

Conclusions of the final panel

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Bologna Seminar „The Quality Assurance system in Higher Education on European and national level“

It has been said rightly that our discussion has been oscillating between very practical, detailed approaches to problem-solving and a general discussion about the importance of quality assurance and quality improvement. I think this is a benefit. It can be seen as a defined result of this conference and put forward to the London Conference as such.

First of all, there is a general consensus that even though quality assurance in all its aspects is burdensome, is a challenge and is difficult to achieve. Putting quality assurance into place is essential at all levels of our higher education system: at an individual level for each individual teacher and researcher, at an institutional level, at a national level and at a European level looking at the US and Asia as competitors. Otherwise we won't be able to meet the challenges.

Secondly, we've made it very clear that the central responsibility in a growing higher education system lies with the universities and the academics themselves. And this is not just a statement. It means that all further procedures like legal provision, agreements etc. have been based on this conviction. Institutions have to be empowered in order to take this responsibility, both in terms of funding and in terms of their rights. For example they have the legal provision to:

- choose their own students
- take their own decisions on how to use their funding
- enter into their cooperations
- employ their own staff at the conditions that they consider right (payment or pension rights for example)

This is quality assurance as it stands as well as talking about qualification of academic teachers and of contents and outcome of courses.

It has also been said that we need to strike the balance between framework and responsibility on the one hand and this essential academic responsibility on the other hand. And we have made it clear: While quality assurance is no substitute for sufficient funding, formalised accreditation is no such substitute for quality improvement – it's just one step towards that, but an essential one. A register or a list or an agreement between nations competing or cooperating on quality assurance procedures and on institutional level is no substitute for accreditation itself. It doesn't prove quality in itself. But they all need to go together.

Here we enter the level of realising this general challenge. We've said that the register (that has been so much talked about) can certainly be a building block in this cooperation. While there has been controversial debate about such a limited issue, we can maybe enter a zone of easier decision-taking and easier cooperation when we start. The register is one step towards realising a kind of quality improvement in Europe. It should not become

practice in the sense of a wide-reaching bureaucracy that ties in and that is watertight against all legal implications (even though this is the hope of many of those that have responsibility for the development of the Higher Education sector and for making all this recognition of degrees and of programmes operational).

It has been made very clear that the risks in this context need to be taken, which is certainly not an easy answer but one that is very adequate to what academia has been about for centuries. Thank you very much.