit from advice and counsel in their quest for continual improvement.
- And, very significantly, accreditation is a major force in the United States to protect and promote core academic values – some of the fundamental academic features of American higher education: general education, collegial governance, academic freedom, and institutional autonomy (Eaton, 2001, pp. 2-3).

[3] Council for Higher Education Accreditation, One Dupont Circle, N.W., Suite 510, Washington D.C. 20036-1135, U.S.A. <http://www.chea.org>.

It is important to note that, while the *regulatory* function is tied to the relationship to federal financial aid, the most important and lasting impact of accreditation is its *improvement* function. For many independent institutions, accreditation is the only form or process of external review. For independent and publicly supported institutions alike, accreditation recommendations are typically taken very seriously by institutions and lead to change and improvement. As accreditation increasingly focuses on student learning and outcomes, its impact is correspondingly shifting at the institutional level from a focus on resources, processes, and structures, as the primary determinant of quality, towards increased emphasis on evidence of student learning, appropriate to the degree level and mission of the institution.

The accreditation structure in the United States tends to be complex, as would be expected of a decentralized enterprise. The United States does not have a true national Ministry of Education with powers to regulate standards for student admissions, degrees, faculty qualifications, and administration of institutions of higher education. While a Department of Education, headed by a Cabinet-level officer, does exist, accountability for the quality of higher education, for the most part, is delegated to accrediting agencies that are recognized by the Department of Education. Thus, the accreditation of higher education is based on a non-governmental peer review process but under the watchful eye of the United States Department of Education. This process is overlapping, includes regional as well as specialized agencies, and has recently been giving serious attention to cross-regional and international concerns.

The United States Department of Education encourages peer review for accreditation purposes but only through agencies that have been approved as per specific regulations. The Department has the right to review accrediting agencies and to "recognize" them as effective reviewers of institutional quality. Congress considers legislation affecting accreditation every four years, when it reauthorizes the major Federal financial aid programmes. While the original legislation establishing the link between accreditation and eligibility for Federal financial aid expressly prohibited the Department from establishing actual accreditation standards (which would be a federalization of higher education), there has been a gradual encroachment on the autonomy of higher education with each new Reauthorization Act.

A significant set of federally mandated policies and regulations now exists. Accrediting agencies themselves undergo periodic review by the staff of the Department of Education and a Presidentially appointed National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality Improvement. The Federal government is especially interested in these periodic reviews to determine whether or not an accrediting agency has established policies and procedures addressing identified areas of concern. In recent years, both Congress and the Department of Education have given particular attention to student academic achievement (with increasing emphasis on identifying how institutions and programmes achieve appropriate learning outcomes

and how these will be measured). In addition, Department of Education regulations focus on the consistency and fairness of the decisions taken by accrediting agencies in their actions, processes for periodically validating the effectiveness of accrediting standards, training and support of evaluation team members, and compliance with a number of regulations dealing with conflict of interest, complaints, and notice requirements. The maximum term between reviews of the accrediting agencies by the Department of Education is five years.

A private, non-governmental organization, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), has been formed by accredited institutions in the United States to assist in the coordination of the many types of accrediting efforts in the nation, to serve as a broker for Federal government interests and legislative requirements in accreditation, and to explore such topics as cross-regional and international co-operation. CHEA also provides its own recognition function for accrediting organizations and conducts studies and conferences on issues of importance to accreditation in higher education.

Accreditation itself is organized through

*v.* regional commissions that focus for the most part on institutions in their entirety;

*vi.* national professional and specialized agencies, which, for the most part, review specific disciplines, professional studies, or specialized areas.

Some professions have more than one accreditor, and there are multiple accreditors in the same general field (*e.g.,* the health professions) to review a range of specialties. (There are also national institutional accrediting groups in the United States that serve primarily career and technical colleges, but they are not discussed in this study.)

There are six regions for the purposes of institutional accreditation, each representing a somewhat different culture and history as well as standards and policies. The procedures of each region are distinct enough to make a difference in some cases. The Commissions in these six regions have organized a Council of Regional Accrediting Associations (C-RAC) to develop common policy statements on important issues, *e.g.,* the inter-regional activities of institutions, distance learning, and common requirements of eligibility for new institutions. This common approach represents a concerted effort to build a set of common practices among regional accrediting commissions.

Voluntarism being a cherished value in American culture, the system depends upon educator-volunteers. In many regions, when these volunteers serve on Commissions or visitation teams, only expenses are paid. Some regions have begun to pay small honoraria to their evaluators.

No discussion of accreditation can be conducted without also describing the extensive and highly diverse range of higher education institutions operating in the United States. The regional accrediting associations serve nearly 4,000 institutions that enroll 15 million students. Institutional size

can vary from under 100 students to well over 30,000. A wide array of institutional missions is represented in this mix: two-year community colleges, research intensive universities, complex urban and regional universities, faith-centered institutions, small liberal arts colleges, and institutions specializing in degrees in particular areas such as psychology, theology, or health sciences. In recent years, there have also been a number of new institutional types developed that accrediting agencies have needed to address. These include proprietary universities formed with a national scope, such as the University of Phoenix, Argosy University, or Jones International University, and special focus institutions in new disciplinary areas, such as acupuncture and Chinese medicine, chiropractic, and Buddhist-centered institutions. The success of higher education in the United States is often attributed to this diversity of institutional types, but it also presents challenges to defining and applying common standards of quality.

## 3. STRUCTURE OF THE WASC ACCREDITING COMMISSION FOR SENIOR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

WASC is a single tax-exempt corporation, responsible for California, Hawaii, Guam, and the former United States Trust Territories of the Pacific. It encompasses three accrediting commissions:

- the Schools Commission that is responsible for Kindergarten through Twelfth-grade schools and occupational schools;
- the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (140 institutions);
- the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities (151 institutions), the primary concern of this study.

The 151 institutions served by the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities have a combined enrollment of more than 750,000 credit-earning students[4] and an equally large number of continuing education and non-credit generating students. Some 78 percent of the institutions accredited by the Senior College Commission are independent. The rest of these are state-supported institutions. Since most of the state-supported institutions are large, they represent over 60 percent of the enrolled students.

The Accrediting Commission comprises twenty-one members elected by the membership on a rotating three-year term. Members of the Commission are drawn from institutional representatives at several levels and include presidents, academic vice-presidents, deans, and senior faculty, as well as representatives of the public and of the schools and

[4] The American undergraduate degree is awarded on the accumulation of credits according to some acceptable pattern of general education, major programmes, and electives. This pattern, of course, serves as a basis for articulation agreements between institutions. It is in contrast to an examination-based model of degree attainment and emphasizes the need for articulation agreements among institutions.

community college segments of the education continuum. The Commission Chairperson is elected by the members of the Commission. The Commission is responsible for appointing the Executive Director, who, in turn, selects and leads a staff of several professionals. This staff represents the region in its relationship with other accreditation bodies. The United States Department of Education coordinates the work of the Senior Commission, recommends policy and procedural reforms, works directly with member institutions in the preparations for review cycles and for institutions seeking accreditation, organizes and staffs visitation teams, and advises the Commission on actions to be taken.

The Commission meets periodically to review extensive reports and recommendations from visitation teams and assumes responsibility for the actions taken. The maximum cycle of accreditation for institutions is ten years; however, the cycle is often shortened in situations in which there are serious issues to be addressed, or the given institution is undergoing significant change. In addition to granting or reaffirming accreditation, the Commission has available to it a range of sanctions that give notice to institutions and to the public that there are serious issues that the institution needs to address. Over the past five years, approximately 10 percent of the WASC Senior College institutions have been on sanction each year. The Commission terminated the accreditation of one of its institutions in 2001.

There have been increasing Federal concerns about the flow of financial aid to troubled institutions that may go out of business. As a result, recent legislation has limited the application of sanctions to two years. As stated in the WASC *Handbook of Accreditation*,

> Under USDE regulations, when the Commission finds that an institution fails to meet one or more Standards, it is required to notify the institution and give [it] up to two years from the date of the action to correct the situation. If the institution fails to take corrective action, the Commission is required under USDE regulations to terminate accreditation. The law permits an extension of this two-year time frame only when good cause is found. The Commission has determined it will grant an extension for good cause only under exceptional circumstances (WASC, 2001, p. 54).

As discussed below, such a policy creates some tension between the function of driving institutions toward compliance to avoid sanctions and that of driving them towards inquiry to support improvement.

The Senior Commission also conducts an annual meeting and periodic seminars and workshops designed to create a learning community within the region for developing good practices in assessing student learning, providing quality in distance education and electronically-mediated learning, and promoting racial and ethnic diversity throughout the institutional culture. As WASC has moved toward supporting institutional improvement and a quality-centered culture, these support and capacity

building efforts have taken on greater importance and have increasing institutional support.

As a corollary to the recently adopted new procedures and new Standards of Accreditation, the WASC Commission created a standing Evaluation Committee to hold itself accountable for creating systems of review similar to those required of institutions. In effect, the Commission accepted the responsibilities of developing its own learning community and of evaluating itself in regard to both the processes and the content of the new Standards embodied in the 2001 *Handbook* and the aspirations established by the Commission.

## 4. CHALLENGES TO ACCREDITATION AND THE WASC REFORM PROCESS

The Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities has just completed a major accreditation reform effort aimed at making the process of accreditation more useful to institutions in building capacity to assess and improve student learning and educational effectiveness. It began in 1996, with the formation of a number of Commission work groups, which, ultimately, led to the significantly revised *Handbook of Accreditation*. These efforts were supported by several major foundation grants so as to induce the Commission to conduct a fundamental review and revision of its accrediting processes. It began with studies of the literature on quality, the preparation of major papers on developing a new vision for accreditation, a series of concept development sessions with leaders from within the region and nationally, and a study of different models of quality assurance. Members of the staff undertook training in the Baldrige process. Study teams of Commissioners and staff traveled to England and Hong Kong to review the academic audit approaches in place locally. A paper on global approaches to quality assurance was prepared, and other national models were studied.

New approaches were field-tested through experimental self-studies and visits, discussed critically in regional meetings, and then refined, leading to the new model of accreditation embodied in the *2001 Handbook*. As the new model took form, educational sessions were conducted for the Commission, for staff, and for volunteer leaders in the region. New Accreditation Standards were developed along with a bold new evaluation model. The entire process involved hundreds of institutional representatives, academic leaders, policy-makers, and national and international leaders in quality assurance, process improvement, and academic reform.

A remarkable aspect of this process of regional dialogue and reform was that it began with the engagement of the major research intensive universities in the WASC region as design partners. Many of the ideas incorporated into the new accreditation model were generated through meetings with representatives of these institutions. They were also among the first to experiment with new self-study and evaluation visit designs.

Research universities have not, historically, been actively involved in accreditation but have often been critical that accreditation has not served their needs effectively. These institutions remain actively involved in the implementation of the new WASC model and have found that the new approaches have significantly reduced costs and increased the value of the process.

The WASC reform effort attempted to respond to a number of challenges identified with the traditional accreditation process. These challenges are faced by all accrediting associations, and, as pointed out below, the steps taken by WASC, while not followed uniformly by other agencies undergoing reform, have led to a new openness among the regional accrediting community to experimentation and new approaches in other regions. Among the challenges the WASC process addressed were the following:

- Too often institutional self-studies were directed towards minimum compliance rather than towards major improvements at the institution.
- For well-established institutions, the accreditation process had become ritualized and was not viewed as cost-effective or significantly value-adding.
- More innovative institutions, especially those operating through distance learning or using accelerated learning formats, asked whether traditional standards of quality, emphasizing input indicators, provided an effective basis for evaluating their institutional quality and effectiveness.
- Many institutions found that the accreditation process was not effectively aligned with institutional priorities or with the timing of institutional planning cycles.
- As institutions began to address issues of student learning outcomes more seriously, they found that the single visit, “one size fits all” review model of accreditation, did not promote serious engagement with learning-related issues, and called for new evaluation models.
- Few institutions had systematically developed what WASC calls a “culture of evidence” to inform planning and decision-making and to improve student learning. The traditional model of accreditation too often did not reinforce effective use of evidence since institutions used the self-study report to describe their structures, processes, and assessment activities, rather than as an opportunity to evaluate and improve their own evidence, especially in relation to student learning.
- The United States Department of Education has given new emphasis to student academic achievement and learning outcomes with a desire to find “bright line” indicators of quality, while institutions are finding that there are no single indicators or instruments to measure learning, especially the more important characteristics of a liberally educated graduate.

Working with a number of design teams, a "whole system" approach was used to address these challenges. The result has been the development of a new and radically different system of accreditation. The reform began first with significant changes to the WASC Standards of Accreditation, and then to a redesigning of the institutional evaluation and visitation process.

## 5. DEVELOPMENT OF THE WASC 2001 ACCREDITATION STANDARDS

The first priority of the Commission was to redefine its Standards of Accreditation in a way that responded to the dynamic changes occurring in higher education while fulfilling the review requirements of the US Department of Education. The Commission adopted a set of key principles to oversee the development of new accreditation standards. Among them were the following two:

*i.* The accreditation process will focus on institutional purposes and results, not on specific structures or methods for their accomplishment;
*ii.* The process will affirm the centrality of educational effectiveness, including student learning, as a common activity of all candidate and accredited institutions.

Two drafting committees were formed – one to develop standards addressing institutional capacity and the second to develop standards addressing student learning and educational effectiveness. As new standards were developed, agreement was reached to combine the work of the two committees into a single integrated set of standards so that the new Standards would be holistic and inter-related. Through this process, major changes were made to WASC. The character of these changes is also reflected in the new standards developed subsequently by other regional commissions. Among the characteristics of the new WASC Standards of Accreditation are the following:

– They have been dramatically streamlined and simplified. Previously there were nine Standards with 268 sub-components. Many of these rules had little to do with educational effectiveness. Now there are four Standards with 42 sub-components that reflect a significant shift in emphasis to effectiveness and attention to student learning.
– The Standards are intended to be dynamic and able to be used for both traditional and innovative educational programmes and institutions.
– The review process still depends heavily on peer review and professional judgment.

The titles of the four Standards reflect these characteristics and the intended dynamic character of the revised accreditation process:

*i.* Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives;
*ii.* Achieving Educational Objectives through Core Functions;
*iii.* Developing and Applying Resources and Organizational Structures to Ensure Sustainability;
*iv.* Creating an Organization Committed to Learning and Improvement.

Simply stated, each institution is expected to demonstrate that it is committed to developing and sustaining *Institutional Capacity and Educational Effectiveness*. It can demonstrate institutional capacity "by displaying evidence that it functions with clear purposes, has high levels of institutional integrity, fiscal stability, and organizational structures to fulfill its purposes" (WASC, 2001, p. 5).

Educational Effectiveness is demonstrated when "the institution evidences clear and appropriate educational objectives and design at the institutional and programme level. The institution employs processes of review, including the collection and use of data that assure delivery of programmes and learner accomplishments at a level of performance appropriate for the degree or certificate awarded" (WASC, 2001, p. 5). Stated another way, the capacity review process is, in effect, a "sufficiency test"; the educational effectiveness review is a test of commitment to

*i.* improvement in the learning environment from whatever place on a continuum the institution finds itself;
*ii.* a process of ongoing review.

The Commission applies the four Standards of Accreditation to measure the degree to which these core expectations are understood and implemented in accredited institutions. "By design, elements of educational effectiveness were incorporated into all four Commission Standards, so that institutions would explore the relationships between capacity and educational quality and effectiveness" (WASC, 2001, p. 6).

There was substantial support for reducing the number of accreditation standards and sub-components since the large number, as previously existed, tended to drive institutions into mechanical compliance with each one rather than towards an effort to identify and focus on the most essential areas of accountability, quality assurance, and improvement.

## 6. REVISING THE EVALUATION PROCESS AND THE CYCLE OF REVIEW

It became clear to the Commission that reform of the Standards of Accreditation required changes in the evaluation process itself. Otherwise, there would be a tendency to return, by default, to traditional mindsets and approaches. Design teams experimented with new institutional presentations and evaluation visits, out of which grew a whole new accreditation review model. The 2001 *Handbook of Accreditation* requires that all institutions participate in the new approach to both institutional reports and visit review cycles.

Both the new Standards of Accreditation and the new evaluation process have been crafted with the explicit goals of making accreditation value-added and fostering educational change through a focus on evidence, internal systems review, and the development and use of ongoing planning and research. If there is one major reason for the reform it is to encourage "a shift toward effectiveness and performance indicators beyond inputs and resources as the organizing basis for defining and evaluating quality" (WASC, 2001, p. 2).

The new review model is based on the learning-centered principle that feedback over time leads to enhanced performance and improvement. As described briefly below, the Commission now requires all institutions to participate in a three-stage sequential review model. The process requires of all institutions a Portfolio or Institutional Presentation beginning with a Proposal followed, in two years, by a Preparatory Review addressing the Core Commitment to Institutional Capacity and concluding, a year later, with the Educational Effectiveness Review. By staging reviews in the three sequences as described, the Commission and the institutions have found that there are far greater opportunities for the entire process to lead to greater institutional awareness, capacity, and performance.

For institutions, institutional presentations are to be organized around a Portfolio of Exhibits and Key Evidence, with reflective essays and case studies of deep engagement with selected issues. Most institutions can rely on data gathered for their own purposes as a starting point for analysis and discussion. There are now page limits for institutional presentations. The intent of this revised format, quite a departure from the traditional self-study format, is to focus institutions on the quality and effectiveness of their own data and evidence gathering system and to identify key indicators of their own performance and quality. This approach represents a shift away from reports that affirm and assert institutional quality without attention to the underlying evidence.

*Stage 1. The Institutional Proposal*

This element begins the accreditation process and provides each institution with the opportunity to frame the review process within its own context and priorities. "The Proposal enables the review process to be anchored in each institution's distinctive context and its intended goals for the accreditation process" (WASC, 2001, p. 37). This proposal must certainly take into account the four Standards, but can be organized around strategic priorities or specific themes that can be cross-referenced with the four Standards. It might focus on specific questions that, if answered, will move the institution to the next level of effectiveness in selected areas. It is submitted two-and-a-half years prior to the first site visit. The proposal enables the institution to determine how best to use the accreditation process to its maximum advantage. It is subjected to peer review by a committee of institutional representatives who apply the accreditation standards to assure that the self-audit and research design

will lead to appropriate levels of accountability as well as to useful engagement and improvement. This Proposal Review process allows for adaptation of the accreditation review to serve both the regulatory and capacity-building functions of WASC. For example, new institutions would need to establish compliance whereas well-established institutions that had been successfully reviewed by WASC teams over many cycles of review might give greater emphasis to strategic improvement. Once the proposal is approved by the Proposal Review Committee on behalf of the Commission, it sets the course for the accreditation review cycle.

*Stage 2. The Preparatory Review*

The proposal is followed in two years by a Preparatory Review, which addresses issues of institutional capacity and compliance and assesses the preparedness of the institution for the extended studies to be considered at the next stage of the review – the Educational Effectiveness Review. In anticipation of the Preparatory Review, each institution is responsible for developing a report (thirty-five pages, maximum) that is intended to be primarily evidentiary, consisting of a carefully-chosen set of exhibits that support the claim of the institution that it meets the expectations of the Commission regarding institutional integrity and capacity. To the extent possible, the exhibits included in the Institutional Portfolio are drawn from existing documents and data rather than being specially generated for the accreditation review and never used again. This approach is intended to reduce unnecessary costs and burden and to anchor the accreditation review process on the ongoing evidence and analyses of the institution.

A small team conducts the Preparatory Review to evaluate institutional resources, structures, and processes in light of the Commission Standards, to assure that the institution is operating at or above threshold levels acceptable for accreditation and, when appropriate, to identify any capacity-related issues. These issues are carried forward in the later Educational Effectiveness Review. In addition, this stage in the review will assess the preparedness of the institution to undertake the Educational Effectiveness Review as proposed and to assist the institution in refining its focus and plan for that review.

Sequencing the Preparatory and Educational Effectiveness Reviews as two linked processes allows the demonstration of compliance to be separated from engagement with student learning, thus permitting institutions to address complex issues of educational effectiveness as research inquiries rather than as mechanical minimum compliance exercises.

*Stage 3. The Educational Effectiveness Review*

“The Educational Effectiveness Review is intended to be significantly different from the Preparatory Review. Its primary purpose is to invite sustained engagement by the institution on the extent to which it fulfills its educational objectives. Through a process of inquiry and engagement,

the Educational Effectiveness Review is also designed to enable the Commission to reach a judgment about the extent to which the institution fulfills its Core Commitment to Educational Effectiveness" (WASC, 2001, p. 44).

Visitation teams will give primary attention to determining whether or not the institution is aligning its resources with educational objectives, whether or not efforts are being made to evaluate the effectiveness of educational programmes, and the degree to which student learning is understood and assessed. Institutional attention is to be given both to the *processes* of student learning assessment and to the level and quality of student learning *results*. Thus, the accreditation review should insure that institutions have the processes in place for the review of samples of student work. However, there should also be evidence that they actually complete such processes so as to assure that the performance of students upon graduation meets institutional standards and expectations beyond the accumulation of course credits and the earning of grades.

The creation of a separate Education Effectiveness Review grew out of experiences with a number of experimental self-studies and visits. The Commission learned that institutions were having difficulty exploring learning-related issues as a compliance activity but that much richer and more consequential results were obtained through focused inquiries. These enabled institutions to begin the process of understanding the vocabulary and epistemology of learning-centeredness. In addition, evaluation teams found it difficult to assess both resources and learning-related issues in one visit. The separate Educational Effectiveness Review requires each institution to focus directly on its evidence of student learning results and identify how the institution can better understand its impact on students and improve student achievement.

As this model has developed, it has been increasingly important not only for member institutions to improve their own understanding of institutional, programmatic, and individual student learning assessment but also to share good practices for improving teaching and learning. Moreover, the new Commission Standards call for the process to focus as much as possible on direct measures of student learning.

## 7. A CULTURE OF EVIDENCE: EXAMPLES OF INDICATORS USED BY INSTITUTIONS

Unfortunately, there is often lack of clarity about evidence of student learning and achievement, since there is a distinction between the types of data and evidence that institutions typically collect.

In a paper prepared for the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, Peter Ewell (2001) comments about this ambiguity:

> Virtually all [American accreditation agencies] include explicit references to student learning in their standards for accreditation. Most also require institutions or programmes to examine student

> achievement... as part of their self-study and review process – usually in the form of some kind of "assessment."... But after more than a decade, the question of exactly how accreditation should engage the topic remains unclear. In particular, what is meant by "assessment" often varies greatly – embracing everything from job placement, through student satisfaction, to self-reported gains in skills and knowledge on the part of students and former students. None of these constitute *direct* evidence of student learning outcomes of the kind currently being asked for by external stakeholders (Ewell, 2001, p. 1).

The implementation of the new WASC Standards, has attempted to address the confusion, evoked by Ewell, by distinguishing between educational outcomes (or outputs) and learning results. This matter is further addressed in the section below. The creation of a separate Educational Effectiveness site review and the publication by WASC of an *Evidence Guide* are intended to focus both institutional attention and that of accreditation evaluators on the evidence presented by the institution and analysis of student learning and to make sure that such evidence includes collection and analysis of educational results.

By way of further introduction, it is also important to make clear that the emphasis in WASC is on insuring that the colleges and universities under its jurisdiction for accreditation develop their programmes consistently within their own unique missions. There is no attempt to insist that institutions comply with a given "check list" of procedures or protocols for evaluating student learning outcomes. WASC is especially interested in determining whether or not the colleges and universities have built into the fabric of the institution a habit of evaluation of student learning outcomes and engaged their faculty and academic administration in a thoughtful use of the data collected and analyzed on a regular and periodic basis.

