

International Seminar
“The Quality-Assurance System for Higher Education
at European and National Level”

15 and 16 February 2007 in Berlin

Greeting by
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State Secretary Thielen,

President Wintermantel,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bologna seminars form a permanent feature of activities necessary to prepare ministerial conferences. These seminars provide opportunities to evaluate the interim results of the Bologna Process and to work on developing joint ideas about the European Higher Education Area. In preparing the conferences of ministers, they also serve to raise public awareness of selected aspects of the Bologna Process, to reflect international experiences in the implementation of both long-term and interim objectives and also draw attention to national characteristics. At the same time, they motivate all stakeholders to report on the highly complex and demanding obligations to which the Bologna signatory states committed themselves in order to realise the European Higher Education Area.

As representative of the *Länder* in the Federal Republic of Germany, I am very pleased to welcome you to this seminar in Berlin dedicated to aspects of quality assurance. There is no doubt: quality assurance is one of the key elements of the Bologna Process. Without the certainty that the Bologna states create not only the structural prerequisites for compatible and transparent study structures but also assure the quality of the study courses, there would be very little cross-border recognition of academic performance and higher-education degrees without comprehensive and detailed checks. This mutual recognition facilitates student mobility immensely. And this recognition is encouraged if the responsibility for the quality of courses is initially perceived as a national and higher education institutions' responsibility oriented at standards agreed upon at international level.

On the other hand the issue of quality assurance demonstrates that the Bologna Process has to include the considerations and initiatives of other organisations and institutions. The discussed register of quality-assurance agencies also concerns the European Union. OECD and the Council of Europe have adopted recommendations for cross-border quality assurance. The comprehensive qualification framework, the European Union is striving to achieve, must be compatible with the qualification framework for the European Higher Education Area developed in the Bologna Process. The national quality-assurance institutions are participants of an international network far beyond the Bologna process area.

Quality assurance, to be discussed today and tomorrow, especially the role of national and European players in the quality-assurance process – that means agencies, higher education institutions, provinces or Federal States and the federal government in Federations - is one of the key questions. And I suppose we expect different answers depending on how the Bologna states structure their national quality-assurance systems.

As you know, the accreditation of study courses is a central element in quality-assurance in Germany. The accreditation system was developed in cooperation between the institutions of higher education and the Federal States as well as the Federal Government. In the federal system of Germany, accreditation was and is the responsibility of the *Länder*. Despite all critics regarding the financial and personal costs of the procedure and the efforts associated with course accreditation in higher education institutions and accreditation agencies, especially for the peers, accreditation in Germany has proven itself as successful: this is the conclusion of the National Bologna Report 2007. The central accreditation body in Germany, the Accreditation Council, was converted into a foundation under public law in Bonn at the beginning of 2005. The accreditation of courses is regulated consistently for all higher education institutions in Germany via *Länder* laws on higher education, resolutions and recommendations by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Länder* and relevant resolutions of the Accreditation Council.

The accreditation procedures are based on the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). With resolutions adopted between December 2005 and June 2006, the Accreditation Council revised all basic procedures, rules and accreditation criteria. Approved agencies are bound by the rules of the Accreditation Council to observe the ESG.

In the beginning of the last winter term 45 % of all around 11.500 courses in German higher education institutions started as Bachelor- and Master courses, among them 70 % of all courses in Fachhochschulen (= universities of applied sciences) and 39 % in universities. One third of these courses had been accredited.

Therefore a discussion has started how to develop our quality-assurance system. One aspect discussed is to strengthen the role and the responsibility of higher education institutions in the quality-assurance process. Quality assurance is the main

task of higher education institutions themselves. Nevertheless it is said in our constitution that the education system is under responsibility of the state. As the higher education system in Germany is a state founded, state organised and state financed higher education system – in the around 20 % private institutions in Germany only 2 % of all students in Germany are enrolled – the state, and that means after the reform of federalism in 2006: the federal states are responsible for guaranteeing the quality of institutions and courses. That is the reason for discussions on introducing the possibility of system accreditation or process accreditation in supplementing programme accreditation. The object of accreditation will no longer be the individual study course but the quality assurance and improvement management of a higher education institution as a whole. A pilot project with four higher education institutions could be finished successfully as a proof of principle at the end of 2006.

Higher education is a public good and a public responsibility – this is said in the communiqué of the first follow-up meeting of ministers in Prague on May 19th 2001. Underlining this the *Länder* in the Federal Republic of Germany are convinced that, despite the increasing autonomy of higher education institutions and despite quality assurance by means of competition and delegation of accreditation to agencies, the state remains responsible for higher education institutions and their study courses, at least in state financed and also in state acknowledged higher education institutions. The state remains responsible for ensuring quality of courses and degrees as well as mobility of students and graduates – at least by ensuring appropriate procedures of accreditation processes.

This includes accreditation by other than national quality-assurance institutions or agencies. However, their procedures and standards have to take account of national requirements within the Bologna process. This is the reason why there are reservations in Germany about regarding accreditation as a for profit service offered on a global education market.

In the Berlin communiqué from September 19, 2003, the member states of the Bologna Process agreed upon the European Higher Education Area being a contribution to make Europe “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better

jobs and greater social cohesion". This requires taking responsibility for the quality of education provided in higher-education and employment systems.

I wish you and us fruitful discussions and future oriented results in this seminar. On behalf of the Länder in Germany: welcome again in Berlin.

Thank you for your attention.