The measuring of the outputs of higher education and the use of secondary evidence of learning are both useful – not simply sufficient. Institutional studies at most universities will be able to cite such "outputs" as the number of graduates, the percentage of faculty members holding terminal degrees, the length of time it takes for the average graduate to complete a given degree, the amount of alumni support, and grading practices and standards. Likewise, "performance measures" can be useful indicators of institutional effectiveness. The research record of the faculty, the retention rates of students, and the number of students who receive honours at graduation serve as examples. The existence of a comprehensive, regularized evaluation of faculty performance can insure the productivity of the faculty. Periodic and regular departmental, programme, or disciplinary reviews will enable the institution to keep pace with expanding knowledge and pedagogical reforms. While this kind of evidence is helpful, "none of these measures what actually happens to an individual student as a result of his or her attendance at a higher

education institution and/or participation in a particular course of study" (Ewell, 2001, p. 5).

At another level, there are many ways to gain indirect evidence of student learning outcomes, and these certainly are useful. Surveys can be taken each year of the graduates who have been out of the college or university for five years to determine employment, career opportunities realized, additional education, or income. Attitudinal surveys to measure student satisfaction with a programme can provide useful cues for institutional leaders considering programme or curricular changes. Student satisfaction, however, cannot be used as a placeholder for a direct measure of what students learn. Student evaluations of faculty can provide important information to teachers who wish to improve their own performance or to the academic administration in their reviews for tenure or promotion. Yet, this information cannot always translate into evidence of how much students learned from the given classroom experience.

Measuring the outputs of higher education and developing secondary evidence of the productivity of the institution are both useful and important. However, what is being called for in American higher education by each of the accrediting bodies, and now by the Federal Department of Education as well, is the collection and use of data about student attainment in order to examine the degree to which programme or institution-level learning goals are being achieved.

Evidence can embrace the results of both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gathering information, both of which may be useful in judging learning. The term, evidence, suggests both the context of "making and supporting a case" and the need to engage in consistent investigations that use multiple sources of information in a mutually reinforcing fashion. But to count as evidence of student learning outcomes, the information collected and presented should go beyond such things as surveys, interviews, and job placement statistics to include the actual examination of student work or performance. As a consequence, assessment of student learning is most appropriately defined for accreditation purposes as the processes that an institution or programme uses to gather direct evidence about the attainment of student learning outcomes, engaged in for purposes of judging (and improving) overall instructional performance (Ewell, 2001, p. 7).

Some examples of indicators used by WASC institutions as direct evidence of student learning are given below. Through the new Standards, the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges serves as a catalyst by encouraging the colleges and universities in the region to pay increasing attention to student learning outcomes. In the educational effectiveness stage of the accrediting process, the Senior Commission is asking that the institutions make clear the processes developed to gather direct evidence about the attainment of student learning as one measure of institutional worthiness.

The following are only examples intended to display ideas about direct evidence of student learning. They are not presented in any order of importance, nor are they differentiated in terms of their ability to assess learning as knowledge, skill attainment, individual value development, or competencies. Also to be remembered is the importance of measuring student learning outcomes in light of the objectives of the programmes themselves.

- A writing programme might be instituted across-the-curriculum that provides writing experiences and instruction at entering-student level, and another set of experiences in the last year of an undergraduate experience. A standard of performance might be tested and/or progress analyzed. Additionally, the faculty engaged in such a writing-across-the-curriculum programme might meet periodically to sample groups of work to determine if their departmental objectives are being met.
- Many institutions are developing Senior year capstone experiences that are intended to enable students to integrate the several courses they have taken into some meaningful project or paper. This exercise will assist the institution in measuring student progress on agreed-upon standards and objectives. Further, however, if a subset of faculty within a given unit would also analyze a group of such capstone experiences, they might determine whether or not the objectives of the department are being met. For example, in a government department, if all of the capstone experiences emphasize state or local government matters, the question might be asked of the faculty as to whether sufficient attention is being given to international and global matters of government and the economy.
- Class syllabi can provide clear statements of the learning outcomes expected and how the given faculty member is intending to assess the knowledge gained, the perspectives of the students, and the skills that should be developed. To be useful, of course, specific measures must be taken to evaluate the actual outcomes. How well can the students present reasoned positions about topics generated in the class? How have the skills been put to use in actual situations? What changes in behaviour can be documented? How will student work be evaluated against the stated objectives?
- Pre- and post-tests can be administered in technical fields and in language study to measure performance against standards.
- Increasingly, faculty are being asked to include in course syllabi what student learning outcomes are expected in a given course and how student evaluations will reflect whether or not the learning outcomes have been achieved. In many departments, there are processes to review the alignment of course learning objectives with departmental and institutional learning goals.
- Increasingly, institutions work with students to create student learning portfolios, whereby students collect samples of their work,

or sometimes all writing products, for a period of time, ranging from a semester course portfolio to a longer period of several years for a comprehensive learning portfolio. Students are asked to evaluate the portfolio, commenting on what the samples reflect in terms of learning development and identifying skills and habits gained, as well as areas needed for self- improvement. Such self-reviews are important ways of developing the skill of self-assessment. Portfolios are also evaluated by faculty. By this method, samples of actual student work can be reviewed to determine the degree to which the objectives of the designed experience are being realized.

- Actual performances in theater, art, and music will measure the competencies and progress of students and can also be used as a means of determining the quality of instruction and the skills of the instructors. Faculties in these disciplines have often developed evaluation rubrics distinguishing between levels of performance or presentation and identifying skill levels for novices and experts.
- Licensure examinations can, in a limited way, measure attainment of a threshold of knowledge or skills required in given professions. Such certification represents third party validation.

More than good practices are needed to establish a learning-centered institution. The experience of the Senior Commission has been that, while all institutions are doing some good assessment, such activities are often limited to an individual department or unit and are not consistently undertaken across the institution. Creating a "culture of evidence" requires moving from an aspirational emphasis on student learning to developing a system of quality assurance that focuses on it, is integrated into the fabric of the institution, and is consistently applied across the institution. The new WASC accreditation standards are designed to provide a framework of self-review for institutions to identify good practices of assessment and learning-centeredness, to assess their effectiveness and potential application throughout the institution, and to build a more coherent and effective system of learning-centered quality assurance. In addition, new visiting and evaluation techniques are being developed to move the evaluation enquiry from the identification of isolated good practices to reviewing for organized systems of quality assurance and improvement that use student learning results as a core element.

Standard 4 of the 2001 WASC Standards of Accreditation place an emphasis on institutional systems, and all institutions are required to review and analyze the effectiveness of their quality assurance and improvement systems as part of the Educational Effectiveness Review Institutional Presentation. One example of such review has been the efforts of a number of institutions to review the criteria for and the effectiveness of their programme review processes in the ways that they address student learning.

Most institutions undertake periodic programme reviews involving departmental self-reviews and site-reviews by a small group of external

examiners. These reviews have typically been focused on curriculum offerings, faculty qualifications and resources, library and technology support, and research productivity. Using the framework of the new WASC Standards of Accreditation, a number of institutions have reviewed and revised programme review criteria to include a focus on the development of clear student learning outcomes for each programme offered, to develop methods for collecting and analyzing student learning results (using many of the examples cited above), and having external reviewers comment on the evidence of student learning and recommending targeted areas for improvement.

A further word may be useful with regard to the role of the accrediting agency. To be faithful to its new standards, WASC must be careful not to prescribe any specific format, organizational structure, or methodology for determining how student learning outcomes are assessed. Rather, it is the role of WASC to insist that the institution be able to articulate how it will engage in the process, what standards of evidence will be used; how the evidence will be used, how the stakeholders, especially the faculty, will be involved, and how the interests and concerns of external stakeholders will be addressed.

To support institutions in developing better evaluations of student learning, the Commission hosts an Annual Meeting for institutions, during which they can share their good practices and lessons learned in assessing student outcomes and student learning. The Annual Meeting has now become a place at which institutional teams are actively engaged in presentations and inter-institutional discussions.

## 8. RESULTS OF THE NEW ACCREDITATION MODEL

After a two-year transition period, the new review model is now fully in use, and institutions are applying the new Standards and Review Model in all of its dimensions.

In the first round of Proposal Reviews, nearly all the proposals were returned for revision, for institutions had to shift their self-study design from linear or mechanical compliance to an integrated approach blending compliance and meaningful institutional inquiry and engagement. Institutions also needed to learn how to develop intended outcomes for the accreditation review, which was a major shift in thinking about the purpose and value of accreditation. Many of the institutions initially developed overly broad and ambiguous research designs for the study of student learning. With further orientation to the proposal process through workshops and materials, now over 60 percent of the proposals are approved at their first review and the remainder upon revision. The Commission has found that institutions, given the opportunity to develop research designs for their self-study reviews, have selected significant areas for study and review and have taken the process seriously.

Eight institutional visits have already been concluded under the new Standards of Accreditation, two using only one site visit during this

transition period, and the rest using the two-stage visit approach. Several more were completed by June 2003. From each of these reviews, the power and impact of the integrated and holistic nature of the new Standards have become evident. Instead of teams being assigned to specific areas, they work in a more integrated fashion. Issues are identified as cross-cutting, and there is increased collaboration among team members. Far greater attention is placed on student learning and institutional systems of review, as well as on the underlying evidence regularly used by the institution to inform decision making and quality enhancement.

Commission staff members have also developed several other innovations to further implement the new model. All teams now conduct a two-hour conference call, prior to each site visit, to identify key issues for the site review, as based on the institutional presentation. The team is also able to identify any needed additional information to enable it to conduct the most effective review possible. Worksheets have been developed for teams to complete, prior to these conference calls, for both the Preparatory and Educational Effectiveness Reviews. Team members complete the worksheets, and they are shared with the whole team to provide a more consistent identification of issues and concerns. This process also allows the team to identify what issues appear to be resolved or satisfied, so that the site review can be focused on the most important matters. Each team also has assigned, from among its members, a team writer/assistant chairperson, to work with the team chairperson in preparing a first draft of the report (based on contributions from all team members). Thus, the team chairperson is given enhanced opportunity to develop and lead a very effective site review.

Because institutions have worked with the redesign effort, a number of other satisfying accomplishments have emerged. The relationships of institutions in the region with the Accrediting Commission have become closer by the shift from emphasis only on regulation to emphasis on capacity building, inquiry, and engagement. The process is being understood as value-added rather than as compliance-oriented and has led to much richer and more robust activity. Streamlining the Standards of Accreditation and the use of institutional Proposals have led to a more adaptive approach to fit the accountability function more appropriately to the history and context of each institution, thereby creating a more reasoned approach that avoids focusing on minutia. Moreover, a lively conversation is already emerging in the region among even the most prestigious colleges and universities about how student learning and educational effectiveness might be better understood. This interest is being credited in substantial part to the WASC reform processes. As indicated above, the Annual Meeting is helping to develop a learning community around accreditation in the WASC region.

## 9. THE LIBERAL ARTS FOUNDATION IN AMERICAN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES – AN ONGOING CHALLENGE

Since most students who are enrolled in the institutions accredited by the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities are at the Bachelor's Degree level, the Commission places great emphasis on the Liberal Arts foundation for all students at this level. One of the features of undergraduate American higher education is the inclusion in the curriculum of a Liberal Arts foundation or general education component for all Bachelor's Degree level students, regardless of their major field of study. While not unique to this country, it is an essential element in the accreditation review that deserves special comment.

Increasingly, students either enroll in professional programmes or transfer into a Bachelor's Degree programme as transfer students from one or more institutions. This mobility creates significant challenges in assuring that all students have a core foundation of skills and learning abilities that will support them after graduation. In the new Standards of Accreditation, the Commission has attempted to address this important need in several ways. First, institutions are expected to provide a substantial programme of general education that is integrated throughout the curriculum, including the upper division level. At the same time, attention is given to stating outcomes of Bachelor's Degree study as a total educational experience. The Commission Standards state: "All degrees – undergraduate and graduate – awarded by the institution are clearly defined in terms of entry-level requirements and in terms of levels of student achievement necessary for graduation that represent more than simply an accumulation of courses or credits" (Standard 2.2, *Handbook*, p. 20.). And third, the Commission has attempted to articulate specific outcomes for all Bachelor's Degrees which include outcomes normally associated with the liberal arts, acknowledging that these abilities may be gained in different ways as part of the educational experience. Again, as stated in Commission Standard 2: "[Bachelor's Degree] programmes also ensure the development of core learning abilities and competencies including, but not limited to, college-level written and oral communication; college-level quantitative skills; information literacy; and the habit of critical analysis of data and argument. In addition, baccalaureate programmes actively foster an understanding of diversity; civic responsibility; the ability to work with others; and the capability to engage in lifelong learning" (WASC, 2001, Standard 2.2, p. 20).

Even with these and other statements in the Commission standards, the challenge remains for all institutions to provide a core foundation at the level of Bachelor's Degree study and for an awarded Bachelor's Degree to have some common meaning within the framework of the diversity of American higher education. It is also a challenge for accreditation teams to evaluate the quality of Bachelor's Degree-level education in the course of accreditation reviews while respecting different institutional missions.

Since institutions are expected to assess the effectiveness of their general education programmes, attention is also being given to the significant challenge of identifying learning outcomes and of assessing achievement of such areas as critical thinking, values formation, ethical responsibility, ability to work with others in a diverse environment, etc. Institutions are developing the use of portfolios, integrative assessments, and other approaches to developing standards of achievement beyond specific course grades.

## 10. OTHER ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

The model of accreditation that has been described is in the early stages of implementation. In order for the shift in focus to be fully realized, a considerable array of new tools, procedures, support manuals, and guides must be completed. Orientation and training programmes must be built for the Commission, staff, and visitation teams of peers. Workshops must be arranged for institutions to share with each other what they are learning about how to improve student learning and the assessment of educational effectiveness. These are well underway.

Institutions need and seem to welcome support in developing the indicators of educational effectiveness and systems of analysis that are called for in the new Standards. The Commission has moved to develop supplemental materials to assist institutions in addressing the new *Handbook of Accreditation*, with its new Standards and review cycle. The first of these has just been published on the *Use of Evidence in the Accreditation Process* (also available for downloading at <http: www.wascweb.org>.

The Evidence Guide provides institutions with concrete examples of good practice in developing evidence under each of the accreditation standards as well as criteria for reviewing the quality and appropriateness of evidence, especially with respect to student learning. The Guide has been developed and circulated as a “working draft” to enable institutions and teams to apply it and recommend further improvements.

All institutions seem to be challenged by the rigour and focus of the new Standards and by the increased emphasis on educational effectiveness.[5] As the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities has moved into full implementation, several challenges have been recognized. One is internal to WASC and results from the new *Standards* and *Handbook* expectations. Others are more applicable across the board for all parties engaged in accreditation.

[5] Paragraphs drawn from a grant proposal, developed in 2001, by WASC (Elizabeth Griego and Ralph Wolff) for the James Irvine Foundation.

### *10.1. Internal Challenges*

The success of the WASC Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities in building institutional support for the new model is leading to a corresponding set of challenges.

The first of these challenges might be stated as follows. Institutions are eager to address educational effectiveness. In approving the new model, institutional representatives have sought WASC leadership in supporting institutional inquiry into educational effectiveness and the sharing of good practices. WASC made a commitment to institutions that it would work in partnership with them to learn what works best for different types of institutions. The important question: How can the Commission avoid a "one approach fits all" orthodoxy and, at the same time, maintain rigour in reviewing educational effectiveness and student learning?

To find an answer to this question, WASC has accepted the challenge by providing institutions with a wide array of support materials to deepen the understanding of educational effectiveness and to share within the region what is being learned about building capacity within as well as across institutions.

*i.* An editorial board, a group of experts, was recently convened to determine what literature from the field of assessment could be most helpful. This group recommended that WASC publish electronically, in text form, a *Resource Manual on Educational Effectiveness*, and that the Web-based version have links to resources and institutional descriptions of good practices. These materials were field-tested, discussed with teams of institutional representatives, and made available for general use in the spring of 2003.

*ii.* Materials will be available to provide examples of promising practices for developing a "culture of evidence" within institutions, such as the recently published *Evidence Guide*.

*iii.* Evaluation teams are being asked to identify exemplary practices, which will be listed on the Website of the Commission to facilitate institutional sharing and improvement.

*iv.* Representatives from institutions in various stages of accreditation review are meeting in cohorts so that they may learn from each other in working through the new accreditation process.

A second challenge results from the fact that some institutions do not have broad arrays of data and evidence; others do not regularly collect and analyze data; even fewer institutions have developed key indicators of performance across themselves outside of the areas of admissions and finance. In addition to the *Evidence Guide*, WASC is developing guidelines and models of text and Web-based institutional data portfolios to assist institutions in finding efficient ways to present and to analyze institutional data elements useful for internal reflection and analysis.

The third challenge is that the new accreditation model calls for significantly enhanced expertise on the part of the WASC team chairpeople and evaluators. The evaluators must know how to review evidence

effectively and not to substitute their judgment for that of the faculty of the institution being evaluated. At the same time, the new Standards of Accreditation, by placing much increased emphasis on educational effectiveness and attention to student learning, have led evaluators to review samples of student work and institutional evidence far more closely than in the past. This new rigour requires increased expertise on the part of evaluators. It is not easy to move from a compliance orientation to an approach emphasizing rigorous and collaborative inquiry on the part of teams conducting institutional reviews.

A new comprehensive programme of training and support for Commission members, executive staff, team chairpeople, and evaluators is in the process of implementation so as to make certain that evaluation mirrors the values and principles established by the Commission. Such training must be ongoing, comprehensive, and of "cutting edge". Commission staff, working with a team of workshop developers, have already begun to pilot test a new workshop format with the beginnings of a web-based curriculum.

As a corollary, teams must be chosen in new ways and with these new skills in mind. The special characteristics needed for reviews conducted with an emphasis on student learning must be defined, and evaluators must be recruited and educated in the range of the best practices that are available beyond those with which they might be familiar in their own institutions.

### *10.2. The Challenges Resulting from Changes in Higher Education Itself*

These challenges are the impacts on accreditation of what Judith Eaton calls the universalization of higher education, the "new commercialization" of higher education, and the internationalization of higher education (Eaton, 2001, pp. 2-6).

Briefly stated, the universalization of higher education is defined as higher education having become such a necessity that it is being provided by programmes that extend beyond the traditional campus settings and include nonresidential attendance, short-term programmes, part-time attendance, open access, and programmes designed to meet the needs of the working adult student. These changes have been in the sights of WASC for many years: "Universalization challenges accreditation to take a quality review system designed for higher education that is a site-based, residential, degree-granting, mostly full-time experience for a limited number of people and apply it to an expansive higher education system – one open to all, with or without site, with or without degrees, and with or without residence" (Eaton, 2001, p. 3).

For-profit educational institutions have existed for many years, but the "new commercialism" refers to such variables as the emergence of large-scale corporate interests in higher education, the use of new electronic technology, the merging of for-profit and not-for-profit educational organizations, and for-profit subsidiaries of non-profit operations. It also

raises new questions about regionally accredited but nationally visible institutions, providing on-site and distance education programmes across regions. At its core, "new commercialism" challenges accreditation to consider whether these new commercial cultures can produce quality and under what conditions" (Eaton, 2001, p. 4).

"Internationalization" refers to expanding boundaries for institutions, courses, and programmes. It might include institutions and programmes from one country operating in several countries, students moving among countries to complete their education, creation of virtual institutions that exist mainly for international purposes, and government interests in further controlling higher education as an item of trade and commerce, *e.g.*, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). In Europe, these very questions are being prompted by the impacts that are likely to emerge from the Bologna Process and discussions of a Worldwide Quality Label (WQL).

"At its core, internationalization challenges U.S. accreditation (and quality assurance leaders around the world) to examine what it means to take institutions, programmes, and quality review systems designed for domestic consumption into an international arena" (Eaton, 2001, p. 4).

## 11. THE REFORM OF OTHER REGIONAL ACCREDITING COMMISSIONS

The significant reforms at WASC described in this study are part of a larger set of efforts being made by several of the regional commissions. The North Central Association has developed an alternative quality process model built on the Baldrige quality review process called AQIP. The Southern Association has recently made significant revisions to its accrediting standards to shift away from large numbers of compliance-oriented standards to a more streamlined set of standards. It is also making innovations in its new approaches to its review process. Two other commissions – the Middle States Association and the Accrediting Commission for Junior and Community Colleges of WASC – have also adopted revisions to their standards which will place far greater emphasis on student learning and educational effectiveness. Together, the WASC reform effort and those at other regional commissions are blending into a major national effort to give greatly increased emphasis to educational effectiveness and student learning.

To assist the regional commissions in developing resources and common approaches to the evaluation of student learning, the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC) recently received a significant foundation grant. The regional commissions are developing common principles for the evaluation of student learning as well as resource materials to assist commissions in the orientation of both institutions and the evaluation of visitation team members. Eventually, these materials will be available on the WASC web site and might become a useful resource for other programmes as well.

## 12. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study has attempted to show how one accrediting commission has undertaken bold new reforms to make the accrediting process contribute far more, than in the past, to quality improvement, and especially to the growing conversation about student learning, academic achievement, and quality improvement. While every organization will probably not adopt the specific measures of the WASC Senior College Commission, all are likely to face the same challenges and to develop their own responses. As accreditation within the United States attempts to deal with these issues, and to discuss, through C-RAC, how to coordinate these efforts, the challenge of international quality assurance looms ahead. It is a much larger problem. Even so, the hope is that the WASC experience will conclusively demonstrate that deep reform is possible and that accreditation and quality assurance processes can lead to institutional change and build institutional capacity.

## *REFERENCES*

EATON, Judith S. "Taking a Look at Ourselves: Accreditation", Remarks Presented to the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), Chicago, Illinois, 28-29 June, 2001.

EWELL, Peter T. *Accreditation and Student Learning Outcomes: A Proposed Point of Departure*. CHEA Occasional Paper. Washington D.C.: CHEA, September 2001.

WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES (WASC). *Evidence Guide. A Working Draft*. Alameda, California: WASC, January 2002.

WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES (WASC). *Handbook of Accreditation*. Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities, January 2001 <http://www.wascweb.org>.

# VI. The Japanese University Evaluation System and the Main Self-Evaluation Criteria of the Japan University Accreditation Association (JUAA)

*MASATERU OHNAMI AND HIROSHI HOKAMA*

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In conformity with international standards, the Japan University Accreditation Association (JUAA) adopted a new evaluation system, in 2003, in response to the various needs of the Japanese universities. Earlier, in May 2000, JUAA first published its planned revisions for the national university evaluation system in a proposal entitled, "The University Evaluation System: Breaking through to New Horizons". A year later, in May 2001, after further investigation, a plan of action was published under the title, "New Ideas for the University Evaluation Action Plan (Part 1)". It is anticipated that the action plan will be fully implemented and that the new university evaluation system will be fully operational by the year 2008.

The factors influencing this new initiative and approach to university assessment are the following:

- First, owing to economic difficulties in the public sector, government funds for important scientific research will be increasingly allocated only on the basis of competition and evaluation.
- In response to rapidly changing technology and the changing structure of Japanese society and the economy, there is a need to implement educational reforms along with an evaluation system which meets societal needs and reinforces professional development.
- Owing to a decline in the size of the 18-year-old population cohort, many Japanese universities are experiencing a fall in demand as well as accompanying difficulties in operating. These universities need to strengthen their operations in accordance with evaluation and reform to remain competitive.
- It is believed that universities, as with other public organizations, should be accountable to society, and that their resource allocation policies should be public knowledge.
- Owing to the increased mobility of people and goods across borders

outside evaluation entities. At present, the university evaluation agency (the National Institution for Academic Degrees) is under the direct control of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology. JUAA is attempting both to ensure greater objectivity and transparency in the university evaluation system and to apply both with increased effectiveness.

Like JUAA, the university evaluation structure of Japan consists of the Japanese Accreditation Board for Engineering Education (which accredits university engineering programmes), the Association for the Advancement of Colleges in Japan, (which evaluates colleges offering two-year programmes), and the National Institution for Academic Degrees. In addition, the law schools operate as separate professional graduate units, and the setting up of a special evaluation organization expressly for these schools is being considered. In the future, JUAA may co-operate with other accreditation organizations with respect to the evaluation system.

## 2. PRESENTATION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NEW UNIVERSITY EVALUATION SYSTEM

The types and characteristics of the new evaluation system of JUAA are presented in Table 1, below:

### *2.1. JUAA University Evaluation Mechanisms and Evaluation Targets*

The Association uses two kinds of evaluations: *accreditation* and *reaccreditation*. Universities that would like to become regular members of JUAA must undergo the accreditation process. Universities that have already joined must undergo a regular reaccreditation evaluation.

As a general principle, each university is assessed as a single unit for *accreditation* purposes and receives a comprehensive assessment or "institutional evaluation". However, for *reaccreditation* or for limited special cases, each faculty within a university can apply to be evaluated, *i.e.*, to undergo a "programme evaluation".

Any university that wishes to be evaluated by JUAA must prepare two reports. One is a "self-evaluation report", consisting of a self-evaluation by and of the university as a whole, and using the main inspection evaluation criteria (see below) as specified by JUAA. The second report is the "Basic Institutional Data Record", which is a list of quantitative data.

### *2.2. JUAA University and Subject Evaluations*

JUAA will conduct an accreditation and reaccreditation evaluation using a structured system (see Figure 1). The members of the evaluation team will be selected from among the faculty members from the already registered

Table 1. Evaluation and assessment categories of the Japan University Accreditation Association (JUAA)

| Evaluation / Assessment category | Evaluation targets | | | Evaluation subject | | | Assessment time | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| JUAA type of evaluation | Institutional evaluation | Programme evaluation | Project evaluation | Self-evaluation | External[1] evaluation | Third party evaluation[1] | Prior assessment | Intermediate assessment | Result assessment | *Ex post facto* assessment |
| Accreditation | ⊙ | | | ○ | | ⊙ | | (○)[2] | | |
| Reaccreditation | ⊙ | ? | | ○ | | ⊙ | | (○)[2] | | |

| Evaluation / Assessment category | Effect of evaluation | | Contents evaluating | | | Action by assessment subject | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| JUAA type of evaluation | Formative evaluation | Summative evaluation | Educational evaluation | Research evaluation | Social contribution evaluation | Input assessment | Process assessment | Output assessment | outcome assessment |
| Accreditation | ○ | ⊙ | ○ | ○ | | ⊙ | ○ | ? | ? |
| Reaccreditation | ⊙ | △ | ⊙ | ○ | ○ | ⊙ | ⊙ | ? | ⊙ |

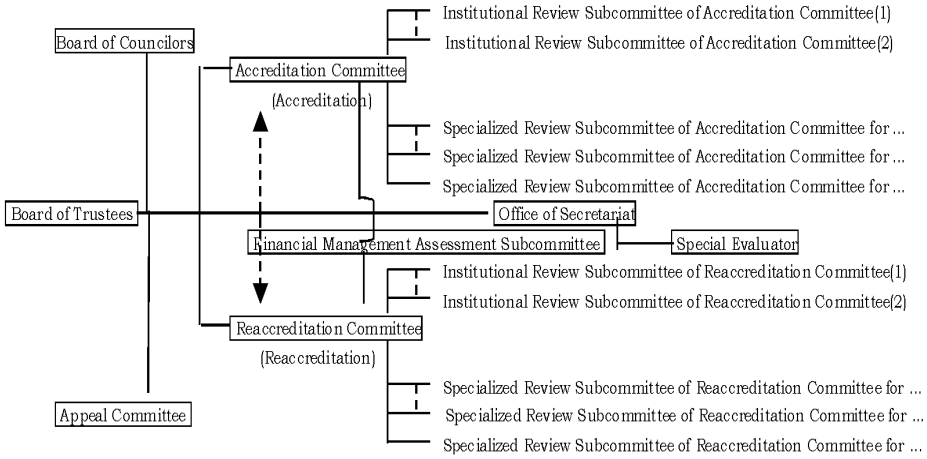
(1) External evaluation is carried out by an outside expert contracted by a university or the academic unit of a university. A "third party evaluation" is an evaluation systematically conducted by an independent evaluating agency.

(2) Is used to indicate the categories: prior assessment, intermediate assessment, result assessment, and *ex post facto* assessment used for university evaluation, even though they are normally used for a programme and a project evaluation focusing on when the evaluation shall be undertaken.

* ⊙, ○, ? indicate evaluation / assessment levels as follows.
⊙: mostly applicable;
○: fairly applicable;
?: partly applicable.

*Source:* The authors.

Figure 1. Organizational chart for the university evaluation system




| | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Institutional Review Subcommittee of Accreditation Committee | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 6 | 6 | 10 |
| Specialized Review Subcommittee of Accreditation Committee | 10 | 6 | 16 | 15 | 21 | 27 | 18 |
| Institutional Review Subcommittee of Reaccreditation Committee | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 6 | 6 | 10 |
| Specialized Review Subcommittee of Reaccreditation Committee | 13 | 19 | 16 | 13 | 40 | 38 | 24 |

*Source:* The authors.

Given that the structure of the main self-evaluation report is dictated by JUAA and that the evaluation team is constituted by JUAA, there can be little doubt that the evaluation is an independent or third party evaluation. The peer review method, however, is not considered a third party evaluation, because it is an assessment made by a formal member of JUAA. Since members may have a vested interest in a university that is undergoing assessment, they are omitted from that particular assessment team to preserve the objectivity of the assessment. In 2002, JUAA also recruited a certified public accountant to the University Finance Assessment Subcommittee, part of the structure of the system of University evaluation. From now on, JUAA will attempt to give more substance to third party evaluations by taking on further members from either private or public organizations.

### *2.3. Duration of JUAA University Assessment*

To become a formal member of JUAA, universities must have been in operation for at least four years. Universities that become formal members after passing the accreditation evaluation need to be reaccredited regularly (the first re-accreditation being due after five years and then every seven

years). In Japan, once the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology has authorized a university to operate, it is permitted to function as a social organization, to engage in research, and to conduct higher education activities, if there is no valid reason to prevent it from doing so. Between the initial authorization and the formal accreditation, there is an intermediate assessment. Since, for either accreditation or reaccreditation, a university is always evaluated as an operational higher education institution, intermediate assessments are common.

### *2.4. The Results and Consequences of Institutional Evaluation*

If an intermediate assessment of an institution reveals that an activity is not meeting the expected standards, or is not making significant progress towards improvement, the activity in question will be ordered to stop. An intermediate assessment is both a summative and formative evaluation. A summative evaluation is designed to demonstrate uniform results. The results of the formative evaluation are used to improve structure and activities by analyzing the perspectives and circumstances of the activity and by pointing out where improvements need to be made.

JUAA *accreditation* has remarkably similar characteristics to that of a summative evaluation because it aims at encouraging general improvement and innovation in university education and research in all institutions through recommendations and advice. On the other hand, *reaccreditation* is similar to a "formative evaluation" because its main aim is to assist the individual institutions with improvement and innovation.

## 3. SUMMARY OF THE MAIN SELF-EVALUATION ITEMS

Universities that apply for JUAA evaluation need to first assemble a self-evaluation report, using the key self-evaluation items that have been established by JUAA, which are different for undergraduate and graduate academic programmes, and which have to be reported separately. There are thirteen key evaluation items for undergraduate units and eleven key items for graduate units, some of which are broken down into sub-categories. Each key evaluation item contains a number of detailed elements which have to be addressed. The total number of detailed elements is 205 for undergraduate units and 143 for graduate units. These individual elements are further categorized as essential elements (A), highly recommended elements (B), or optional elements (C) (see Tables 2 and 3).

Table 2. Breakdown of the thirteen key self-evaluation items for undergraduate units

| Key evaluation item | | Mission, purpose, and educational goals of the undergraduate academic unit | Education and research structure | Content and methodology of education and research | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Contents of education and research | Educational methodology and innovation | Correspondence College |
| Number of detailed items | Group A | 1 | 1 | 4 | 5 | 1 |
| | Group B | 1 | 0 | 14 | 15 | 0 |
| | Group C | 3 | 1 | 10 | 15 | 0 |
| Subtotal | | - | - | 28 | 35 | 1 |
| Total detailed elements | | 5 | 2 | 64 | | |

| Key evaluation item | | Situation concerning acceptance of students | Personnel structure for education and research | Facilities and equipment | Library and library documents - learning information resources | Contribution to society |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of detailed items | Group A | 5 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| | Group B | 5 | 8 | 7 | 1 | 3 |
| | Group C | 13 | 6 | 4 | 0 | 9 |
| Total detailed elements | | 23 | 19 | 12 | 4 | 12 |

| Key evaluation item | | Student services | Administration and management | Finance | Office management structure | Self-evaluation | Grand total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of detailed items | Group A | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 39 |
| | Group B | 2 | 7 | 6 | 6 | 2 | 77 |
| | Group C | 12 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 6 | 89 |
| Total detailed elements | | 18 | 15 | 10 | 10 | 11 | 205 |

*Source:* The authors.

Table 3. Breakdown of the eleven key self-evaluation items for graduate units

| Key evaluation item | | Mission, purpose, and educational goals of the graduate academic unit | Contents and methods of education and research and their conditions | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Contents of education and research | Education and research methodology and innovation | Inter-and intra-national exchange of education and research | Award of academic degrees verification of completion of curriculum | Graduate correspondence university |
| Number of detailed items | Group A | 1 | 6 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| | Group B | 1 | 14 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| | Group C | 0 | 10 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 0 |
| Subtotal | | - | 30 | 10 | 6 | 6 | 1 |
| Total detailed elements | | 2 | 53 | | | | |

| Key evaluation item | | Situation concerning acceptance of students | Personnel structure for education and research | Maintenance of research | | Facilities, equipment and information infrastructure | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Activity and research system | | | |
| | | | | Research activities | Maintenance of research system | Facilities, equipment | Information infrastructure |
| Number of detailed items | Group A | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| | Group B | 3 | 4 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| | Group C | 3 | 6 | 6 | 8 | 6 | 2 |
| Subtotal | | - | - | 8 | 12 | 10 | 4 |
| Total detailed elements | | 9 | 12 | 20 | | 14 | |

| Key evaluation item | | Contribution to society | Student services | Administration and management | Office management structure | Self-evaluation | Grand total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of detailed items | Group A | 0 | 3 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 29 |
| | Group B | 1 | 0 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 42 |
| | Group C | 14 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 72 |
| | | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Total detailed elements | | 15 | 6 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 143 |

*Source:* The authors.

### *3.1. Undergraduate Academic Units*

#### 3.1.1. KEY EVALUATION ITEMS

a. Mission, purpose, educational goals
b. Educational and research structure
c. Contents, methods, and conditions of education and research

#### 3.1.2. CONTENTS OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH

*GROUP A (ESSENTIAL)*

– Relationship between undergraduate curricula and the mission and purposes of the undergraduate units;

– Appropriateness of credits for each course with respect to the course characteristics, contents, and size of classes.

*GROUP B (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED):*

– Appropriateness of educational care for a smooth transition from secondary school education to higher education;
– Links between secondary school and university curricula;
– Allocation, appropriateness, and adequacy of required and elective courses in the curriculum;
– Appropriateness of credit transfer by universities that undertake such programmes with domestic and/or foreign universities;
– Appropriateness of credit qualifying processes by a university that recognizes student credits earned at any educational institutions, except universities, and credits earned prior to admission;
– Ratio of credits granted by the undergraduate unit to the credits required for graduation;
– Courses and ratio of courses taught by employed faculty members to all courses;
– Situations involving contract faculty members; their links to the educational process;
– Appropriateness of programmes and measures taken for lifelong learning.

*GROUP C (OPTIONAL)*

– Extent to which general education (if appropriate) addresses globalization, improves cultural awareness, and/or strengthens communication skills;
– Applicant ratios, number of successful applicants, and ratio of successful applicants in an undergraduate unit that includes curricula associated with national licensure examinations;
– Curricula and national licensure examinations;
– Appropriateness of internship programmes and their fulfillment by the undergraduate academic unit;
– Appropriateness of credit programme for volunteer activities and its fulfillment by the undergraduate academic unit;
– Agreement and curricular conditions of student exchange programmes with foreign universities;
– Appropriateness of educational aid to developing countries by a university if it offers such aid;
– Curricular programming and educational guidance for adult students, students studying abroad, and returned students.

### 3.1.3. Educational Methodology and Its Development

*Group A (Essential)*

- Appropriateness of course registration, upper limits specification, and its implementation;
- Appropriateness of assessment methods and standards;
- Appropriateness of student course guides;
- Effectiveness of programmes to promote student learning motivation and to improve faculty teaching abilities;
- Appropriateness of syllabi.

*Group B (Highly Recommended)*

- Appropriateness of methods employed for educational outcome assessment;
- Agreement among faculty members on educational outcomes, outcome achievements, and their assessment methods;
- System for reviewing functional efficiency in educational outcomes assessment;
- Placement of graduates;
- Results of the assessment system;
- Appropriateness of assessment methods to ensure quality of graduate students and yearly achievement;
- Office hours system;
- Appropriateness of educational care and guidance for students who need to repeat certain courses or examinations;
- Appropriateness of systematic measures taken for faculty development;
- Student course evaluation system;
- Appropriateness, adequacy, and educational effectiveness of class types and educational methods;
- Multimedia education programmes and appropriateness of their delivery;
- Appropriateness of distance learning programmes and of the process for recognizing credits earned through distance learning.

*Group C (Optional)*

- System for developing educational outcomes assessment;
- System of reviewing the efficiency of methods for educational outcomes assessment;
- System for educational improvement based upon results of educational outcomes assessment;
- Acknowledgement of human resources acknowledged at home and at international levels;
- System to stimulate the motivation of student learning;
- Adviser systems to ensure constant academic guidance;

– Appropriateness of educational care and guidance for course students and auditors;
– Appropriateness of procedures for continuing implementation of faculty development;
– Student satisfaction survey methods;
– Assessment programmes by alumni of curricula and educational methodology when they were students;
– Assessment programmes by employers of actual results of graduates;
– Appropriateness of the system and its use for reflecting results of educational evaluation directly to improvements in education;
– Appropriateness of four-year degree programmes.

3.1.4. CORRESPONDENCE COLLEGES

*GROUP A (ESSENTIAL)*

– Suitability of curricula, educational methods, credits, academic degrees, and appropriateness of requirements for them

*GROUP B (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED)*

*GROUP C (OPTIONAL)*

3.1.5. CONDITIONS FOR STUDENT ADMITTANCE

a. Personnel structure for education and research
b. Facilities and equipment
c. Library and learning information resources
d. Contribution to society
e. Student services
f. Administration and management
g. Finance
h. Office management structure
i. Self-evaluation

*3.2. Graduate Academic Units*

3.2.1. KEY EVALUATION ITEMS

a. Mission, purpose, educational goals
b. Contents and methods of education and research
    1. Contents of education and research
    2. Education and research methods and their innovation
    3. Inter- and intra- national exchange of education and research

*GROUP A (ESSENTIAL)*

*GROUP B (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED)*

– Appropriateness of fundamental plans for internationalization and expansion of international academic exchanges;

– Appropriateness of programmes to promote academic exchanges at international level.

*GROUP C (OPTIONAL)*

– System for accepting foreign faculty members;
– Achievement and appropriateness of published research.

1. Awarding of academic degrees – verification of completion of curriculum
2. Graduate correspondence
   a. Situation concerning acceptance of students
   b. Personnel structure for education and research
   c. Maintenance of research

3.2.2. RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

*GROUP A (ESSENTIAL)*

– Publication of research papers
– Relationship between laboratories affiliated to the university and its graduate academic unit

*GROUP B (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED)*

*GROUP C (OPTIONAL)*

– Activities of academic societies (both domestic and international);
– Research activities that are recognized as research fields leading the graduate academic unit;
– Research programme development supported by research funds;
– Participation in international co-research programmes;
– Establishment of research centers abroad;
– Relationship between co-operative laboratories and graduate units.

3.2.3. MAINTENANCE OF THE RESEARCH SYSTEM

*GROUP A (ESSENTIAL)*

– Appropriateness of individual costs and travel costs for research;
– Preparation of study rooms for faculty (including the offices of professors);
– Suitability of research time allocated to faculty members.

*GROUP B (HIGHLY RECOMMENDED)*

*GROUP C (OPTIONAL)*

– Suitability of joint research funding and its execution;
– Application and approval status for Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research and other research grant foundations;

- Appropriateness of dual support systems;
- Utilization of mobile research academic units and mobile research personnel units;
- Appropriateness of procedures for making research organizations flexible, such as large field grouping units;
- Appropriateness of procedures for supporting publication of research papers and research results;
- Procedures for dispatch and receipt of research results to and from universities/laboratories, domestically and internationally;
- Appropriateness of internal rules on activities that are ethically self-regulated for research and experiments;
- Appropriateness of internal committee control on medical activities and animal experimentation from an ethical point of view.

3.2.4. FACILITIES, EQUIPMENT, AND INFORMATION INFRASTRUCTURE

*a*. Facilities, equipment;
*b*. Information infrastructure.

1. Contribution to society
2. Student services
3. Administration and management
4. Office management structure
5. Self-evaluation

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

On 5 August 2002, the Central Educational Council (established under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology) published three reports regarding higher education. One of these, "A New System Organization for University Quality Assurance", formed the basis for institutional approval procedures and university evaluation.

The report recommended that the current national regulations for institutional approval of universities be revised so as to make them more flexible, that audit programmes by third parties be implemented for the constant evaluation of universities after their establishment, that they later be assured by both national and private systems, that the national government should recognize and register "third party evaluation agencies" that satisfy specified requirements, and that universities should be audited through "institutional evaluation" by the above-registered agencies.

As there are few signs of improvement in the harsh domestic and international economic environments, and given that competition for government funding in Japan will continue to be fierce, reforms in administration, finance, and regulation are essential.

JUAA has had fifty-five years of experience in the field of university evaluation and is committed to promoting the high standards and continuous development of universities through its new evaluation system, beginning in 2003. To guarantee the quality of higher education, both

domestically and globally endeavours will be made in Japan to fully conform to changes in the organization, process, and self-evaluation criteria of universities.

# VII. Current Debates on Standards, Criteria, and Indicators Used in Programme Accreditation and Quality Assessment in Japan

*AKIYOSHI YONEZAWA*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Japan has one of the largest higher education systems in the world. It hosts more than 4,500 higher education institutions with highly diversified characteristics. The country has 686 universities (99 national, 75 local and public, and 512 private), 541 junior colleges (of which 475 are private) offering two-year course programmes, and more than 3,500 other higher/tertiary education institutions. Among these institutions, the conditions of resources, the standards of academic achievement at input/output level, and the characteristics of educational programmes are diverse.

The interests reflected by and concerned with higher education institutions are also numerous. The latter belong to different associations according to their type and institutional specialization. All of the national universities that are directly operated by the national government belong to the Japan Association of National Universities (JANU). Within JANU, there are diversified interests, especially among the top universities, including the former "imperial" universities, and the newer and smaller institutions. The local public universities, operated by the local governments, constitute the Japan Association of Municipal and Prefectural Colleges and Universities (JAMCU). Private universities are mainly divided into two associations; namely, the Japan Association of Private Colleges and Universities (JAPCU), which is made up mainly of older institutions, and the Association of Private Universities of Japan (APUJ), which is made up of newer or smaller institutions. The former association has a strong orientation to obtaining equal status for its members with public universities and to improving quality, while the latter, attracting the majority of private institutions, is much more oriented toward provision of mass higher education.

Private junior colleges form the Association of Private Junior Colleges in Japan (APJC), while the public junior colleges also have their own association. Most of the operational bodies of private junior colleges are the same as those of private universities. The Educational Promotion Group of Vocational Schools (EPGVS), an association of specialized training

colleges,* also has interests that are different from those of the universities or the junior colleges. These diversified interests and group structures have made it difficult to assure the quality of educational programmes using a common set of indicators across higher/tertiary education in Japan.

There are also different interests among diversified fields. Academics and professionals in the field of engineering are highly active in setting up international standards for their engineering education programmes. A professional accreditation body, called the Japan Accreditation Board for Engineering Education (JABEE), aims at joining the Washington Accord, an international network for quality assurance in engineering education. Stakeholders in the field of the natural and medical sciences are basically committed to setting up an international quality assurance framework for their education programmes. However, different interests exist among applied sciences and basic sciences as well as between traditional sciences and the emerging sciences.

Academics in the fields of the humanities and the social sciences sometimes have varying views. Economists, in general, are used to drawing upon the international publication database when assessing academic performance and have a sense of the international quality of education. Some faculty members, such as those involved in legal studies, are strongly familiarized with quality assurance in the logic of Japanese contexts. In some fields, such as Japanese studies or Japanese literature, there are vigorous debates with a view to establishing "identity" as the Japanese way to education and research in the Japanese language.

Indicators are the simplified way of conveying information that contains a value: short or long, good or bad, etc. If different stakeholders have different values, the way of setting indicators may influence a power balance among diverse parties. On the other hand, data accumulation on higher/tertiary education institutions is rapid and drastic at system-level, institutional-level, and at personal level, as well.

This article discusses the current context of Japanese higher/tertiary education and the challenges it is facing to develop a decentralized system of indicators, one that has been planned by the National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation (NIAD-UE).

## 2. DEVELOPMENT OF ACCREDITATION/EVALUATION SYSTEMS

The first accreditation system in Japan was initiated in 1947 by the Japan University Accreditation Association (JUAA). JUAA set the "University Standard" that was used as the official standard for the operation of universities. The JUAA itself is an association that approximates the model of the regional accreditation associations of the United States. For this

* Specialized training colleges provide short cycle vocational education, which may lead to a diploma called the *Senmonshi*.

reason, the indicators or data required for accreditation are basically similar to those of the American accreditation associations.

In 1957, the Ministry of Education (MEXT) set up "Standards for University Establishments". By this action, the legal power of university accreditation was transferred to the state government. MEXT standards were linked strongly to the idea of input and process-based accreditation, such as the number of credits and the quantity and structure of general education. In 1991, the Standards for University Establishment were deregulated in order to assure institutional autonomy for curriculum development. At the same time, the universities were required to "make efforts" in regard to self-monitoring and self-evaluation, in order to demonstrate their accountability to society. In the 1990s, JUAA began the "mutual evaluation" scheme, which is a process for the re-accreditation of already accredited universities. In 1998, the University Council, an advisory committee for higher education policies, set up by the Ministry of Education, recommended the establishment of "third-party" evaluation, an external quality assessment system by bodies that are independent both of universities and of government. In 2000, NIAD-UE began a pilot evaluation scheme for national universities (Yonezawa, 2003). In 2002, local public universities joined the NIAD-UE evaluation scheme.

## 3. ONGOING UNIVERSITY REFORM AND THE QUALITY ASSURANCE SCHEME

Japanese national universities have organizational structures that are similar to those of continental European universities, namely, a combination of a high degree of academic autonomy at the chair/faculty level and highly centralized administrative bureaux as "branches" of the government. In the discussion about the restructuring of public services under the framework of the so-called new public management, the national university sector became a target of anticipated reform. Its status would be changed from being a government bureau to recognition of the various universities as "Independent Administrative Corporations".

Given the unique nature of academic activities, "special treatment" for the national universities was introduced into the framework of "Independent Administrative Corporations". As of 2004, all the national universities will be operated as "National University Corporations" (NUCs) that will be independent of the government, however retaining their statuses as public organizations (Study Team, 2002). "Mid-term plans", based on the idea of contracts between government and universities, and financial distribution, based on performance over six-year cycles, will be introduced under the NUC scheme. Most of the local public universities follow the NUC scheme. The National University Corporation Evaluation Committee (NUCEC) will be established inside MEXT, while NIAD-UE will be requested to implement the evaluation of educational and research activities as an "expert agency" for university evaluation.

In 2002, input-based "Standards for University Establishment" were deregulated through amendment to the School Education Law. The amended law now provides for the introduction of the new quality assurance system. Under the new system, the national government will authorize "third-party evaluation organizations" for the implementation of accreditation and quality assurance. Currently, three or four evaluation organizations, including JUAA and NIAD, are planning to apply to be part of this new scheme.

There is strong national interest in setting-up an international network for the quality assurance of higher education in Japan (Kimura and Yonezawa, 2003). The Central Council for Education (CCE) has recommended the development of such a network. There are arguments that the higher education market in Japan should be "opened up" to foreign higher education service providers. The demand for more internationalized (or English-based) education programmes from a segment of students and families is also increasing. E-learning, diploma-mills, and other emerging issues, all bearing on the quality assurance of imported educational services, will be given priority on the policy agenda. Some Japanese universities wish to "export" their educational services. The government has assumed some "responsibility" to assure the quality of these educational programmes, especially in the cases of public providers. The increase in the numbers of overseas students, mainly from Asia, has raised the issues of diploma recognition and degrees awarded in foreign countries.

Policies that foster the emergence of "world-class research universities" are also tightly linked to the issues of quality assurance in higher education. In 2001, the Japanese government published its idea of fostering around thirty top universities as institutions to engage in "world class" research. The proposal led to a controversial discussion, partly because of the fear of budget cuts and of the possible labeling of the other universities as "non-research" institutions.

MEXT clarified its policy. It would not select "institutions", but would select research units called "Centers of Excellence in the Twenty-First Century" (COE21). However, the number of COEs an institution receives became a clear indicator of its research performance. Under this scheme, public and private institutions compete under the same rules. There is strong pressure on the part of the Ministry to use performance indicators and strong resistance on the part of the academic community. In the final elaboration of the scheme, the evaluation, based on peer review and review by stakeholders, became a decisive tool for selection. However, various data concerning research activities and post graduate education were indeed collected, partly under the official formula set by the scheme, and partly through the voluntary provision of data at institutional level.

## 4. DATA ACCUMULATION

University managers gathered and utilized various quantitative and qualitative indicators and information not only for internal selection of COE21 research units, but also for other managerial purposes, such as grasping the academic performance of each unit. Intensive discussions took place among academics, experts, and administrators on the use of performance indicators, common standards, and criteria based on the peer review system. Indicators of input factors have been used for a long time in the process of authorizing new establishments. Standards set by MEXT or the JUAA accreditation schemes have used indicators of the quantity and quality of faculties, space, facilities and equipment, finance, curriculum, etc.

There was no clear system for monitoring the continuing assurance of quality; however, most higher education institutions had frequently received instructions in regard to monitoring from the Council for University Establishment (CUE) relative to the expansion and the restructuring of educational programmes. No sanctions have been imposed on institutions not receiving accreditation from JUAA. On the other hand, journals, in the 1990s, began to develop multi-indicator-based rankings (Yonezawa *et al.*, 2002). This action by the journals strengthened the idea of the assessment of higher education performance by means of multiple indicators.

NIAD-UE began in 2000 to engage in university evaluation, based on the peer and expert review system, stressing "evaluation according to the aims and purposes" set by institutions themselves. NIAD-UE stressed the importance of the value of diversity in the characteristics of higher education. However, evaluation based on different aims and purposes means that it is impossible to compare different institutions with different purposes. This intensive but not "useful" evaluation scheme caused some confusion among stakeholders, including the national government, which was interested in fund allocation based on performance.

Increasing governmental pressure for the introduction of "performance funding" may stimulate the further development of performance indicators. Some academics are supportive of performance-based funding at national level and within the institutions as well. Experts on indicators, including those linked to publication databases and citation indexes, are questioning the reliability and are citing possible negative side-effects of an over-reliance on quantitative indicators. However, there is high demand on the part of society for comprehensive statements of university performance that can be understood at a glance. Young researchers and certain top researchers are also supportive of the use of "objective" indicators with a view to obtaining transparent evaluations or to breaking the "seniority" system or the practice of "boss domination" in the academic world.

The accumulation of information by higher education institutions and the evaluation organizations is proceeding apace.

The introduction of the self-monitoring and self-evaluation scheme in 1991 stimulated the development of institutional data and information on institutional activities. However, such data are not standardized, and benchmarking has been *ad hoc*. The COE21 scheme stimulated the use of performance indicators at institutional level. The development of information technology and the increasing requirement that information on performance be presented in certain ways has led to systems for the daily reporting of the activities of faculty members and students. Such highly decentralized accumulation of information and data is confronted with difficulties, given the standardization of data and indicators. There are certain requirements for national or international level benchmarking exercises using common data-sets. JUAA has attempted to set up a relatively standardized set of items (Ohnami and Hokama, 2003).

NIAD is also trying to establish a database of university activities with a view to supporting the implementation of university evaluation and providing information on university activities. The NIAD scheme is much more oriented toward the elaboration of databases by collaboration with universities that have already developed their own databases. The policy is to provide a data-set open to the public. Institutions, researchers, and other stakeholders may analyze and develop various indicators that are suitable for their purposes, including institutional research, quality assessment, and assessment of performance.

Setting a common database framework among different evaluation or information organizations or, at least, sharing information is desirable. Network or regular meetings among evaluation organizations will be developed. Efforts to reduce the costs of data accumulation by institutions must be engaged.

## 5. CONCLUSION – A DECENTRALIZED APPROACH TO INDICATORS

The higher education system in Japan is highly diversified and highly sensitive in regard to rankings, standardization, and the mechanical use of indicators for performance funding. Institutions, newspapers, and various organizations have already developed data and information sets in a highly decentralized style.

The development of information technology and of databases is unsystematic and *ad-hoc* in nature. Neither the Government or anyone else can "control" developments. However, the State may "feel a responsibility" to provide an official common data-set for domestic and international stakeholders. The involvement of higher education institutions is essential, even in a development process involving an international common data/indicator framework.

Indicators are not "objective" in nature, and certain values or visions are included in them. How to set common data-sets should be discussed intensively and cautiously through the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders, especially the users of the higher education institutions.

*REFERENCES*

KIMURA, T., and YONEZAWA, A. "Quality Assurance and Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education in Japan, A Country Paper for OECD/CERI", *in*, K. MOMII, ed., *International Quality Assurance, Accreditation, and Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education in Japan*. Paris: OECD-CERI, 2004.

OHNAMI, M., and HOKAMA, H. "The Japanese University Evaluation System and Main Self-Evaluation Criteria of the Japan University Accreditation Association (JUAA)", *in*, L. VLASCEANU and L. C. BARROWS, eds. *Indicators for Institutional and Programme Accreditation in Higher/Tertiary Education*. Bucharest: UNESCO-CEPES, 2004, pp. 103-115.

STUDY TEAM CONCERNING THE TRANSFORMATION OF NATIONAL UNIVERSITIES INTO INDEPENDENT ADMINISTRATIVE CORPORATIONS. *A New Image of National University Corporations*. Tokyo: MEXT, 2002.

YONEZAWA, A. "The New Quality Assurance System for Japanese Higher Education: Its Social Background, Tasks, and Future", *Research in University Evaluation* 2 (2003): 22-34.

YONEZAWA, A., NAKATSUI, I., and KOBAYASHI, T. "University Rankings in Japan", *Higher Education in Europe* 27 4 (2002): 373-382.

# VIII. Standards and Indicators in Institutional and Programme Accreditation in Higher Education: A Conceptual Framework and a Proposal

*DIRK VAN DAMME*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### *1.1. Purpose and Structure of This Study*

The main ambition of this study is to provide an analytical, and, to a certain extent, a comparative review of standards and indicators for quality assurance and accreditation in higher education. It does not provide an extensive comparative overview of the standards and indicators that are used in the many existing quality assurance and accreditation systems in all regions of the world. Rather, it builds further on the regional analyses and illustrative case studies, written by other experts, to map and to analyze some of the crucial issues at stake.

A second ambition of this study is to move from a mapping and analytical perspective to a more programmatic and policy-oriented level of discourse. The idea is to propose a short list of quality assurance and accreditation standards and indicators (mainly) for programme accreditation, which is comprehensive, minimal, and communality-oriented. The standards and indicators so listed should be those that are considered to be necessary in many existing systems and schemes around the world and on which agreement seems feasible among international actors and stakeholders as a kind of hard core.

A first task is to provide and explore certain basic definitions. Thus, the quality definitions and approaches at work in quality assurance and accreditation systems over time and in various parts of the world are reviewed. Figure 1 graphically integrates the various quality approaches in one conceptual framework. Section 2 discusses certain important aspects of the contemporary development of quality assurance and accreditation, including the drive towards minimalist but effective quality assurance systems, the emergence of accreditation systems, and the internationalization of quality assurance and accreditation. The author then proposes a multi-level model in which the various levels going from the internal quality culture to the supra-national (meta-) accreditation systems have their specific place and role. Figure 2 graphically illustrates this multi-level model.

The fifth section of the study opens with a discussion of standards and indicators for quality assurance and accreditation. After a consideration of

certain issues regarding the use and the quantity of standards and indicators in quality assurance and accreditation, the author proposes the CIPOF-model, including a list of standards and indicators that are necessary, in his approach, to quality assurance and accreditation. The final paragraph of the section considers the relative weight and relevance of each of the categories of standards and indicators in the CIPOF-model regarding the various levels of the multi-level model mentioned above. A concluding section closes the study.

### *1.2. A Note on Definitions*

Despite the growth of evaluation practices and systems in higher education and the increasing public interest in quality issues, a generally accepted set of concepts and definitions suitable for use at international level does not exist. Concepts and terms such as quality assurance, assessment, accreditation, validation, licensure, certification, approval, evaluation, etc., are used in divergent and often inconsistent ways. Even within particular systems, such as those of the United States and of Europe, there is great confusion as to the exact meaning of the concepts used. Conceptual differences are even greater among various regions of the world.

In order to facilitate communication, exchanges of opinions, and critical debate, an agreement is needed on a basic set of terms and definitions. For this reason, certain organizations have embarked on the development of glossaries[1]. Not surprisingly, also, the regional papers produced in the framework of this project apply terms and concepts in different ways. For the purposes of this study, a basic set of definitions is necessary. The author has attempted to adhere to the definitions developed by the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), a professional association in this field, to the proposal of Knight and van Damme (2004), and to *Quality Assurance and Accreditation: A Glossary of Basic Terms and Definitions* (Bucharest: UNESCO-CEPES, 2004). The non-European reader will excuse the author for an unavoidable European bias in the following definitions.

*Evaluation* is, in the author's view, a very broad, generic term that refers to a broad range of practices and procedures whereby the performances of students, professors, programmes, departments, institutions, and even entire systems are measured and appreciated. Evaluation is not necessarily focused on quality, but can have other dimensions of performance in focus. Because of its broad and general nature, this concept will not be frequently used.

[1] Associations and organizations, such as the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), INQAAHE, UNESCO, etc., have embarked on similar attempts to develop sets of definitions suitable for international debate. Knight and van Damme (2003) have tried to formulate a set of very elementary definitions for the OECD-CERI project on international quality assurance.

*Quality assurance* is referred to as the processes and schemes that have the objective of assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, and maintaining and/or improving quality in higher education institutions and/or programmes. These can have the functions both of accountability (including information provision) and improvement.

Many systems make a distinction between *internal quality assurance* and *external quality measures*. Internal quality assurance refers to the intra-institutional practices used to monitor and improve the quality of its processes, both institutional and programme-oriented. These practices are completely the responsibility of the institution or department. The term, *quality culture*, refers to the integration of internal quality assurance procedures into the organizational culture and management systems of the institution, so that its members share a core set of academic quality values and approaches. E*xternal quality assurance* concerns the inter- or supra-institutional schemes of assessing, maintaining, and improving the quality of institutions and/or programmes. These practices fall under the responsibility of a specialized agency that has the authority and the legitimacy to engage in such activities. In the American system, the term, quality assurance, is narrowed to those review processes, executed by independent bodies, of an institution or programme to determine and "assure" that standards are maintained and enhanced.

Related to the internal-external dimension, the ownership of quality assurance schemes is of crucial importance. Theoretically, two poles of a continuum can be distinguished, with, on the one hand, "self-regulatory" systems of quality assurance, whereby the ownership lies with the institutions – individually or collectively – and systems of quality assurance whereby an outside agency is entrusted with a capacity of quality control. In its purest mode, the last case can be labeled as *inspection*, but, in practice, even such evaluation agencies seek to establish trust in the higher education community.

By *quality assessment* or *quality review*, the actual processes of reviewing, measuring, and judging quality aspects in programmes or institutions are indicated. In most systems of external quality assurance, the process of assessment of quality involves a combination of self-assessment and assessment by peer review and site visits. The term, *quality audit*, is appropriate when the assessment is focused on the institution or programme (internal) quality assurance procedures or on the overall (internal and external) quality assurance procedures of the system.

*Accreditation* is defined here as a particular form of quality assurance, with, as the distinctive characteristic, that it leads to the formal approval of an institution or programme that has been found by a legitimate body to meet predetermined and agreed upon standards, eventually resulting in an accredited status granted to that provider or programme by responsible authorities. For international purposes, it is not very meaningful to distinguish accreditation from (state) "approval" or "certification", as is

done in the American system.[2] Accreditation can be awarded by an external quality assurance agency, such as in the United States, or both can be separated, as in the Dutch-Flemish accreditation system. As in the Australian system, accreditation can also be given by the institution itself, which is then "self-accrediting". It is important to narrow the use of the term, accreditation, and to separate it conceptually both from the quality assurance activities that can feed into the accreditation decision-making processes, and the consequences or rights resulting from an accredited status. Furthermore, the following conditions have to be fulfilled in order to use the term consistently:

- It is a formal decision of a binary ("yes"/"no") or ternary (adding "conditional") nature;
- It is based on predetermined standards or requirements, used as benchmarks, to which the relative position of assessed quality aspects of an institution or programme is determined;
- The formal decision has a time-limited validity.

The body or agency that has the power to accredit institutions or programmes can itself be subject to such schemes or procedures, as is the case in Germany, for example. For international use, it is appropriate, then, to speak of *meta-accreditation*, for which, in the United States, the term, *recognition*, is used.

In many systems, quality assurance and accreditation are closely linked to various kinds of consequences, such as the capacity to operate and to provide educational services, the capacity to award officially recognized degrees, or the right to be funded by the state, etc. Accreditation also entails consequences and rights for individuals studying in or graduating from institutions or programmes, such as licensed entry into a profession, the right to financial support, etc. Given the variety of these capacities and rights for institutions, programmes, and students deriving from quality assurance and accreditation in different higher education systems, specific terms will not be proposed for them.

In general, accreditation implies the use of *standards*, *i.e.*, basic quality requirements and conditions that have to be met by an institution or programme. Standards function as *benchmarks*, *i.e.*, reference points against which the performance of institutions or programmes is checked. Often neglected is that standards also necessitate decision-making *criteria*, *i.e.*, rules which govern the decision-making processes in accreditation that allow determination, for example, of how standards should be weighted, of how many negative marks regarding quality aspects result in refusal of accreditation, etc. The term, *indicators*, is used to denominate specific empirically measurable characteristics of institutions or programmes on which evidence can be collected that allows a

[2] In fact, the American approach to accreditation is close to what is defined here as *quality assurance*, with the American concepts of *approval* or *certification* lying close to what is meant here by accreditation.

determination of whether standards are being met. Usually, each standard is related to a set of indicators, but the same indicator can also be linked to several standards. Additionally, indicators vary from standards in accreditation systems by the fact that only when standards are evaluated as being below certain threshold levels can accreditation be refused. A negative mark at the level of an indicator is generally not sufficient to withhold accreditation.

These concepts have led to the elaboration of a basic terminological framework that allows for a comparative analysis of accreditation systems and their use of standards and indicators.

## 2. CONCEPTS OF AND APPROACHES TO QUALITY

One of the most difficult concepts to define is *quality* itself. Despite the widespread use of the term, a more or less agreed upon definition has not yet materialized. Rather, a multitude of meanings and conceptual confusion are the result. Each definition implies different consequences regarding standards and indicators.

A very common association is, for example, that between the quality and level of difficulty of a programme. Among many higher education leaders, there is a strong tendency to identify quality with the *level* of curricula and course contents, with *level* usually defined as the degree of complexity and weight of the content involved in the curriculum and the seriousness of student testing involved. The notion of quality, then, is very close to *distinctiveness*, *exclusivity*, and *excellence*. Only the best possible standards of excellence are understood as determining the quality concept. One can call this approach the *excellence standards* approach. With regard to indicators, this approach leads to the somehow strange consequence that a programme is viewed as being of better quality the lower the number of successful students is. Also, it drives institutions to selective intake procedures in order to uphold their "quality level".

Partly as a reaction to this conservative and élitist notion of quality, considered inappropriate in a context of mass higher education in a rapidly changing society, a notion of quality has been developed in the quality assurance community that is usually labeled as "fitness for purpose". Today, this definition is the most widely used one. It links quality to the purposes and objectives of an institution or a programme and brings quality assurance procedures to check and to improve the degree to which the actual operation of the institution or programme helps to realize those objectives.

The focus is on the processes at work in an institution or programme and their relative efficiency in achieving the stated objectives. Therefore, it is sometimes also labeled as the *value for money* approach, because of its concentration on the effective use of input and context indicators by the processes involved. Stressing the change realized by the processes, *e.g.*, the teaching and learning processes, between input and output, the label, *value-added approach*, is also used. The prevalence of this notion in the

quality assurance movement of the 1980s and 1990s, in many parts of the world, has stimulated an attention to explicit objectives and process characteristics as quality indicators.

The *fitness for purpose* approach has great attractiveness because of its ability to cope with increasing diversity and change in higher education systems and its concern for the achievement of objectives with the most effective use of resources. It has also led to a growing interest in the process characteristics of institutions and programmes and their complexity. Finally, it is closely linked to an improvement-oriented approach to quality assurance, that is that quality assessment could provide the critical insights and recommendations to stimulate an improvement of the processes at work in institutions and programmes and to induce a more optimal use of resources.

However, the hegemony of the *fitness for purpose* approach seems to be coming to an end. Its focus on the objectives of the institution or programme is sometimes viewed as implying a lack of concern for minimal standards and external expectations. If the focus is on the fitness of processes for the objectives defined by the programme itself in a sovereign way, then there is no check of the fitness *of* the purpose itself in regard to external objectives and expectations.

Two alternative approaches that, despite their different origins, seem to have a great deal in common, are threatening the hegemony of the *fitness for purpose* approach.

The first is closely linked to the emergence of accreditation. In many parts of the world, governments increasingly feel that the relativistic concern with the degree of realization by institutions or programmes of self-defined purposes has given way to a neglect of *standards* in higher education. This feeling, although not often empirically supported, of a decline in standards is a very powerful policy ideology and has driven governments and other stakeholders, such as employers' organizations, to lobby for new forms of regulation. In an increasingly diverse social context and context of higher education systems, accreditation is viewed as a mechanism to protect minimal quality safeguards, called *standards*, in order to reassure the political world and the wider society that, anyhow, basic quality requirements will be met. Against the relativistic stance of the *fitness for purpose* approach, a more absolutist definition of quality as the obligation to meet these basic quality standards is being put forward. Furthermore, the assurance that basic quality is guaranteed has to be provided by agencies independent of the higher education institutions themselves, so that social trust can be secured. This approach, that is closely related to accreditation, can be called the *basic standards* approach.

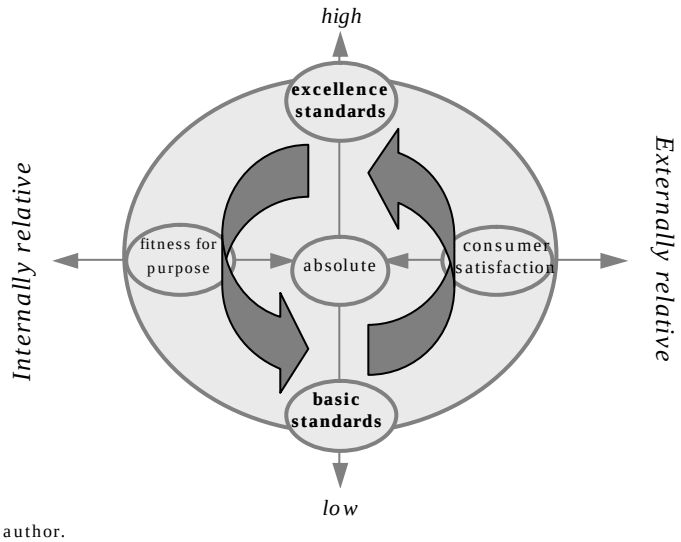
A second approach that criticizes the hegemonic fitness for purpose approach is the *consumer satisfaction* approach. In the context of the growing importance of market forces in higher education, a notion of quality is emerging that stresses the importance of the expectations of direct and indirect consumers, namely students, families, employers, other

stakeholders, and society at large. Quality then becomes synonymous with the ability of an institution or a programme to satisfy the demands of these *customers*. The *fitness for purpose* approach is criticized for encouraging inward-looking attitudes in institutions and for neglecting the legitimate expectations of the outside world. In contrast, the *consumer satisfaction* approach aspires to force institutions and programmes to pay closer attention to these external demands. It is intrinsically linked to other forms of market regulation in higher education. In contrast to the *basic standards* approach, it is less absolutist, but has a relativistic stance towards the external expectations of consumers and other stakeholders.

Each of these four different approaches to quality and quality assurance involves its own definition of the notion of quality and leads to a distinct use of standards and indicators. Hence, it is not possible to give a coherent, abstract definition of quality.

Definitions of academic quality are oscillating among the various dimensions of the model, as illustrated in Figure 1. The 1980s and early 1990s witnessed a movement from *excellence* to *fitness for purpose*. The late 1990s witnessed a correction to this movement, first to the *basic standards* approach and next to more *consumer satisfaction-oriented* approaches. In the near future, a resurgence of the *excellence/standards* approach is expected, as institutions try to distinguish themselves from their competitors and ranking practices become more widespread. Probably, the oscillating movement between *relative* and *absolute* perspectives, between *internally oriented* and *outward looking* approaches, between rather *basic* and more *advanced* notions of quality is something close to perpetual.

Figure 1. Definitions of academic quality




*Source:* The author.

## 3. MAPPING QUALITY DEFINITIONS

All of the above does not necessarily imply that there is no room for a minimal consensus on what is meant by quality. The current situation is not one dominated by relativistic confusion and, ultimately, meaninglessness. There are also signs that a kind of balance is developing, in which each approach plays a part of the game. Quality thus becomes a multi-dimensional and multi-level phenomenon, with various features and colours depending on where one stands and how one looks at the question, but still with a hard core. The specific definition of quality used in a particular context, then, is a discrete integration of the following elements and functions asked of institutions and programmes: *(i)* the guaranteed achievement of minimal standards and benchmarks; (*ii*) the capacity to set objectives in a diversifying context and to achieve them with the given input and context variables; (*iii*) the ability to satisfy the demands and expectations of direct and indirect consumers and stakeholders; (*iv*) the drive to excellence.

## 4. FROM QUALITY ASSURANCE TO ACCREDITATION AND BEYOND

### *4.1. The Emergence of Quality Assurance in Higher Education*

Undoubtedly, quality has been the central concept and one of the major focuses of policy-making of institutions and governments in higher education in the 1990s. With varying intensity, pace, thoroughness, and success, most countries in the world have established systems and procedures of quality assurance in higher education, comparable to those in industry or government, created a number of years earlier. After more than twenty years of development of quality assurance in higher education, one can conclude that the ambitions of some decades ago have, in general, been achieved.

Traditional, informal, academic self-regulation, which, for centuries, was held to be sufficient in guaranteeing quality, has been replaced by explicit, formal, quality assurance mechanisms and related reporting and external accountability procedures.

There are a number of interrelated factors to which one can make reference in order to explain the importance and strengths of the quality assurance movement of the past decades. First, there are the concerns about a potential decline of academic standards against the background of massification in higher education. Second, key stakeholders, especially businesses, professional bodies, and employers' organizations began to lose confidence in the traditional academic quality management capacities of higher education institutions. In their view, the ability of higher education institutions to match their quantitative and qualitative output with the needs of modern workplaces and labour markets in an increasingly competitive and globalizing economy was no longer guaranteed. Third, budget restrictions and fiscal crises led to stagnating or declining government funding per student and pressure to increase

efficiency in public expenditure. Fourth, institutions were expected to meet the demands of an increasingly "evaluative state" for greater public accountability. Fifth, the higher education environment itself became increasingly competitive with the erosion of traditional student recruitment practices, growing mobility of students, increased mobility of professionals and academics, the pressure of private institutions, etc.

In this context, the notion of quality has become a distinguishing labeling tool with potentially powerful effects. One can expect that the international higher education market will become more competitive and more diversified in the future, and that (perceived) quality will become the decisive criterion for students, employers, etc., in making decisions in an increasingly complex market. In some regions of the world, specific considerations add up to these factors. It is clear, for example, that, in Eastern Europe, the development of quality assurance and accreditation schemes has to be understood as a response on the part of the State to the increasingly complex situation caused by the establishment of numerous private higher education institutions. The same is true in the case of a number of developing countries that have established accreditation systems to control the supply side of the higher education market and to safeguard minimal quality standards.

The establishment of quality assurance policies and mechanisms in many countries took place in a political and governmental environment characterized by a changing relationship between the State and the institutional field. Deregulation, increasing institutional autonomy, devolution of authority, a shifting balance between state- and market-oriented elements in the steering of higher education systems, and a growing weight of output-related, performance-based factors in steering and sometimes also in financing, were the decisive features of that changing relationship. In general, there was an exchange between deregulation and institutional autonomy, on the one hand, and quality assurance, accountability, and output control, on the other hand. Both the state and the institutions in most countries considered that this exchange was advantageous.

In conclusion, in the establishment of quality assurance systems, external drivers were probably more important than internal demands. Higher education accepted and developed quality assurance schemes because institutions favoured the trade-off with autonomy. In addition, they preferred the internal quality improvement functions of these schemes much more than their external accountability functions.

### *4.2. Strengths and Weaknesses of Quality Assurance Systems in Higher Education*

Looking back after more than twenty years of quality assurance in higher education, it is not perfectly clear what the general outcomes and results are. Sufficient evidence exists to assert that overall results are positive. In many institutions, quality assurance schemes have provoked a push in the

quality of programmes and processes and in the understanding of the importance of quality. The high level of trust that higher education enjoys from the general public – if not always from the political system – testifies that fears of diminishing public confidence in the context of massification have been averted by the development of formal quality assurance systems. Although they do not yet produce the levels of transparency that some observers seem to regard as necessary in a more market-oriented system – a need that in some countries is satisfied by different kinds of rankings – formal quality assurance systems produce sufficient guarantees that overall quality levels are adequately monitored and defective programme or institutions are corrected or removed from the system. How much these rankings are based on, or related to, existing quality assurance procedures is a question with no clear answer. They seem to follow parallel tracks.

However, in many cases, the establishment of quality assurance schemes was not mirrored by the development of a real internal quality culture within the institutions. The informal internal academic quality control systems, prevalent in the age of élite universities, is vanishing, and, in many cases, they have not yet been replaced by strong internal systems adjusted to the new realities and environments. In many institutions, there is still a relatively high tolerance for poor quality. It still seems to be the case that quality assurance is perceived as an externally imposed phenomenon, reluctantly accepted by academics who experience it as a loss of professional autonomy and academic freedom. There are indications that, in the power game regarding quality and involving the three communities involved, namely the higher education institutions, the quality assurance agencies, and the State and other stakeholders, there is less and less room for consensus.

In current debates on quality assurance in higher education, a number of criticisms are being voiced that seem to indicate that the issue of quality is again at a kind of turning-point. The drawbacks and weaknesses of present-day quality assurance arrangements in higher education, most commonly mentioned, can be summarized in the following way:

- *Issues of cost, bureaucratic overload, and various other ways in which quality assurance imposes a burden on higher education institutions and programmes*. In particular, higher education institutions themselves increasingly make an issue of the high burden quality assurance arrangements impose on their internal functioning and resources. As Sursock (2004, pp. 65-76 in this volume) demonstrates, quality fatigue and resistance to increased burdens heavily influence the contemporary stance of institutions towards quality assurance. There is a need for light, but highly efficient, quality assurance procedures having a minimal cost and the smallest possible impact on institutional autonomy.
- *Critical questions regarding the benchmarking of standards, the self-referential nature of peer-review methods, the independent nature of*

*review processes, the opportunities left for window-dressing and deceptive practices on the part of institutions, and the critical nature of quality statements resulting from quality assessments*. These questions have in common that they express reservations about the external trustworthiness of quality assurance arrangements and their ability to satisfy the public and political demands for transparency and accountability.

- *Issues resulting from the rather vague connection between institutional quality and its regulatory consequences (funding, for example).* In most countries, external quality assurance and accreditation is not explicitly linked to public regulation, even though many contemporary policy discourses view quality as the main regulatory criterion in future higher education systems.
- *Observations about the conservative nature of quality assurance systems, imposing particular models, certain canonized curricula and contents, as well as established delivery modes*. Quality assurance systems are criticized for having a homogenizing impact on the higher education system, for not taking into account increasing diversity in higher education institutions, curricula, and delivery modes, such as distance education, and for jeopardizing innovation.

Looking at the weight and emotional load of debates on the issue, it seems that in many parts of the world a balanced agreement, on the basis of which the development of quality assurance could take off, is being increasingly challenged.

### *4.3. The Expansion of Accreditation*

Accreditation, as it has been defined, is a particular form of quality assurance that has gained increasing attention as a possible answer to some – certainly not all – of these criticisms and refutations. More specifically, those favouring the introduction of accreditation address the elements mentioned in the second and third points made above. The section on the definition of the concept of quality has already stressed that the *basic standards* approach, to which most accreditation schemes are tuned, has developed as a reaction to the relativistic nature of the hegemonic *fitness for purpose* approach.

To fully understand the expansion of the accreditation model, reference has to be made to the changing social context. Factors and developments in the social environment of higher education that are of critical importance in this regard include the growth of the knowledge society urging policy-makers to attach a more vital role to higher education systems and to their outcomes; the impact of internationalization including various forms of transnational higher education and globalization in general; and the increasing penetration of market factors and characteristics into the higher education systems. These and other developments are radically affecting higher education systems throughout the world. Institutions are having to adapt their operations to new

demands, especially addressing lifelong learning opportunities, vocational and professional qualifications, and short courses. Leaving behind the hegemony of egalitarian approaches dominant in the era of massification, higher education systems are becoming increasingly competitive and market-like. A process of increasing diversification of higher education institutions, practices, delivery modes, etc., is drastically changing the face of higher education hitherto dominated by fairly traditional brick-and-mortar universities. New developments, labeled under the umbrella-concept of "borderless education", including for-profit providers and corporate learning provision, are competing and fundamentally challenging higher education systems.

In this changing environment, governments and external stakeholders, including students and their families, are looking for policy instruments that enhance the transparency of the higher education system, first of all by guaranteeing that, in any case, basic quality standards are met, and secondly, by providing devices to check differential quality features among competing providers. Accreditation is thus expected to fulfill the following needs, demands, and ambitions:

- to guarantee that certain agreed upon basic quality standards are met and, thus, to ascertain that programmes and degrees – for example new Bachelor's and Master's Degree type qualifications in the context of the Bologna Process in Europe – correspond to generally accepted basic quality descriptors, thus assuring their international recognition;
- to sharpen quality assurance arrangements by making them more independent, by focusing on more absolute and externally benchmarked standards, and by making them result in clearer statements;
- to allow international benchmarking of standards and criteria, and thus of programmes and degrees, allowing them to function in a context of student mobility, credit transfer and accumulation, and transnational delivery;
- to strengthen the capacities of quality assurance arrangements to inform the students and the general public and to demonstrate the accountability of higher education institutions;
- to make possible the linking of quality statements to other forms of regulation, including funding, financial aid to students, recognition of institutions, programmes or qualifications, entry to professional practice, etc.

The spread of accreditation and accreditation-like practices is thus part of a contemporary process of renewal and revitalization of quality assurance arrangements. Despite convergence, there are still a number of differences among various national accreditation systems. Accreditation does not mean the same thing in the United States, Eastern Europe, Japan, or Argentina, but there are certainly some common characteristics.

Some observers do not find the case for accreditation convincing. Pioneers from the quality assurance community feel that there is no need for checking basic quality in well-developed higher education systems, that fixed standards are not very appropriate in an increasingly complex system, that accreditation at minimal quality standards offers no advantages for the 90 percent or so of programmes or institutions that will pass accreditation, and that the quality improvement function will be jeopardized by a stronger emphasis on the external functions of quality assurance systems. Some institutional leaders dislike the additional burden of accreditation systems and consider them to be a violation of their institutional autonomy. Academics sometimes see accreditation as a manifestation of distrust in their academic quality and sovereignty.

In current debates and developments in the field of quality assurance in higher education, apparently two contrasting phenomena are occurring: on the one hand, an increasing stress on basic standards and external accountability; on the other hand; a renewed emphasis on institutional autonomy and diversity. In fact, these two concerns do not necessarily have to be in conflict with one another. Perhaps it has become an illusion to assume that in the present-day context the two functions of quality improvement and accountability can be served by one and the same quality assurance model. In a context of increasing competitiveness and diversification, the needs of higher education and the demands of the external society can both be met by separate systems of independent accreditation, that, on one hand, safeguard basic quality standards and internal quality improvement schemes within institutions or inter-institutionally, and on the other hand, respect autonomy and diversity.

### *4.4. Towards International Quality Assurance and Accreditation?*

Internationalization and globalization have not only provoked changes in national quality assurance and accreditation systems, but have also stimulated discussions on the need for an international approach to quality assurance and accreditation. It is also felt that in the field of higher education, globalization is degrading the capacities of national policy frameworks to achieve their objectives and that globalization, the rise of "borderless" higher education, and especially the liberalization of trade in educational services are calling for new regulatory frameworks and instruments operating at international level.

The need for greater convergence of quality assurance arrangements and systems is particularly clear in the context of the regional integration of national higher education systems. The case of the Bologna Process in Europe is exemplary: From the 1999 Bologna Declaration onwards, to the Prague Communiqué of 2001, and probably also in the Berlin ministerial meeting in September 2003, a more integrated European approach to quality assurance and accreditation is viewed as necessary to complete the process of convergence towards a European Higher Education Area. However, despite this favourable environment, progress is slow.

Conceptual divergence, differences in arrangements and systems, national prerogatives over issues of substance, fears of a possible centralized European quality bureaucracy, and the sensitive nature of quality hinder rapid convergence in this matter. Nevertheless, many see progress in a European approach to quality assurance and accreditation as a necessary condition for success in the general Bologna Process. Similar developments and discussions can be witnessed in other cases of regional integration of quality assurance arrangements, *e.g.*, in the framework of free trade agreements, such as, for example, in MERCOSUR or APEC.

Elsewhere, the author has argued for the development of a new, international public policy framework to deal with the impact of globalization on higher education (van Damme, 2002a). Three components appear to be essential in this international framework: *(i)* the international registration of providers; *(ii)* the development of new arrangements for the recognition of foreign qualifications and for the transferability of credits; and *(iii)* the development of an international approach to quality assurance and accreditation. Quality assurance and accreditation are particularly mentioned in many publications as the crucial elements of regulation in the increasingly trade-oriented international higher education market. Many experts believe that trade liberalization is unavoidable and perhaps also beneficial in the long run, but that the resulting liberalized global higher education market will need strong quality assurance and accreditation arrangements. These are viewed as necessary, not only to safeguard learners in their basic consumer rights, but also to defend broader academic values and the fundamental characteristics of the academic/scientific system. Trustworthy accreditation systems, based on comparable recognized professional standards themselves, could provide safeguards in a more globalized higher education system.

Current developments in the direction of international quality assurance and accreditation include: (*i*) approaches attempting to achieve greater convergence between national quality assurance systems by stimulating international or regional co-operation and empowering them to deal more effectively with new forms and providers in higher education; (*ii*) strategies to promote mutual recognition among national quality assurance systems; (*iii*) the establishment of systems of international meta-accreditation or "recognition" of national quality assurance systems on the basis of agreed-upon standards of good practice; and (*iv*) attempts to arrive at genuine international forms of quality assurance or accreditation (van Damme, 2002b).

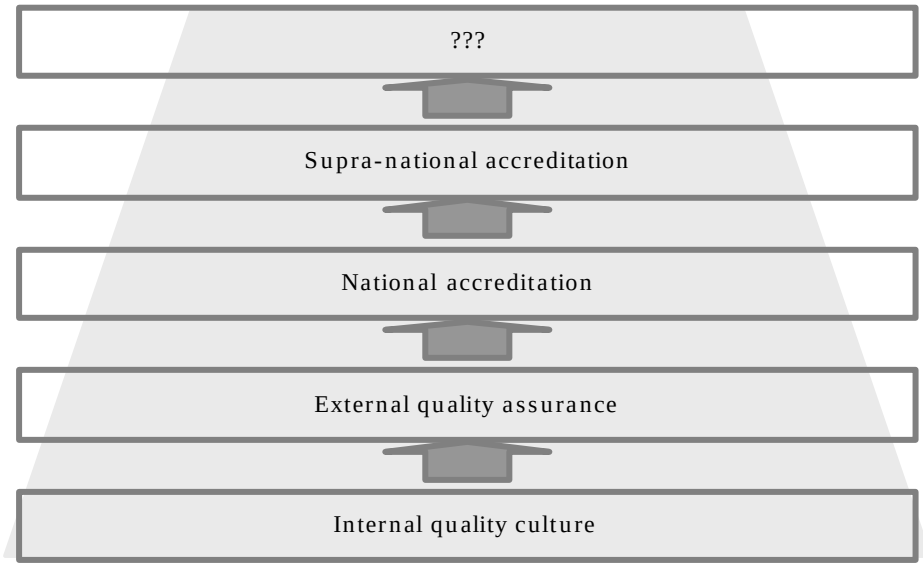
In practice, however, progress in this field is slow and hesitating, because many quality assurance agencies prefer to stay close to their national policy-making environments from which they derive their political legitimacy and to acknowledge the particular social and cultural contexts in which they developed. Many also distrust the establishment of too distant forms of authority and power. Still, the combined impact of globalization, liberalization, and transnational education pushes forward processes of co-operation, convergence, mutual recognition, and even

meta-evaluation – for which the regional and international associations and networks of quality assurance agencies are the vehicles – that do not yet bring about an internationally integrated quality assurance system, but do establish a fruitful basis for the international quality assurance community to deal with international issues and challenges.

### *4.5. A Multi-Level Model*

Tensions and shifts between the internal and external functions, the improvement of transparency oriented dimensions, the relativistic or standards-related approaches, and the national and international aspects of quality assurance have fuelled important debates and developments in present-day quality assurance and accreditation systems. In too many instances, these tensions and shifts are considered to be mutually exclusive, as conflicting poles. It is preferable, however, to see them as complementary, serving different purposes at various levels of the quality assurance configuration. The image of a quality assurance edifice with several levels can be used. The structure of this edifice is gradually differentiating into several layers or levels, each with specific characteristics and functions and, of course, addressing various standards and indicators, but with links (elevators) among them. Not all countries have quality assurance systems that comprise all levels, but for the sake of the conceptual argument, all relevant levels are distinguished here. Figure 2 illustrates the multi-level model of quality assurance.

Figure 2. The multi-level model of external quality assurance and accreditation




*Source*: The author.

The first and most basic level is that of internal quality assurance arrangements within an institution. All quality assurance systems ultimately depend on the existence of effective arrangements within institutions, preferably supported by a well-developed quality culture as an integrated system of quality-supportive attitudes and arrangements. The scope of standards and indicators addressed at this level is very broad, covering all relevant quality aspects over which an institution has control. Indeed, the concept of *total quality management* is governing internal quality assurance practices in many institutions, covering all relevant factors and processes in the production of high quality output. The function dominant at this level is clearly that of quality improvement. The time-perspective is that of continuity. The ownership of quality arrangements is clearly institutional.

The second level is that of national external quality assurance schemes. There are many models of external quality assurance arrangements, but most of them are characterized by a mixed ownership of the state and the higher education sector, and by the combination of quality improvement and external accountability and transparency functions. Internal institutional quality assurance arrangements feed into the external quality assurance level by means of the self-assessment reports prevalent in most schemes and by the fact that most external quality assurance schemes also review the functioning of internal arrangements. The scope of the quality aspects addressed at this level is often still very broad, but there is no need that it still totally cover all quality aspects. Most external quality assurance arrangements are periodic, with external reviews every five to ten years.

The next level is that of national accreditation. Not many countries make a distinction in their systems between national external quality assurance and accreditation, but some do, and from a conceptual perspective it is interesting to distinguish them. Compared to external quality assurance, accreditation is still narrower in function and focus. The main functions of accreditation are externally oriented, guaranteeing minimal quality standards and enhancing transparency and accountability. Ownership is usually external to the higher education sector, with independent or state-run accreditation agencies being the dominant model.[3] Usually, the scope of quality aspects that fall into the focus of accreditation is still smaller than that in the case of external quality assurance. In any case, there are very good reasons to include fewer quality standards and indicators in accreditation than in external quality assurance. Given its main functions, accreditation has to focus on those standards and indicators that are essential to making relevant statements about those functions. In countries in which external quality reviews and accreditation are distinguished, the results of the first feed into the accreditation procedures, but at the same time selecting those

[3] See the author's remark on the American system of accreditation in Footnote 2, p. 128.

quality aspects that are considered to be essential for taking decisions related to the standards covered by accreditation.

Above national accreditation systems, supranational schemes of accreditation can be imagined. These can take many different forms: real international systems of accreditation, meta-accreditation or recognition of existing national systems, regional integration of national systems via mutual recognition agreements or in the framework of free trade agreements, etc. In most cases, these supranational schemes will be built on top of existing national schemes and will not substitute for them. Through bilateral or multilateral recognition of national schemes and their outputs, national quality assurance systems will feed into supranational ones. Again, the scope of supranational schemes can be less broad than that of national arrangements, covering only those quality aspects that are relevant for the international objectives, such as the international recognition of qualifications, students and graduate mobility, credit-transfer, etc.

Figure 2 illustrates this multi-level model of quality assurance and accreditation. It shows that the scope of standards and indicators at stake at each level is not necessarily the same, but that the range of standards and indicators is diminishing from each level to the next.

## 5. STANDARDS AND INDICATORS FOR ACCREDITATION

### *5.1. Introduction*

With the conceptual framework and the multi-level model of quality assurance and accreditation developed above in mind, it is now possible to proceed to the analysis of standards and indicators. The intention is to arrive at a kind of comparative mapping of standards and indicators used in contemporary quality assurance and accreditation schemes.

### *5.2. The Use of Quality Aspects, Standards, and Indicators*

Various regional papers on standards and indicators give an insight into the range of quality aspects, standards, and indicators used in various systems of quality assurance and accreditation around the world.

All quality assurance systems rely on an analysis of certain aspects or dimensions of quality, but not all use *standards* in the sense as defined above. Building further on the definitions also given and on the useful clarifications of Hämäläinen *et al.* (2004, pp. 15-29 in this volume), standards can be described as the statements on requirements and conditions, formulated at certain threshold levels, that have to be noticeably met by programmes or institutions in order to be accredited. The difference between mere quality aspects and standards is that the latter include thresholds that distinguish between conditions below and above that point of reference, and criteria, that give rise to information, to be derived from indicators, that are suitable for taking decisions on the question of the thresholds values for that standard. In most accreditation

systems, these threshold levels are defined as being at the level of minimally acceptable quality.

Using this strict definition, quality assurance systems are usually not standards-focused, and even many existing accreditation systems do not have clear statements as to the threshold levels of each standard. In more relativistic definitions and approaches to quality, *i.e.*, the left and right criteria on the horizontal dimension in Figure 1, there are, in principle, no fixed (in absolute terms) defined "standards", since quality is dependent on its relationship to other things, namely the internal, sovereign purposes of the programme or institution itself, on the one hand, or the external expectations of customers and stakeholders, on the other. Only the approaches in the middle – the "basic standards" and the "excellence standards" approaches – use standards in the strict definition of the word. However, in most quality assurance systems, there are implicit ways of evaluating the level at which particular quality aspects are met, for example, by assessing the performance levels of programmes or institutions as *sufficient*, *good*, or *excellent*. The discriminative points on the performance continuum implied in such judgments are seldom explicit, but their demarcation is left to the inter-subjective assessment of review teams. In accreditation systems, however, clearly defined and benchmarked threshold levels should be made explicit beforehand, so that they may serve as discriminative tools when real programmes or institutions are being reviewed.

Hämäläinen *et al.* (2004) are correct, of course, when stating that "the final judgment is always subjective" (p. 20), and that, ultimately, the verdict depends on the confidence of the reviewers, in the capacity of the provision under review to realize the academic standards in practice. Standards can never be formulated in such an absolutist manner that the discriminative character of reference points on the scale is interpreted by everyone in the same way. The information needed to discriminate between two points on the continuum – and in the case of the threshold level between "yes" and "no" – is always less than perfectly available. A team of reviewers always has an inter-subjective critical margin in arriving at a conclusion. Still, it should always be the ambition of accreditation systems that standards be defined in a clear and univocal way and that review teams have sufficient instrumental guidelines to follow in order to make their decisions as objective as possible.

Departing from a desire for objectivity and also from a desire to protect the review panels from their own subjectivity, there is a clear tendency, in many quality assurance and accreditation systems, to quantify quality dimensions and to define standards as quantitative benchmarks. Formalizing standards and relating them – via well-defined criteria – to quantifiable indicators is a very attractive avenue of development in the context of making evaluation systems more reliable, robust, and homogeneous. Quantifiable standards are often linked to statistical performance indicators, *i.e.*, a selection of parameters that can be expressed in statistical terms and that represent the measure to which the

programme or institution is performing in a certain quality dimension. Performance indicators also allow comparisons among programmes or institutions and therefore serve as invitations to ranking.

There are two possible, interrelated risks in this development. The first is that certain quality aspects or standards are assessed only in their quantifiable dimensions. The teaching performance of academic staff members, for example, may be assessed solely by calculating the average marks of student assessments of their in-class learning experiences in lectures by means of questionnaires or surveys. The second is that only those quality aspects or standards are included in quality assurance or accreditation decisions that can be linked to indicators that allow for quantification. Accreditation systems that attach a higher value to the number of square meters in university buildings available for a specific programme than to the learning outcomes of students – because the first is more easily measurable in quantifiable ways – are moving away from the fundamental purpose of quality assurance and are confusing means with objectives of quality assurance. Precisely the most sensitive aspects of academic quality are often the least fit for quantification.

Much more progress is needed in educational research to arrive at the level of sophistication in measurement techniques for teaching and learning experiences that is required by standardized assessment in robust accreditation systems. In the meantime, relying too easily on quantification can produce a false sense of objectivity and trustworthiness. The inter-subjective judgment of review teams, even with the risk of collegial partiality by peers, is still the best alternative to superficial quantification.

There is also a time-related aspect in the use of standards and indicators and the way they are assessed. In addition to measuring the actual situation by means of performance indicators, the standards-oriented assessment of programmes also needs to look at the policies that are elaborated by an institution and/or programme. The assessment of standards and indicators has to include a dynamic perspective and not only a static one. A static approach has the disadvantage of time lags. In most cases, the actual situation measured by quantifiable performance indicators reflects the reality of a few years ago and the results of the policies of still longer ago. An assessment of quality standards and indicators has to include a dynamic perspective and build a bridge spanning the past, the present, and the future. Many contemporary quality assurance and accreditation systems are becoming aware of this necessity, as is amply illustrated in the article on the Western Association of Schools and Colleges by Appleton and Wolff (2004) appearing in this volume (pp. 77-101). This increased awareness implies that an assessment of standards and indicators always includes a mix of reality-based and potentiality-focused components.

Professionals of quality assurance know that there are many cases in which an assessment of the actual situation could lead to a negative conclusion. However, sufficient confidence may be provided by new policies to bring the reviewers to the conclusion that the potential for improvement

in the future is great enough to compensate for deficient realities in the past or the present. In this regard, the often-mentioned antagonism between the improvement and the accountability functions of quality assurance and accreditation are reduced when looking at standards and indicators assessment from a more dynamic point of view.

### *5.3. The Numbers of Standards and Indicators Used in Accreditation*

An interesting variable in the current development of external quality assurance and accreditation systems is the quantity of standards and indicators involved. It would be an interesting experiment to plot the actual number of standards used against the date at which they were introduced. As the study by Hämäläinen *et al.* (2004) demonstrates in the European case, accreditation systems, in their early stages of development, still stick to a rather elevated number of standards, each again substantiated by a number of indicators. Some external quality assurance and accreditation systems check hundreds of quality-related items. In most cases, it is unclear how these are weighted or what criteria are used to decide on their relative impact on an eventual negative accreditation decision. Argumentation is often absent regarding the necessity of these standards and indicators or how they relate to the particular goals and consequences of the external quality assurance or accreditation system. The burden of these systems on the programmes and institutions under review is very high; their autonomy and integrity is often imperiled. The amount of information requested bears insufficient relation to the quality improvement or accountability function of the system.

It should be an elementary principle in external quality assurance and accreditation that the number of standards and indicators reviewed and the burden imposed on the programme or institution under review be directly related to the objectives of the system and the benefits which might result for all partners involved. Also, external quality assurance and accreditation should be subject to elementary principles and rules of efficiency and "value for money".

It is a fortunate development that, in recent adjustments to external quality assurance and accreditation protocols, attempts have been made to rationalize the actual review system and to reduce the quantity of standards and indicators involved. A good example of this sort of reduction is provided by Appleton and Wolff (2004) in their description of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. Instead of 9 standards with 268 "sub-components" or indicators, now, no more than four standards with only forty-two indicators are used, reflecting "a significant shift in emphasis to effectiveness and attention to student learning".

Another interesting example is the division of standards made by the Japan University Accreditation Association into three groups, each with a different use and purpose, as is illustrated by Ohnami and Hokama (2004). Put in simple words, Group A standards are indispensable for accreditation; Group B standards are highly recommended; and Group C

standards are items that can be included as well in the self-assessment and thus also in the accreditation/re-accreditation process. It thus partially depends on the sovereign decision of the programme or institution which items from Group B and C will be addressed in the accreditation system. However, in this Japanese system, the actual total number of detailed items or indicators is still very high, 205 for university undergraduate programmes and 143 for graduate programmes. The compulsory Group A, however, only has 39 and 29 items, respectively.

The newly established Dutch Accreditation Agency has six standards and only twenty-four quality aspects, in all. There are many other examples of recent accreditation systems that are reducing their numbers of standards and indicators to those that are viewed as necessary to make an informed decision, leaving out those that are considered as more or less irrelevant for purposes of accreditation.

This development is closely linked to the increased confrontation of external quality assurance and accreditation systems to the growing diversity in higher education. For example, distance learning and, especially, e-learning challenge conventional wisdom on the nature of the teaching and learning process and the kinds of learning experience a learner is supposed to undergo in higher education. They thus also challenge conventional external quality assurance and accreditation systems based on familiar input- and process-related norms and criteria. Several features of distance learning are so different from traditional delivery modes that conventional quality standards and indicators can no longer be applied. The learning experience is fundamentally different from on-site face-to-face learning. Traditional notions of study-load and time invested in courses are no longer applicable. Physical campuses are absent. The roles of faculty members are fundamentally changed. There is an unbundling of parts of the educational activity (for example, separation of curriculum design from actual delivery, which, in turn, is separated from assessment and evaluation), etc. Questions about responsibility for the educational enterprise and external accountability are affected by changing concepts of "institution" and "degree". The issue of quality assurance for these new forms of higher education and new delivery modes has thus become a very pressing one (Middlehurst, 2001; van Damme, 2002b).

If external quality assurance and accreditation systems seize the challenge to deal effectively with increasing diversification in higher education, they will have to question the conventional ways in which they translate academic quality into standards and indicators. They will have to strip protocols to the hard core, to define, more precisely, what they mean by quality, and to drastically reduce the number of quality standards and indicators under review. Such a process of elimination does not imply that standards and indicators left out in external quality assurance and accreditation would not remain valid and relevant for internal quality assurance arrangements. The idea advanced in this study is that internal quality assurance, falling completely under the autonomy and

responsibility of the institution itself, would cover all quality dimensions considered by the institution, as being relevant, but that external quality assurance and accreditation schemes, certainly, when moving to the supra-national level, would restrict themselves to those aspects, standards, and indicators strictly relevant for quality management purposes at these supra-institutional and supra-national levels. Furthermore, since these systems would have to care for an increasingly diversified reality, they would have to develop quality assurance and accreditation systems that depart from a quality definition that is robust, irrespective of the kind of providers or the delivery modes involved.

### *5.4. Mapping Standards and Indicators in the CIPOF-Model*

In the often-long lists of quality aspects, standards, and indicators addressed by external quality assurance and accreditation systems in the world, there is a great deal of variation but also many commonalities. Why some systems attach a higher importance to specific standards and indicators than others is a question that is almost impossible to answer. Cultural elements, political decisions, the personal preferences of key persons involved, and idiosyncrasies difficult to explain all play a role in deciding what is to be more or less emphasized.

In fact, there is not as much variation in the standards and indicators themselves, but there is more variety in the ways they are classified and ordered. It is mainly the groupings of standards and their headings that vary, not the actual lists of standards and indicators themselves. There are many possible ways to categorize and group standards and indicators used in external quality assurance and accreditation. At international level, there is perhaps not so much need for a complete consensus on which standards and indicators should be used, but there is certainly a huge need for a common understanding on how to map them.

In what follows, the author focuses on a proposal for a set of standards and indicators for quality assurance and accreditation. In their study in this volume, Hämäläinen *et al.* (2004, pp. 15-29) propose a conceptual framework with five categories:

1. Objectives
2. Resources
3. Programme
4. Results
5. Internal quality assurance.

The author wishes to propose a somewhat similar categorization, one that is well-known in evaluation studies as the CIPO-model, using the four categories: **C**ontext-**I**nput-**P**rocess-**O**utput, but with the addition of a feedback category, thus arriving at a CIPOF-model:

1. **C**ontext;
2. **I**nput;
3. **P**rocess;
4. **O**utput;
5. **F**eedback.

The advantage of this categorization is that it is based on a rather universal model grounded in cybernetics and systems theory. It departs from the perspective of the possibility of the institution or programme as a system functioning in a certain context, working with a defined input, steering its own processes, which all lead to a particular output, and with a feedback loop which also makes it a dynamic and self-regulatory process.

The following paragraphs will attempt a characterization of the various categories and will list the standards that are minimally fundamental to each category. The intention is to be rather programmatic and normative, by formulating a proposal rather than by describing realities. No attempt is made to list all possible standards and indicators in each category, but only those in regard to which there seems to be agreement, in the view of the author, that they are indispensable.

The first step is to explore which standards and indicators seem to be minimally necessary. Then, an attempt will be made to formulate them as real standards and indicators, thus indicating the threshold levels that have to be met.

### 5.4.1. CONTEXT

Strictly speaking, context elements fall outside the scope of impact of an institution or programme, which cannot thus be held responsible for these items. For this reason, specific standards and indicators for quality assurance or accreditation will not be listed under this category. A programme cannot be denied accreditation because of defective context variables. However, it is still important in all systems of quality evaluation that the context in which a programme or institution is operating be taken into account in order to fully understand and appreciate the links that it has with its surrounding environment via the input and output categories. Institutions or programmes do not function in a vacuum, but in particular economic, political, social, and cultural environments. Relevant information here may include the historical context, the geographical location, the political environment, the specific rules and regulations that apply, the social and economic environment, etc.

### 5.4.2. INPUT

Input factors are those elements such as resources, personnel, and students that are “fed into” the “black box” of an institution or programme, provided by the context or generated/selected by the institution or programme itself. Input factors are thus a mixed responsibility of the contextual environment and the institution/programme. Although they are a legitimate category of standards for quality assurance and accreditation because the

institution/programme has at least a partial capacity to influence the input variables, input factors also heavily influence the efficiency of processes and the output. Accreditation, focusing solely on output, without taking into account input factors, would lead to the perverse conclusion that it could be more profitable, for example, to opt for a more selective student inflow than to invest in more efficient teaching and learning processes.

There are at least two input standards that seem to be essential in programme accreditation:

- *The physical/material and the human infrastructure, i.e., funding, buildings, teaching and learning facilities, supportive facilities, and a sufficient number of qualified staff.* In most quality assurance and accreditation systems, there is still a huge proliferation of these standards and indicators. The underlying idea is that trustworthy levels of input indicators provide minimal guarantees to the overall quality of the programme concerned. There has to be a certain material and human capacity in order to guarantee a sufficient condition to realize quality. It is generally accepted that certain basic input conditions have to be fulfilled in order to guarantee a threshold level of quality in process and output standards. However, contemporary views on quality assurance tend to minimize the importance attached to input indicators in the achievement of quality to the benefit of process and output indicators. These input indicators also have a rather high reciprocal correlation. Therefore, it is wise to limit the numbers of input standards and indicators in quality assessments. According to the author, the input indicators relevant to the guaranteeing of quality can be limited to two indicators, namely (i) adequate resources and facilities, and (ii) staff quantity and quality. These indicators together constitute one standard.
- *Students, i.e., student recruitment, selection, and intake.* In a certain sense, incoming students constitute the "raw material" with which a given programme will work. Student selection – not only in the formal sense as entrance requirements, access policies, and eventual selection procedures, but also, more informally, in the actual processes of social-cultural selection resulting in a certain student intake – constitutes an important variable for the quality of a programme. Contrary to many protocols in existing quality assurance and accreditation systems, it is advisable to make a distinction between student selection and intake and other aspects, which are more process-oriented, such as study-load. Among the many aspects and indicators relevant to student selection, the following two indicators seem to be crucial: (*i*) the admission requirements (on paper and the compliance in reality), and (*ii*) formal and informal student intake and access policies.

### 5.4.3. PROCESS

Undoubtedly, this category is the one in which the numbers of standards and indicators in most external quality assurance and accreditation systems abound. Process standards include all relevant aspects of institutional practices that determine its output quality. Process standards make certain that, for example, a particular programme makes the most efficient and beneficial use of its input to produce the highest possible quality output in a given context. Just as with input standards, process standards are checked in order to guarantee that all is in place to reasonably predict a certain quality result.

The problem with conventional process standards is that they depart from rather traditional, well-known, teaching and learning processes in higher education. Innovation in teaching and learning processes and, especially, technologically supported developments such as distance learning and e-learning have led to an increasing diversification of some of these processes. The confrontation with the fact that there is no single road to quality output and that conventional views on process standards may well entail unfounded presuppositions and even prejudices about effective teaching and learning environments, has led many external quality assurance and accreditation systems to revise their approaches to process standards. From the wisdom that "many roads lead to Rome", more emphasis is now being placed on the policies and approaches of the given programme and on the "culture of evidence" supporting it. However, it seems essential that the institution or programme have a clear commitment and orientation to facilitate student learning and that it have an outcome- and demand-driven approach, not confining itself to the organizational and instructional part of the process.

Minimally, the two following process standards seem to be required in programme accreditation:

– *Mission and objectives, i.e.,* the aims and purposes of the institution or programme, based on its educational philosophy, its values, and its frame of reference. Partly as a heritage of the "fitness for purpose" approach to quality, most quality assurance and accreditation systems put great emphasis, in quality assessments, on the aims and objectives of programmes. From a more accreditation-oriented perspective, based on standards, it is clear that not all aspects related to the aims and purposes of programmes are relevant. First of all, institutions or programmes should be able to demonstrate that they have clearly defined strategic mission statements, institutional purposes, and educational objectives, including the planning and improvement processes for continuously realizing them. Secondly the educational objectives should be stated in terms of benchmarked levels of knowledge, skills, and competencies to be achieved by students, and they should respond to nationally defined and/or internationally benchmarked level descriptors of the qualification concerned. In Europe, for example, the so-called Dublin Descriptors

for Bachelor's and Master's Degree qualifications have a strong impact on quality assurance and accreditation systems. Thus, there are two indicators for this standard: (*i*) a clearly defined strategic mission as well as clearly defined institutional purposes and educational objectives, including planning and improvement processes; and (*ii*) correspondence of educational objectives to qualification-level descriptors

– *Effective learning processes, i.e.*, the conditions that have to be in place, for example, regarding the curricular design, the contents offered to students, including the evaluation procedures (testing, examinations) used to assess student achievements, and the didactic approaches and teaching/learning environments designed so as to facilitate and to achieve effective student learning. As the standards and indicators of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges suggest (Appleton and Wolff, 2004), an institution or programme should have a clear commitment to learning. Of course, the curriculum, the contents, and the teaching/learning processes have to be such that they achieve the objectives of the programme. They must, as well, relate to the research basis of the discipline concerned and to the requirements of the profession for which they are preparing in a relative weight depending upon the nature of the programme. Furthermore, the curriculum has to be compatible with the particular student intake of a programme, and the evaluation of students must adequately reflect the attainment levels that are expected of students in order to realize the objectives of the programme. The various didactic settings applied in the programme must effectively reach the stated objectives of the curriculum and programme contents chosen, including lectures, field work, group work, assignments, dissertations, student guidance and counseling, etc., with a particular focus on their innovation and the thoughtful use of technologies. Teaching and learning processes have to be effective and innovative. It is advisable to integrate these various elements into one standard, because of their strong interdependence. Thus, three indicators appear evident for this standard: (*i*) the relation of curricula, contents, and didactic approaches to the objectives of the programme; (*ii*) programmed and real study duration, study load, and student support; and (*iii*) the characteristics of student assessment.

#### 5.4.4. OUTPUT

In many quality assurance and accreditation systems, attempts have been made to shift the focus from input and process to output standards and indicators. Learning outcomes-based assessment is a hot topic in quality assessment literature and practice. Of course, it is wise to move the quality assurance perspective away from those characteristics that are supposed to guarantee quality towards checking whether that quality has been realized effectively in the graduates themselves. What is important is what a

programme accomplishes in terms of change in the knowledge and skill levels of students, not in how the job is done.

The quality assurance and accreditation experiences reviewed in the literature illustrate various attempts to deal with this challenge. In particular, recently designed systems invest a great deal of energy into elaborating quality assessment arrangements that adequately focus on learning outcomes. However, a number of problems are linked to this ambition. Assessing learning outcomes in the levels of knowledge and competencies in students is tricky. There is also a time problem involved in the exercise. The actual realization of learning outcomes often occurs only some time after the actual teaching/learning processes took place. But a large time-lag also increases the chances that other learning experiences will become intertwined and interact with the teaching/learning processes in the programme under review. Also, the responsibility of the programme for the actual realization of the training of a graduate into, for example, job placement and, still farther along, socio-economic development, is limited.

Despite these critical considerations, it is clear that contemporary quality assessment and accreditation systems have to put a great deal of emphasis on output-related standards and indicators. Two standards are particularly relevant in this regard:

- *The realization of the programme objectives*. It is quite obvious that the most important quality standard related to output is the realization, by the programme, of its own objectives. As this study has focused on the correspondence of the educational objectives to the defined and benchmarked level descriptors, it is clear that the actual realization of the objectives as related to the descriptors must be measured. As a first indicator for this output standard, it is necessary to define the degree to which the actual knowledge, skills, and competencies of graduates – the learning outcomes – meet the level descriptors for the specific qualification concerned. Secondly, a more social perspective has to be included. In order to measure a programme output, it is important to look at the impact of that programme via its skilled graduates. There are several relevant indicators at stake here, but emphasis is placed on the labour market, by measuring graduate placement, and the broader economic, social, and cultural impact that an institution or programme achieves via its graduates. There are huge measurement issues attached to this indicator, but it still seems necessary to include such a perspective.
- *Efficiency*. Quality is also linked to the efficiency with which resources, as input indicators, are used to achieve the output measured. As the *fitness for purpose*-approach has stressed, quality in higher education necessarily also entails a *value for money*-perspective. The efficient use of resources is thus an indicator for assessing the second standard in the output category.

### 5.4.5. FEEDBACK

As Hämäläinen *et al.* (2004) emphasize in their review of standards and indicators in Europe, any review of the quality of a programme or institution must address the internal quality assurance arrangements, the quality management systems, and the quality culture integrated into the organization. This idea is enlarged to feedback in general, in correspondence with general systems theory. In addition to the original CIPO-model, a feedback loop has to be included as the fifth category of standards and indicators. Any external quality assurance or accreditation system has to attach an important value to the capacities, strengths, weaknesses, and efficiency of the ways in which institutions or programmes, as learning organizations, learn from experience, systematically including quality management processes in the overall process, and continuously adjusting and improving their strategic planning. Two standards can be distinguished:

- *Effective internal quality management.* The seventh standard that the author proposes in his model is the effective functioning of internal quality management procedures, their integration into the organizational culture, and their consequences for quality improvement and arrangements for innovation. Thus, two indicators for this standard can be distinguished: (*i*) the presence and functioning of effective internal evaluation procedures, whereby students, graduates, staff, employers, other stakeholders, and internal and external quality reviewers provide evaluative information to the programme or institution; and (*ii*) the ways in which this information is translated and integrated into effective quality improvement and innovation arrangements, and the degree to which these arrangements are embedded in the organizational culture.
- *Feedback to strategic planning.* In order to close the feedback loop, the institution or programme should be able to demonstrate the ways in which it is able to develop policies and strategies for change and improvement. Effective strategic planning seems to be a necessary condition for a trustworthy institution or programme. Two indicators are essential for this purpose: (*i*) the capacity for integrating feedback into strategic change and improvement processes itself; and (*ii*) the presence of effective organizational strategies to improve equity and student participation. Of course, the last indicator is a rather normative or political stance, but in many countries and quality assurance systems, a clear commitment to equity regarding sex, social class, ethnicity, and disability, and an orientation to improve the role and influence of students in the policy-making processes of the institution or programme are viewed as essential.

In the perspective of proposing a limited list of quality standards and indicators for programme accreditation, the author has developed a model of eight quality standards and sixteen indicators. This CIPOF-model of quality

standards and indicators for accreditation in higher education is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Standards and indicators for quality assurance and accreditation in the CIPOF-model

| Categories | Standards | Indicators |
|---|---|---|
| **C**ontext | The physical/material and human infrastructure | Adequate resources and facilities |
| **I**nput | Student selection and intake | Staff quantity and quality<br>Admission requirements<br>Student intake and access |
| **P**rocess | Mission and objectives | Clearly defined strategic mission and objectives<br>Correspondence of educational objectives to qualification level descriptors |
| | Effective learning processes | The relation of curricula, contents and didactic approaches to programme objectives<br>Study duration, study load, and student support<br>The characteristics of student assessment |
| **O**utput | The realization of objectives | Correspondence of learning outcomes to qualification-level descriptors<br>Impact on labour market and society |
| | Efficiency | Efficient use of input resources to realize output |
| **F**eedback | Effective internal quality management | Effective internal evaluation procedures<br>Effective quality management and innovation arrangements |
| | Strategic planning | Capacity for strategic change and improvement processes<br>Effective organizational strategies to improve equity and student participation |

*Source*: The author.

### *5.5. Criteria, Thresholds, and Evidence for the CIPOF-Standards and Indicators*

So far, only the themes and aspects to which the CIPOF-standards and indicators refer have been indicated. This way of proceeding seemed to be the most appropriate for selecting the essential standards and indicators in quality assurance and accreditation in higher education. At this point, it is necessary to return to the list of proposed standards and indicators and to reformulate them as real standards, thus indicating certain criteria or threshold levels that have to be met. Of course, this task will still be accomplished in a rather general way. When applying the model in a more specific context, more precise formulations will be necessary to make the model more operational.

Related to this more operational approach is the question of how actual performance levels for the various standards and indicators should be measured. Performance indicators, especially in the quantifiable dimensions, should be measurable. However, this need does not imply that quality assessments in all circumstances should employ elaborate and sophisticated measurements of all those aspects themselves. The standards and indicators of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (Appleton and Wolff, 2004) rightly stress the need for a “culture of evidence” to be

deployed and demonstrated by the institution or programme under review. An institution or programme should be able to demonstrate, by evidence, that its claims for meeting standards and criteria can, in reality, be substantiated.

Table 2 again lists the CIPOF-standards and indicators and attempts to reformulate them with criteria and thresholds.

Table 2. CIPOF-standards and indicators and their criteria and thresholds

| Categories | Standards | Indicators |
|---|---|---|
| **C**ontext | - | - |
| **I**nput | The physical/material and human infrastructure | Adequate resources and facilities |
| | | Staff quantity and quality |
| | Student selection and intake | Admission requirements |
| | | Student intake and access |
| **P**rocess | Mission and objectives | Clearly defined strategic mission and objectives |
| | | Correspondence of educational objectives to qualification level descriptors |
| | Effective learning processes | The relation of curricula, contents, and didactic approaches to programme objectives |
| | | Study duration, study load, and student support |
| | | The characteristics of student assessment |
| **O**utput | The realization of objectives | Correspondence of learning outcomes to qualification level descriptors |
| | | Impact on labour market and society |
| | Efficiency | Efficient use of input resources to realize output |
| **F**eedback | Effective internal quality management | Effective internal evaluation procedures |
| | | Effective quality management and innovation arrangements |
| | Strategic planning | Capacity for strategic change and improvement processes |
| | | Effective organizational strategies to improve equity and student participation |

*Source:* The author.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The starting-point of the UNESCO-CEPES project, "Indicators for Institutional and Programme Accreditation in Higher Education/Tertiary Education", of which this study is a part, is the conviction that the wide variety of standards and indicators used in quality assurance and accreditation systems around the world is a hindrance to substantial progress in the internationalization of quality assurance. In order to promote convergence of quality assurance and accreditation arrangements and bilateral or multilateral recognition of agencies and their assessment or accreditation decisions, a more common understanding is needed of what exactly the objects of the focus of quality assurance are, what is being assessed, and what standards and indicators are used in these processes. The step forward in this project is that attention is being directed to the real heart of the matter, namely the standards and indicators themselves. Ultimately, if some sort of common understanding of what should be essential in quality assurance and accreditation can be reached, substantial progress may be expected in the form of better

understanding among quality assurance and accreditation agencies, eventually resulting in mutual recognition. This step, in turn, seems to be an essential condition for taking new steps forward in the issue of the international recognition of qualifications.

In this study, an attempt has been made to develop a conceptual framework for a shared vision on quality assurance and accreditation and to work out a proposal for a set of standards and indicators that can be viewed as a kind of common core. The ambition behind this study is not to impose a standardized set of standards with a UNESCO-CEPES label attached to it, but to advance a proposal for further debate among the quality assurance and higher education communities.

The proposed model builds on a comprehensive data set of protocols, handbooks, and materials collected from numerous quality assurance and accreditation agencies and arrangements. Some of the regional papers that were developed in the framework of the UNESCO-CEPES project have masterfully synthesized a great deal of these materials. Of course, the model advanced in this study is not to be interpreted as a kind of summary of the common denominator found in these materials. It is necessarily a normative, and to some extent also a personal, model, based on a set of concepts and ideas elaborated in the first sections of the study.

The crucial starting-points were the proposal for a minimal set of really indispensable standards and indicators, on which sufficient agreement seems to be possible, keeping in mind the need to minimize the burden of quality assessment. Ideas on the shift from teaching to learning and on outcomes-centered assessment have heavily influenced the model, even though emphasis is still placed on the necessity to assess capacity in terms of input and process characteristics. The model should be applicable to highly diverse situations, even though it is clear that modifications would still be necessary in order to apply it to atypical forms of higher education. Finally, the model is based on a theoretical logic grounded in systems theory, whereby an institution or a programme is viewed as a dynamic system functioning in a given context, with specific input characteristics and various processes, leading to a certain output, and, crucially important, with feedback functions with which such systems continuously adapt to changes and improve their performance.

Some criteria or guidelines have steered the author in the choice of standards and indicators from the large pool of available ones. A first and very important question was the following: is it really necessary to externally guarantee these standards in order to trust the quality of the institution or programme under review. Quality fatigue and protests against sometimes-exaggerated quality assurance protocols have forced the quality assurance community to focus on what is really necessary. The amount of indicators, on which the performance of an institution or programme can be measured, is almost unlimited. A second question was whether or not the standard or indicator was really within the range of responsibility or accountability of the institution or programme. The capacity of institutions to influence contextual variables, for example, is

limited. Third, a standard or indicator should be empirically measurable, which means that evidence can be found that allows for sound decisions as to whether or not the standard is met.

Quality assurance and accreditation are not value-free activities, primarily because the concept of quality cannot be defined in a vacuum. Values and normative considerations have also inspired our thinking and have thus led to a certain normative bias in the proposed model. The political bias is, for example, very clear in the indicator addressing issues of equity and student participation, but there was convincing support to include it. Also the student- and learning-centered approach has a normative component and may not be accepted by all institutions or quality assurance agencies. More problematic, perhaps, is the bias resulting from the dominance of the developed world on thinking and practice in the field of quality assurance. The CIPOF-model departs from a societal context in which resources and input variables are sufficiently guaranteed. Countries facing a dramatic lack of capacity in assuring even the barest necessities for higher education institutions and students may consider the proposed standards and indicators as very luxurious, leading to the perverse conclusion that minimal quality is something beyond their reach. Nevertheless, the model is designed relative to context and input. No abstract definitions of quality are given.

The CIPOF-model that has been developed in this way includes eight standards and sixteen indicators. The ambition now is to introduce them for further debate into the higher education and quality assurance communities, and, subsequently, to test them in a variety of settings. Only such testing can determine the validity of the model.

*REFERENCES*

APPLETON, James R., and WOLFF, Ralph A. "Standards and Indicators in the Process of Accreditation: The WASC Experience – An American Higher Education Accreditation Perspective", *in*, L. VLASCEANU and L. C. BARROWS, eds. *Indicators for Institutional and Programme Accreditation in Higher/Tertiary Education*. Bucharest: UNESCO-CEPES, 2004, pp. 77-101.

HÄMÄLÄINEN,K., MUSTONEN, K., and HOLM, K. "Standards, Criteria, and Indicators in Programme Accreditation and Evaluation in Western Europe", *in*, L. VLASCEANU and L. C. BARROWS, eds. *Indicators for Institutional and Programme Accreditation in Higher/Tertiary Education*. Bucharest: UNESCO-CEPES, 2004, pp. 15-29.

KNIGHT, J., and VAN DAMME, D. *Proposed Working Definitions for the OECD-CERI Meeting on International Quality Assurance and Accreditation*. Paris: OECD-CERI, 2003 (Unpublished Working Paper).

MIDDLEHURST, R. *Quality Assurance Implications of New Forms of Higher Education*. Helsinki: ENQA, 2001.

OHNAMI, M., and HOKAMA, H. "The Japanese University Evaluation System and Main Self-Evaluation Criteria of the Japanese University

Accreditation Association (JUAA)", *in*, L. VLASCEANU and L. C. BARROWS, eds. *Indicators for Institutional and Programme Accreditation in Higher/Tertiary Education*. Bucharest: UNESCO-CEPES, 2004, pp. 103-115.

SURSOCK, A. "Accreditation in the Context of the Bologna Process: Needs, Trends and Developments", *in*, L. VLASCEANU and L. C. BARROWS, eds. *Indicators for Institutional and Programme Accreditation in Higher/Tertiary Education*. Bucharest: UNESCO-CEPES, 2004, pp. 65-76.

VAN DAMME, D. "Higher Education in the Age of Globalization", *in*, UVALIC-TRUMBIC, S., ed. *Globalization and the Market in Higher Education: Quality, Accreditation, and Qualifications*. Paris and London: UNESCO/IAU/Economica, 2002a, pp. 21-33.

VAN DAMME, D. "Trends and Models in International Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Relation to Trade in Education", *Higher Education Management and Policy*, 14 3 (2002b): pp. 93-136.

VLASCEANU, L., GRÜNBERG, L., and PARLEA, D., preparers. *Quality Assurance and Accreditation: A Glossary of Terms and Definitions*. Bucharest: UNESCO-CEPES, 2004.

# IX. Working with the CIPOF Model – A Hypothetical Example

*MIRCEA MICLEA*

## 1. PREMISES

In his study, "Standards and Indicators in Institutional and Programme Accreditation in Higher Education: A Conceptual Framework and a Proposal", Dirk Van Damme (2004) presents the CIPOF model as a candidate for a comprehensive, multilevel approach to accreditation in higher education. The assumption here is that the main characteristics of the model are already known, as well as its underlying conceptual framework. Van Damme makes clear that he has been "rather programmatic and normative, by formulating a proposal rather than by describing realities".

The main objective of the present study is to examine the CIPOF model using the realities and constraints of a particular institution, *i.e.*, Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, in Romania, as a test case. More precisely, the perspective adapted here is that of an institution which presumes that it is going to be accredited according to the CIPOF model and expresses a range of reactions. Thus, the author will consider the general characteristics of this model and try to anticipate how the institution, as a whole, or its programmes would behave if evaluated according to this model. It is hoped that the resulting observations will be useful, and that by producing salient reflections, its validity will be improved and its characteristics, enriched.

## 2. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TEST CASE INSTITUTION

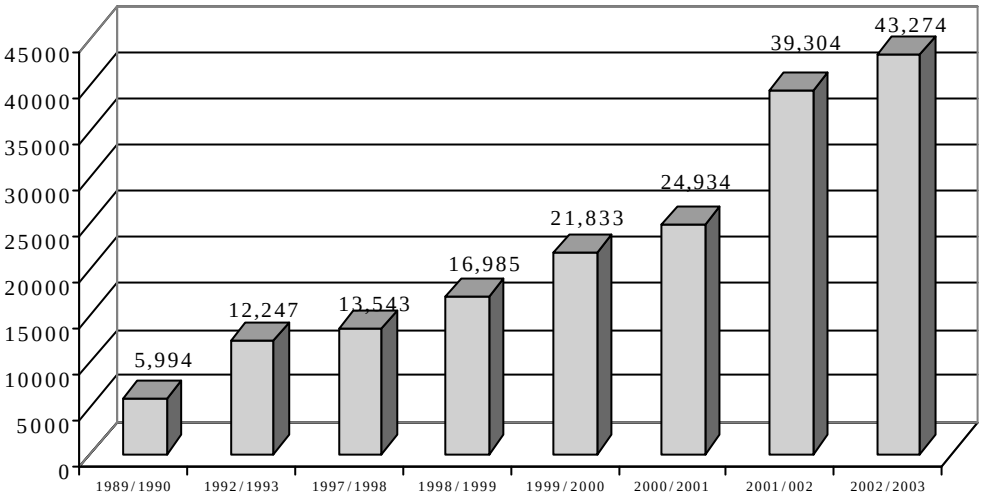
Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca is one of the most complex higher education institutions in Central and Eastern Europe. During the 2002-2003 academic year, it had 43,274 enrolled students, studying in nineteen faculties, and 2,635 teaching positions. In addition to the large number of students, faculties, and academic staff, several other features add to its complexity and comprehensiveness.

### *2.1. Multiculturalism*

At Babes-Bolyai University, teaching and learning are organized along three parallel lines of study: Romanian, Hungarian, and German. These lines are reflected at an institutional level in the cultural and linguistic interests of the three main ethnic communities living in Transylvania.

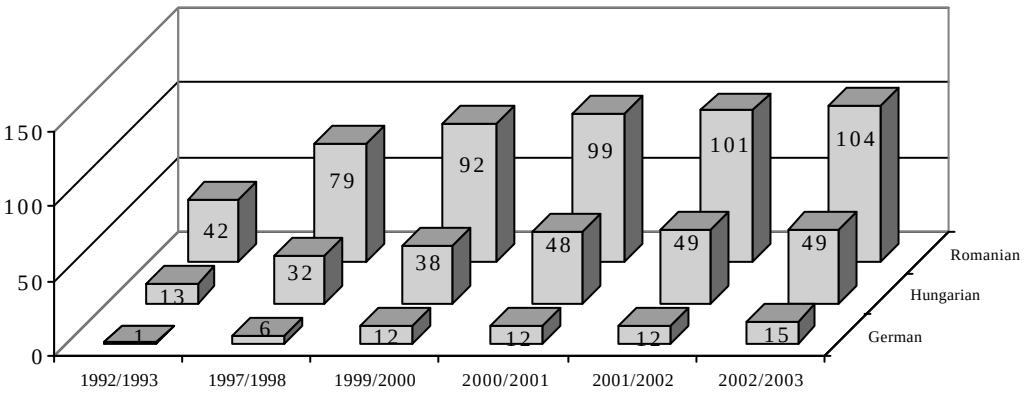
Figures 1 and 2 portray the development of student enrollments and the number of specialties in each language over the last decade.

Figure 1. Development of student enrollments




*Source:* The author.

Figure 2. Development of study lines: specialities in Romanian, Hungarian, and German




*Source:* The author.

The University provides training in Hungarian at seventeen of the nineteen Faculties, and in German, at nine Faculties. Two faculties (Greek-Orthodox Theology and Greek-Catholic Theology) only offer courses in Romanian, and two other faculties (Catholic Theology and Reformed Theology) only offer studies in Hungarian.

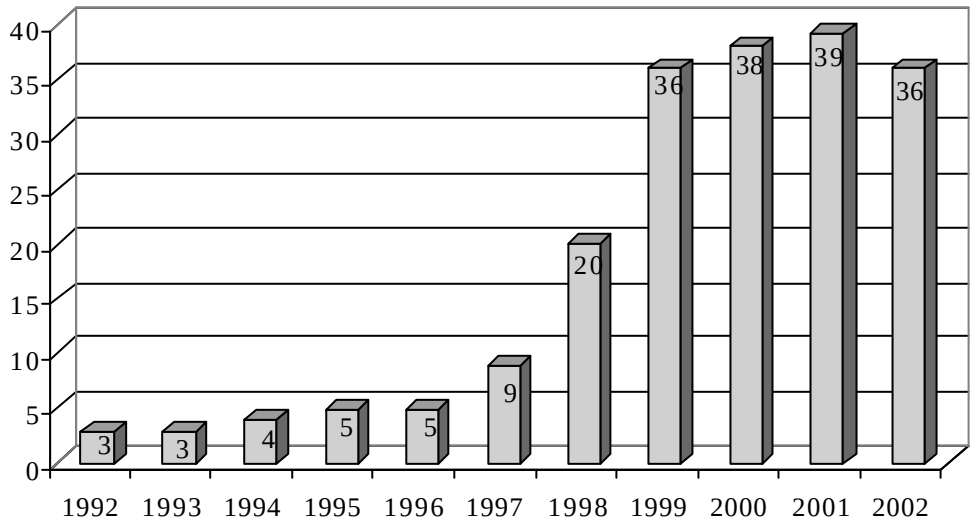
*2.2. Ecumenism*

Babes-Bolyai University has promoted an appropriate framework for inter-confessional contacts and ecumenism. It contains the four Faculties of (Christian) Theology (Orthodox, Greek-Catholic, Catholic, and Reformed), representing the main Churches in Transylvania, which provide training and scholarship in a climate of tolerance and mutual understanding.

*2.3. A Full Range of Degrees*

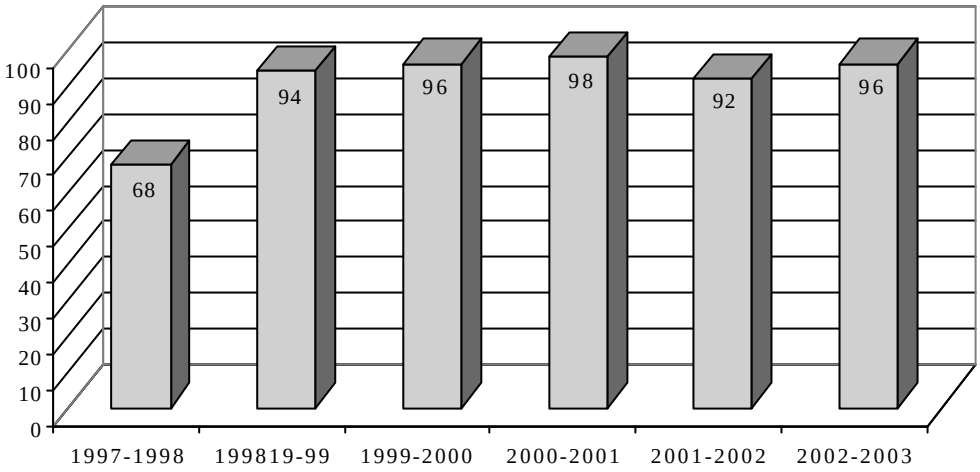
Babes-Bolyai University offers two types of undergraduate programmes (three-year college studies and four-year long-term studies), Master's Degree programmes, Doctoral programmes, and postgraduate programmes for continuing education. The development of colleges, Master's Degree programmes, and Doctoral programmes is portrayed in Figures 3-5.

Figure 3. Development of university colleges



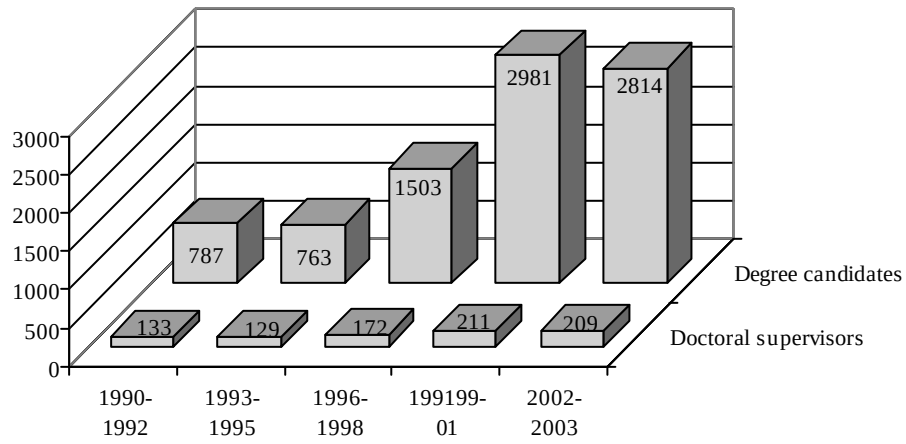

*Source*: The author.

Figure 4. Development of Master's Degree programmes




*Source*: The author

Figure 5. Development of Doctoral studies




*Source*: The author

### *2.4. Development of Distance Learning*

Beginning with the 1998-1999 academic year, the University launched distance learning programmes for the following three specializations: Political Science, History, and Psychology. In 1999-2000, it extended distance learning (e-learning) to seven undergraduate programmes, in 2001-2002, to fourteen programmes, and in 2002-2003, it succeeded in providing undergraduate training via the Internet in seventeen specialties.

In summary, in terms of the number of enrolled students, full-time academic staff, the multicultural and inter-confessional character of Babes-Bolyai University, and the number and diversity of its programmes, it can be viewed as a "touchstone" for the CIPOF accreditation model.

## 3. HOW THE MODEL WORKS AND CERTAIN INSTITUTIONAL REACTIONS TO IT

The author's scrutiny of the CIPOF model from an institutional perspective starts with a clear appreciation of two basic assertions regarding Van Damme's model.

*First*, the number of standards and indicators should be kept to a necessary minimum if one wishes to balance the benefits and costs of accreditation for an individual institution.

*Second*, data gathering in regard to these standards and indicators should be subordinated to the *function* of accreditation at different levels. Accreditation serves different purposes at different levels; therefore, the relevance of the standards and indicators must be reconsidered at each level. Both the parsimony of the indicators and the functional variability of accreditation are highly appreciated by such a complex, multicultural, and ecumenical university as Babes-Bolyai. An accreditation process relying on a large number of standards and indicators, insensitive to the functional variations of the accreditation itself, seems less appropriate when the object of accreditation is complex and heterogeneous.

There are important reasons for believing that, given the complex, multicultural, multilingual, and multi-confessional nature of the European system of higher education, the CIPOF model presents a very good case for being an effective accreditation instrument. A range of institutional reactions are expressed below.

### *3.1. The CIPOF Model and a SWOT Analysis*

In our opinion, Babes-Bolyai University, or any other higher education institution, can use the CIPOF model in two ways: *informative* and *formative*.

*The informative use* of the CIPOF model and, by extension, of any other accreditation model, means that an institution working towards accreditation starts to gather data and information to prove that it matches the standards and indicators of accreditation at an appropriate level. In doing so, it is unconsciously biased to enhance the importance

and relevance of confirming data and to deny or minimize the relevance of information indicating the contrary. For example, if one considers the indicator, "appropriate buildings and facilities", an institution under evaluation is bent to underline its strengths (*e.g.*, the ratio of square meters to students, the numbers of computers to students), and to minimize its weaknesses (*e.g.*, the physical conditions of buildings, temperature, light, humidity, and access, that are inadequate for didactic purposes, or the fact that the computers are outdated).

One selectively concentrates on the data that are consistent with one's claim rather than on incongruent information (Miclea, 1999; Richard, 1990). One should not perceive here any "institutional hypocrisy". A similar bias is common currency in research, when one primarily considers the confirming data for his or her hypotheses, by minimizing the relevance of contradictory facts or by calling them "anomalous data".

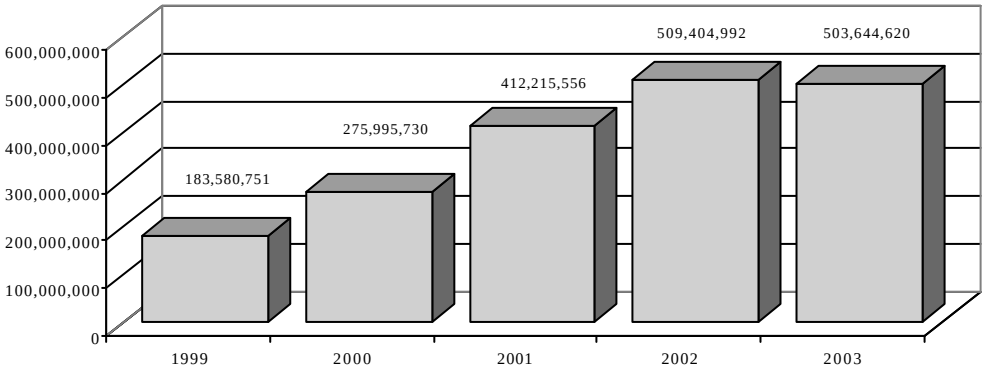
*The formative use* of an accreditation model uses the framework provided by the model to critically reflect upon the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to a particular standard and indicator. From an institutional point of view, *the formative approach to an accreditation model is far more useful than an informative approach*. The formative approach produces quality improvements, whereas the informative use, at best, produces ranking or increased accountability, but not quality enhancement.

Taking, for example, the indicator: "adequate funding": if Babes-Bolyai University were to consider this indicator from an informative perspective, then it would be possible to offer significant data about the *size* and *diversity* of the institutional budget.

Figures 6 and 7 contain data about the evolution of state-budgeting and the self-generated financial resources of the institution over the last four years. There is a clear increase in self-generated financial resources and, overall, a clear increase in the total budget of the University. Both the size and the diversity of the budget give sufficient reason to suggest that the "adequate funding" indicator required by the CIPOF model can be satisfied. It might even be considered as "scoring" quite high.

Figure 6. Total State funding

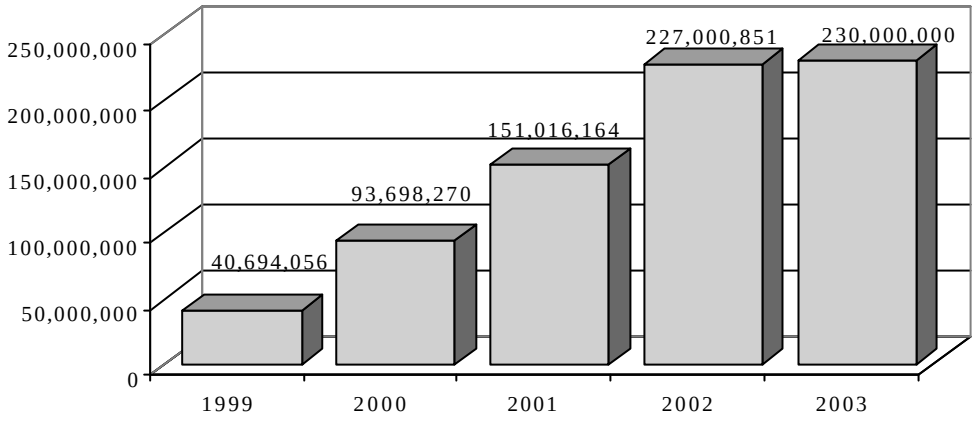
(in thousands of Romanian lei)



*Source:* The author.

Figure 7. Self-generated funds

(in thousands of Romanian lei)




*Source:* The author.

A good ranking, however, is not an objective *per se*, but rather a derivative outcome of quality assurance. Thus, we are much more interested in the "adequate funding" indicator of the CIPOF model viewed from a *formative perspective*, and we believe that the use of a SWOT analysis as a formative perspective tool is both necessary and relevant (see Table 1).

Table 1. "Adequate funding": A SWOT analysis for Babes-Bolyai University

| **S**trengths | **W**eakness | **O**pportunities | **T**hreats |
|---|---|---|---|
| - increased entrepreneurship at "Babes-Bolyai" University;<br>- diversity and increased proportion of self-generated resources | - low contribution of research to self-generated resources: 5.43 percent;<br>- low contribution of services (including technology transfer): 2.52 percent | - launching of spin-off companies;<br>- expansion of lifelong learning and e-learning | - promotion of parallel lines of study, *i.e.*, in Romanian, Hungarian, and German;<br>- promotion of "rare" and classical languages |

*Source:* The author

Even a cursory SWOT analysis of adequate funding produces a whole range of useful information:

*First*, despite the high proportion of self-generated financial resources in the total University budget, the contribution of research is extremely low: 12.5 billion lei of the 230 billion self-generated income in 2003 (only 5.43 percent!).

*Second*, one learns that the total incomes from services and technology transfers amounts to only 5.8 billion lei, only 2.52 percent of the total self-generated income of the University.

*Third*, new opportunities to raise money must be quickly identified and implemented. In its next meeting, the Senate will discuss, for example, the possibility of launching several spin-off-companies. In addition, a decision has already been taken to extend e-learning with four new undergraduate programmes and to set up a center for lifelong learning.

*Fourth*, there are sizeable threats to effective funding management. For example, the promotion of parallel lines of study in Romanian, Hungarian, and German is *much more expensive* in purely financial terms than a monolingual study programme. In order to cover the costs of parallel study lines, there will be a need to reallocate funds via differential budgeting, *i.e.*, where a Romanian language student is equal to 1.0, the equivalent Hungarian language student is 1.75, and the equivalent German language student is 2.50. Thus, for the same number of equivalent students, Hungarian and German study lines receive respectively 1.75 and 2.50 times more funding than Romanian study lines.

But we believe that there is much more at stake here than a simple monetary consideration. The social, cultural, and long-term economic costs of not providing education in these languages would be much higher. Thus, although the promotion of parallel study lines has a negative impact upon the funding of other programmes, we have decided to continue and further develop them (see Figure 2).

On the other hand, in the tradition of a comprehensive university, Babes-Bolyai has had special programmes for Latin and Greek Language and Literature. It has also launched programmes in Hebrew, Finnish, Norwegian, Ukrainian, Japanese, Korean, Russian, Italian, and Spanish. Since only a small number of students have enrolled in these programmes, there is an annual budgetary deficit of 3.012 billion lei. Although this situation has a negative impact on the adequate funding of other programmes, the Senate has decided to continue the budgeting of the above-mentioned programmes, because they increase the prestige and comprehensiveness of the University. Overall, the institution has decided to assume the threats imposed by parallel study-lines and “rare” languages to the adequate funding of other academic programmes.

If one compares the formative *versus* the informative use of the CIPOF model, it is now easy to see the differences. The former induces a data-gathering attitude to match the requirements, whereas the second – a guided analysis – aims at quality improvement. The informative perspective produces an unintentional bias by the selective treatment of favourable data, whereas the formative approach invites an equal consideration of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. We

consider that an institution strongly committed to quality-improvement should avoid the *confirmation bias* and proceed to a SWOT analysis, following the guidelines provided by the accreditation model.

In summary, the author found that from an institutional perspective, the formative use of the CIPOF model is much more useful than an informative one. The CIPOF model allows for a SWOT analysis (the example of an "adequate funding" indicator is taken, but the same procedure could be used for each standard and indicator of the model) with remarkable consequences for quality improvement. It is thought that the formative potential of an accreditation model is a very important dimension of evaluation from an institutional perspective.

The University has also found that what "adequate funding" means to academic programmes depends very much on the mission and strategic management of the institution, an idea that will be more extensively explored later in this study.

### *3.2. The CIPOF Model – Considering Research and External Services*

The CIPOF model seems to be constructed with a special focus on the *programmes* which have to be accredited. As a consequence, the range of proposed standards and indicators focuses more on programmes, *i.e.*, the didactic process, or so-called knowledge-dissemination activities. However, if the institution as a whole is to be the object of accreditation, then it is necessary to take into account each of the three main functions of the university: knowledge-production (research); knowledge-dissemination (training, teaching, and learning), and knowledge exploitation (via services, patents, licenses, technology transfers, etc.).

"Does a university fulfill its basic functions?" and "To what degree?" These are crucial questions to be addressed in order to accredit or evaluate an institution of higher education, not simply a *collection of programmes*. And if one recognizes knowledge-production and knowledge-exploitation among the core functions of a university, then one should consider the standards and indicators of these functions as integral parts of an accreditation model. Perhaps some insight into the experiences of Babes-Bolyai University would be illustrative at this point.

When private universities were set-up in Cluj-Napoca and in the neighbouring areas, they used to hire part-time or full-time professors (or retired professors) from Babes-Bolyai University. These professors simply took academic programmes from the State university and replicated them at private institutions. If one looks at the programmes in terms of objectives, curriculum, content, and teaching and learning processes, then one can hardly find any differences between the original programmes and their "clones" at private universities: the same people teaching the same contents, using the same teaching methods and procedures. An accreditation agency, after accrediting a programme at Babes-Bolyai University or another prestigious State university, would find it difficult not to accredit the same programme taught by the same people at a private

university. Borrowing a term from psychometrics, the *discriminative power* (*i.e.*, the power of an item to discriminate between poor performers and outstanding performers) of programme objectives, contents, and teaching/learning methods is very low. On the other hand, the inclusion of indicators for knowledge-production and knowledge-exploitation in the CIPOF model would increase its discriminative power, so that the CIPOF model could easily distinguish between outstanding and low-performing institutions. We firmly believe that discriminative power is a fundamental characteristic of an accreditation model.

*Summing up*, we suggest that the CIPOF model include some indicators for measuring the quantity/quality of knowledge-production and efficiency of knowledge-exploitation, for two basic reasons:

- to cover all the main functions of a university;
- to increase the discriminative power of the model.

### *3.3. Applying the CIPOF Model to the Intermediate Levels of Higher Education Institutions*

Van Damme's model has been elaborated with the purpose of accrediting institutions and programmes of higher education. However, we draw a legitimate inference by saying that a model that claims to be valid at the highest level (*i.e.*, that of the institution itself) and the lowest level (*i.e.*, the programme level) of a higher education institution should also be valid for intermediary levels (faculties, colleges, and departments). In other words, the attempt is to generalize the model to intermediary organizational layers.

From an institutional perspective, we consider it very important that an accreditation/evaluation model be relevant for all the organizational levels: institution-faculty-college-department-programme. The standards and indicators for all these levels should be, if not identical, at least very similar. Otherwise a great deal of tension and discontent may be generated within an institution. Asking people to satisfy a certain set of criteria for programme accreditation, a different set for department evaluation, and another, for college and faculty evaluation/accreditation implies huge amounts of paperwork and induces confusion, resistance to accreditation, as well as increased costs for the process itself.

Putting it succinctly, the standards and indicators of an accreditation model should be consistently relevant, *i.e.*, relevant for *all the organizational layers of a higher education institution*. Consistent relevance should be an important indicator of the viability of an accreditation/evaluation model.

After several simulations with different indicators included in the CIPOF model, it was found that consistent relevance is one of the strengths of the CIPOF model. All standards and indicators (with small contextual interpretations) mentioned in this model can be consistently applied to evaluate each organizational level, including the intermediary levels of an institution.

Let us take, for example, the "staff quantity and quality" indicator. This indicator is consistently relevant and can be applied to each organizational level. One can measure the degree to which this indicator is met in a specific Master's Degree programme, in a department, a college, a faculty, or the university as a whole. Table 2 presents the quantity and quality of academic staff at Babes-Bolyai University, at the beginning of the 2002-2003 academic year. Only those *quality* aspects of the academic staff are taken into account which are considered as being relevant for financing universities by the Ministry of Education, *i.e.*, the ratio of full-time academics to the total number of teaching positions, the proportion of full professors and associate professors, the proportion of academics under the age of 35, and the proportion of PhD holders.

Table 2 indicates that the CIPOF quality and quantity indicator of academic staff can be consistently applied not only at an institutional level, but also at the intermediary organizational level of faculties and colleges. A quick glance at the table reveals, for example, that the indicators for quality and quantity have not been met by most of the colleges, and, in 2003, this information was useful to the Senate in reaching the decision to reduce the number of colleges down to the level of the 1999 academic-year. We can also identify which faculties need to increase the number of academics with Doctoral degrees (*e.g.*, Physical Education), to hire new people (*e.g.*, the Faculties of Geography, Psychology, and Greek-Catholic Theology), and so on.

The particular conclusions for Babes-Bolyai University are not important in this context. What is important is the idea that the simulation underlines the importance of what has been called the consistent relevance of an accreditation model, CIPOF included. A model that is consistently relevant at all organizational levels of a higher education institution is more convenient than one that is not. On the other hand, when constructing an accreditation model, one should maintain only those standards and indicators that are consistently relevant for all organizational levels. In other words, consistent relevance can be an important heuristic in constructing an accreditation model.

*In conclusion*, it is clearly important for an accreditation model that it be consistently relevant for each organizational level of the given higher education institution. The CIPOF model has proven to have such a characteristic.

Table 2. Staff quantity and quality at Babes-Bolyai University (October, 2002)

| | Faculties with colleges | | | | | Colleges | | | | | Faculties without colleges | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| No. Faculty | Teaching positions | Degree (%) | Professor, Assoc. Prof (%) | Under 35 years old (%) | PhDs (%) | Teaching positions | Degree (%) | Professor, Assoc. Prof (%) | Under 35 years old (%) | PhDs (%) | Teaching positions | Degree % | Professor, Assoc. Prof (%) | Under 35 years old (%) | PhD (%) |
| 1. Mathematics | 223 | 53.81 | 44.17 | 38.33 | 63.33 | 19 | 5.26 | - | - | 100.00 | 204 | 58.33 | 44.54 | 38.66 | 63.03 |
| 2. Physics | 116 | 55.17 | 54.69 | 25.00 | 78.13 | 9 | - | - | - | - | 107 | 59.81 | 54.69 | 25.00 | 78.13 |
| 3. Chemistry | 167 | 61.68 | 47.57 | 21.36 | 80.58 | - | - | - | - | - | 167 | 61.68 | 47.57 | 21.36 | 80.58 |
| 4. Biology and Geology | 134 | 62.69 | 40.48 | 32.14 | 65.48 | | | - | - | - | 134 | 62.69 | 40.48 | 32.14 | 65.48 |
| 5. Geography | 224 | 30.36 | 27.94 | 54.41 | 35.29 | 94 | 19.15 | 11.11 | 66.67 | 11.11 | 130 | 38.46 | 34.00 | 50.00 | 44.00 |
| 6. Law | 58 | 50.00 | 41.38 | 48.28 | 65.52 | - | - | - | - | - | 58 | 50.00 | 41.38 | 48.28 | 65.52 |
| 7. Economic Sciences | 308 | 45.78 | 39.01 | 46.81 | 51.06 | - | - | - | - | - | 308 | 45.78 | 39.01 | 46.81 | 51.06 |
| 8. Business | 41 | 46.34 | 31.58 | 36.84 | 47.37 | 15 | 40.00 | 33,33 | 33.33 | 50.00 | 26 | 50.00 | 30.77 | 38.46 | 46.15 |
| 9. History | 156 | 57.05 | 42.70 | 31.46 | 64.04 | - | - | - | - | - | 156 | 57.05 | 42.70 | 31.46 | 64.04 |
| 10. Psychology | 277 | 28.52 | 20.25 | 46.84 | 36.71 | 151 | 6.62 | - | 70.00 | 10.00 | 126 | 54.76 | 23.19 | 43.48 | 40.58 |
| 11. European Studies | 74 | 41.89 | 38.71 | 41.94 | 67.74 | - | - | - | - | - | 74 | 41.89 | 38.71 | 41.94 | 67.74 |
| 12. Political Science | 94 | 59.57 | 14.29 | 58.93 | 26.79 | 43 | 27.91 | 8.33 | 75.00 | 16.67 | 51 | 86.27 | 15.91 | 54.55 | 29.55 |
| 13. Letters | 420 | 58.57 | 26.02 | 35.37 | 41.87 | - | - | - | - | - | 420 | 58.57 | 26.02 | 35.37 | 41.87 |
| 14. Physical Training | 137 | 40.88 | 23.21 | 46.43 | 10.71 | 12 | 25.00 | - | - | - | 125 | 42.40 | 24.53 | 43.40 | 11.32 |
| 15. Orthodox Theology | 37 | 51.35 | 36.84 | 21.05 | 52.63 | - | - | - | - | - | 37 | 51.35 | 36.84 | 21.05 | 52.63 |
| 16. Greek-Catholic Theology | 72 | 29.17 | 19.05 | 42.86 | 23.81 | 9 | - | - | - | - | 63 | 33.33 | 19.05 | 42.86 | 23.81 |
| 17. Roman-Catholic Theology | 9 | 55.56 | 20.00 | 60.00 | 40.00 | - | - | - | - | - | 9 | 55.56 | 20.00 | 60.00 | 40.00 |
| 18. Reformed Theology | 20 | 65.00 | 23.08 | 7.69 | 38.46 | - | - | - | - | - | 20 | 65.00 | 23.08 | 7.69 | 38.46 |
| 19. Sociology | 68 | 47.06 | 37.50 | 31.25 | 50.00 | - | - | - | - | - | 68 | 47.06 | 37.50 | 31.25 | 50.00 |
| TOTAL of BBU | 2.635 | 48.39 | 34.59 | 38.12 | 51.53 | 352 | 14.20 | 10.00 | 66.00 | 18.00 | 2283 | 53.66 | 35.59 | 36.98 | 52.90 |

*Source:* The author.

### *3.4. The Actual* versus *the Prospective Perspective in Accreditation*

The quality assurance professionals of quality are becoming increasingly aware of the fact that an exclusive focus on the actual situation of an institution or programme is overly static. Such a focus reflects the present reality and the results of the policies of the previous years (Appleton and Wolff, 2004; Sursock, 2004; Hämäläinen *et al.*, 2004).

In his study, Van Damme pleads for a more dynamic approach in order to "build a bridge spanning the past, the present, and the future". Unfortunately, the CIPOF model is still more centered on the actual dimensions of an institution/programme and does not make sufficiently explicit the importance of the *prospective* dimension in the process of institutional accreditation.

Taking one example from Babes-Bolyai University: Some time ago, after somewhat harsh discussions with the deans, a decision was taken to start a programme to upgrade the heating system (eighteen plants and fifty-four boilers) and to partially reconstruct and upgrade the forty-five-kilometer pipe network. These programmes required a large commitment and a huge amount of resources, but have no immediate and direct consequences for the standards and indicators of quality. However, such programmes constitute an indicator of the capacity of the institution to identify and discriminate among *important* and only *urgent* problems, and to set up programmes or policies aiming at finding solutions.

The Senate has also elaborated precise programmes to launch adult education, to open university courses for the entire local community, to set up spin-off-companies, to set up a new Faculty of Environmental Sciences and Technologies, etc. These programmes and specific polices were achieved only after a great deal of hard work and difficult decisions. They constitute a salient indicator of the capacity of the institution for change, yet they hardly receive any recognition in the accreditation model.

When a bank wants to give credit to a private company, it looks not only at the actual (present) situation of that company, but also at its prospects for development and its ability to generate returns in the future. When a researcher submits a grant proposal, the funding agency explicitly evaluates not only his or her past and present scientific achievements, but the feasibility of his or her hypothesis, methodologies, and expected results.

By analogy, we find it reasonable to claim that a higher education institution must be evaluated/accredited by *explicitly* taking into account the *number and feasibility of its polices and programmes for change* that fall under the heading of *strategic management*. The programme for change of an institution constitutes a part of its identity as it indicates its past and present achievements. Therefore, we plead for an explicit *separation* of prospective dimensions from actual dimensions in an accreditation model. Because the effects of any accreditation process will only really be felt in the future, asking retrospective questions like: "Did the institution

correctly identify its strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities?“ and “Did it produce feasible polices or programmes to approach them? ”, should be essential in the accreditation process.

To sum up, our suggestion is to add to the CIPOF model an explicit *category: strategic management*; a *standard*: *capacity for change*; and an *indicator*: *relevance and feasibility of the programmes for change*. If accepted, this proposal would transform the CIPOF model into a CIPOFs model. We wish to stress that we appreciate Van Damme's proposal to reduce the number of standards and indicators, and to subordinate data collection to the function of accreditation at different levels. However, we consider that the implicit mixing of actual aspects with prospective ones in the accreditation/evaluation of an institution is rather confusing and counterproductive. The profile of a university is not only dictated by its present arrangements and structure, but also by its capacity to invent completely new programmes and to identify and solve critical problems or to assume risks. Strategic management planning plays a feed-forward role, as quality assurance arrangements play a feed-back role.

## 4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

To conclude, from the perspective of a higher education institution such as Babes-Bolyai University, the CIPOF model is a very strong candidate for a comprehensive accreditation arrangement at European level. We appreciate the parsimony of the standards and indicators as well as their functional dependence on the various roles accreditation processes must play at different levels. It is important to emphasize the following:

*i.* Formative use should prevail over the informative use of an accreditation model.
*ii.* Discriminative power (*i.e.*, the capacity to distinguish between low and outstanding performers) should be an important characteristic of any accreditation model, and it can be achieved by covering the main functions of the university.
*iii.* The selection of standards and indicators could benefit from a heuristic of consistent-relevance (*i.e.*, indicator-relevance for each organizational level).
*iv.* Strategic or prospective dimensions should be explicitly and separately evaluated.

## *REFERENCES*

APPLETON, J. R., and WOLFF, R. A. “Standards and Indicators in the Process of Accreditation: The WASC Experience”, *in*, L. VLASCEANU and L. C. BARROWS, eds. *Indicators for Institutional and Programme Accreditation in Higher/Tertiary Education*. Bucharest: UNESCO-CEPES, 2004, pp. 77-101.

HÄMÄLÄINEN, K., MUSTONEN, K., and HOLM, K. "Standards, Criteria, and Indicators in Programme Accreditation and Evaluation in Western Europe", *in*, L. VLASCEANU and L. C. BARROWS, eds. *Indicators for Institutional and Programme Accreditation in Higher/Tertiary Education*. Bucharest: UNESCO-CEPES, 2004, pp. 15-29.

MICLEA, M. *Psihologie cognitiva*. 2nd ed. Iasi: Polirom, 1999.

RICHARD, J. F. *Les Activités mentales: comprendre, raisonner, trouver des solutions*. Paris: Armand Colin, 1990.

SURSOCK, A. "Accreditation in the Context of the Bologna Process: Needs, Trends, and Development", *in*, L. VLASCEANU and L. C. BARROWS, eds. *Indicators for Institutional and Programme Accreditation in Higher/Tertiary Education*. Bucharest: UNESCO-CEPES, 2004, pp. 65-76.

VAN DAMME, Dirk. "Standards and Indicators in Institutional and Programme Accreditation in Higher Education: A Conceptual Framework and a Proposal", *in*, L. VLASCEANU and L. C. BARROWS, eds. *Indicators for Institutional and Programme Accreditation in Higher/Tertiary Education*. Bucharest: UNESCO-CEPES, 2003, 125-157.

HOLM, Karl, Project Manager
*Address*: Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC).
P.O.
Box 1425 (Annankatu 34-36 A), FIN-00101 Helsinki, Finland.
Telephone: +358-9-1607-6921
Fax: +358-9-1607-6911
E-mail: karl.holm@helsinki.fi

MICLEA, Mircea, Professor, Chancellor
*Address*: Babes-Bolyai University, UNESCO Chair of Higher Education Management and Governance . 1 Mihail Kogalniceanu Street, RO-400084 Cluj-Napoca, Romania.
Telephone: +40-744-333-263
Fax: +40-264-195-576
E-mail: mirceamiclea@psychology.ro

MIHAILESCU, Ioan, Professor, Rector, University of Bucharest, President,
National Council of Academic Assessment and Accreditation .
*Address*: University of Bucharest, 36-46 Mihail Kogalniceanu Bld.
RO-050107 Bucharest, Romania.
Telephone: +40-21-307-7300
Fax: +40-21-313-1760
E-mail: rector@unibuc.ro

MUSTONEN, Kirsi , Senior Adviser
*Address*: Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC).
P.O. Box 1425, Annankatu 34-36 A, FIN-00101 Helsinki, Finland.
Telephone: +358-9-1607-6916
Fax: +358-9-1607-6911
E-mail: kirsi.mustonen@minedu.fi

OHNAMI, Masateru, Dr., , Chairman, The Reaccreditation Committee.
*Address*: Japan University Accreditation Association (JUAA)
8-10 Hyuga-Cho, JP-Takatsuki-city, Kyoto 569-0024, Japan.
Telephone: +81-72-672-9055
Fax: +81-72-672-9055
E-mail: ohnami@tcn.zaq.ne.jp

ROZSNYAI, Christina
Programme Officer for Foreign Affairs, Hungarian Accreditation Committee
*Address*: Ajtosi D. sor 19-21, H-1146 Budapest, Hungary
Tel: 36-13440314
Fax: 36-134403133
e-mail: Rozsnyai@mab.ph.hu

SURSOCK, Andrée, Dr.
*Address*: European University Association (EUA). Rue d'Egmont 13, B - 1000 Brussels
Tel: +32 2 230 55 44
Fax: +32 2 230 57 51
E-mail: andree.sursock@eua.be

VAN DAMME, Dirk , Professor, General Director
*Address*: Flemish Inter-University Council (VLIR). Egmontstraat 5, B-1000
Brussels, Belgium.
Telephone: +32-2-550-15-94; +32-2-512-91-10
Fax: +32-2-512-29-96
E-mail: dirk.vandamme@vlir.be

VLASCEANU, Lazar, Programme Specialist and Professor
*Address*: c/o UNESCO European Centre for Higher Education (UNESCOCEPES),
39 Stirbei-Voda Street, RO-010102 Bucharest,
Romania.
Telephone: +40-21-315-9957
Fax: +40-21-312-3567
E-mail: l.vlasceanu@cepes.ro

WOLFF, Ralph A., Executive Director
*Address*: Senior College Commission, Western Association of Schools and
Colleges. 985 Atlantic Avenue, Suite 100, Alameda, California 94501, United States of America.
Telephone: +1-510-748-9001
Fax: +1-510-748-9797
E-mail: rwolff@wascsenior.org

YONEZAWA, Akyioshi , Associate Professor
*Address*: National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation (NIAD-UE. 1-29-1 Gakuennishimachi, Kodaira,
JP-187 8587 Tokyo, Japan.
Telephone: +81-42-353-1818
E-mail: yonezawa@niad.ac.jp

## Studies on Higher Education

* Gains and Losses: Women and Transition in Eastern and Central Europe (English, 1994, 115 pp.)
* Academic Freedom and University Autonomy. Contributions to the International Conference, 5-7 May 1992, Sinaia (English, 1993, 309 pp.)
* The Doctorate in the Europe Region (English, 1994, 225 pp.)
* Standards and Diversity in Architectural Education (English, 1996, 353 pp.)
* Ten Years After and Looking Ahead: A Review of the Transformations of Higher Education in Central and Eastern Europe (English, 2000, 410 pp.)
* Transnational Education and the New Economy: Delivery and Quality (English, 2001, 172 pp.)
* Good Practice in Promoting Gender Equality in Higher Education in Central and Eastern Europe (English, 2001, 160 pp.)
* System-Level and Strategic Indicators for Monitoring Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century (English, 2003, 238 pp.)
* Institutional Approaches to Teacher Education in Europe: Current Models and New Developments (English, 2003, 344 pp.)
* Indicators for Institutional and Programme Accreditation in Higher/Tertiary Education (English, 2003, 180 pp.)

## Papers on Higher Education

* CEPES - 20 Years of Service (English, 1992, 40 pp.)
* Academic Freedom and University Autonomy: Proceedings of the International Conference, 5-7 May 1992, Sinaia (English, 1992, 52 pp.)
* University Profiling and Identity (English, 1994, 21 pp.)
* Academic Freedom and University Autonomy: Two Perspectives (English, 1995, 85 pp.)
* La Formation pratique: principes et questionnement (French, 1995, 52 pp.)
* Report on Higher Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Historical Development, Present State, and Needs Assessment (English, 1996, 127 pp.)
* Mutual Recognition of Qualifications: The Russian Federation and Other European Countries (English, 1997, 124 pp.)
* A European Agenda for Change for Higher Education in the XXIst Century (Changer l'enseignement supérieur en Europe, un programme pour le XXIe siècle) (English and French, 1997, 166 pp.)
* A European Agenda for Change for Higher Education in the XXIst Century: Twenty Case Studies (English, 1998, 390 pp.)
* Internationalization of Higher Education: An Institutional Perspective (English, 2000, 97 pp.)
* Quality Assurance in Higher Education in the Russian Federation (English, 2001, 126 pp.)
* From Words to Action: Approaches to a Programme (English, 2002, 240 pp.)
* Policy-Making, Strategic Planning, and Management of Higher Education (English, 2002, 194 pp.)
* Financial Management and Institutional Relationships with Civil Society (English, 2002, 234 pp.)
* Quality Assurance and the Development of Course Programmes (English, 2002, 224 p.)
* Guidelines for Promoting Gender Equity in Higher Education in Central and Eastern Europe (English, 2003, 110 pp.)
* Quality Assurance and Accreditation: A Glossary of Basic Terms and Definitions (English, 2004, 84 pp)

## Monographs on Higher Education

* Albania (1986), Austria (1987), Belarus (1983, 1999), Bulgaria (1983, 2002), Estonia (1997), Finland (1988), Germany (1999), The German Democratic Republic (1983), Hungary (1985, 1997), Moldova (2003), The Netherlands (1985, 1988, 1989), Norway (1983, 1991), Poland (1987), Switzerland (1984), Turkey (1990), The Ukrainian SSR (1985), The USSR (1990), The United Kingdom (1996), The United States (1982).

## Studies on Science and Culture

* Bioetica în România: teme si dileme (Romanian, 1999, 126 pp.)
* Politics and Culture in Southeastern Europe (English, 2001, 335 pp.)
* Sustainable Development: Theory and Practice Regarding the Transition of Socio-Economic Systems towards Sustainability (English, 2001, 306 pp.)
* South East Europe–The Ambiguous Definitions of a Space – L'Europe du Sud-Est - les définitions ambiguës d'un espace