

# Quality in the context of the Bologna process

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## Structure of the presentation

- The Bologna process as the European context for HE issues
- QA and the growing role of internal processes
- External evaluation and the importance of moving beyond the national level
- The European QA discussions

## I. The Bologna Process : Developments since 2001

- Prague Communiqué (2001):  
Ministers "... emphasized the necessity of close European cooperation and mutual trust in and acceptance of national quality assurance systems..."

### => **National Agencies**

- Berlin Communiqué (2003): Ministers "... stress
  - ✓ the need to develop mutually shared criteria and methodologies on quality assurance,
  - ✓ consistent with the principle of institutional autonomy, the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself..."

### => **Higher education institutions**

## I. The Bologna Process : Developments since 2001

- Bergen Communiqué (2005): Ministers
  - ✓ “... adopt the standards and guidelines for QA in the EHEA...
  - ✓ ... commit ... to introducing the proposed model for peer review of quality assurance agencies on a national basis, while respecting the commonly accepted guidelines and criteria.
  - ✓ ... welcome the principle of European register of quality assurance agencies”

=> **European organisations**

## II. The growing importance of internal quality processes

- On QA issues the point of departure is a robust internal quality culture
- These types of process already exist in a growing number of institutions (Trends V and European QA Forum show progress in commitment)
- How to develop a quality culture?
  - ✓ EUA launches project in 2002
  - ✓ About 130 HEIs from 30 countries in the three rounds

## II. The growing importance of internal quality processes

- The QC project title: The signpost of a philosophy and a method

A carefully-chosen title: Quality culture vs. Quality control or Quality management

- To indicate:
  - The importance of a change in attitudes and behaviours within the institutions
  - The importance of a grass-root development of quality rather than a top-down approach

## II. The growing importance of internal quality processes

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Central philosophical tenet: Quality is contextual

- An institution must develop quality measures that are congruent with its **internal environment**
- An institution must develop quality measures that are congruent with its **external environment**
- An institution must take into account the **time vector**: e.g., “quality champions” might be useful at the beginning of the internal quality developments but not necessarily later

## II. The growing importance of internal quality processes

Project results: In terms of process

- The “exceptionalism” of higher education institutions
- The challenge then is two-fold:
  - ✓ To systematise standards and operations across an institution while taking into account the professional concentration of expertise at the grass roots.
  - ✓ To develop a set of standards in line with the institutional mission, without stifling individual initiatives and departmental diversity.

## II. The growing importance of internal quality processes

To meet these two challenges, it is essential to:

- **Engage the whole community** – including students and administrative staff who are often forgotten – in a process of reflection about missions and goals
- Develop a **communication strategy** that combines top-down, bottom up and horizontal communication channels, written documents and formal and informal meetings

## II. The growing importance of internal quality processes

- Identify and empower “**quality culture champions**” to contribute to the development and implementation of a quality culture strategy
- Create **teams** across the institution in order to ensure cross-fertilisation
- Address the issue of **fears** by developing a coherent staff development scheme
- Support the development of an effective quality culture with appropriate **human and financial resources**

## II. The growing importance of internal quality processes

Project results: success factors:

- The success of the **first steps** in introducing a quality culture is essential for an effective development along that path
- The importance of **institutional governance** and **community building** (vs. management) for an effective quality culture
- The importance of **strategic thinking**, based on an appropriate institutional analysis (SWOT or similar analytical instruments)

## II. The growing importance of internal quality processes

- The integral causal link between strong **institutional autonomy** and the effective development of a quality culture
- The link between quality development and appropriate **financial and human resources**, including staff development schemes
- Avoid the bureaucratisation of QC (i.e., proper staffing of QC unit and staff rotation)

## II. The growing importance of internal quality processes

Project results: impact

- On **participating institutions** through their individual action plan
- On the **European QA Community**: An increased recognition that quality culture is key to improving quality levels
- On **Berlin and Bergen Communiqués**: Ministers recognised that “ the primary responsibility for QA in HE lies with each institution itself”

## II. The growing importance of internal quality processes Lessons from Trends V Questionnaires

- HEI questionnaire responses - evaluation frequencies:
  - Staff 84%
  - Programmes 70%
  - Research 65%
  - Student Services 43%
  
- Overall high level of internal activity – increase in attention to QA...
- Relatively low priority to assessing student services

## II. The growing importance of internal quality processes Lessons from Trends V visits

- Importance of quality, and high level of activity confirmed
- But effective mechanisms to secure quality improvement still a major challenge
- Concern that some external systems are over-intrusive, resulting in bureaucratic procedures that are counter-productive to institutional responsibility  
=> In these cases, institutional action driven more by external system than by institutional goals & objectives
- Confirmation of Trends IV and QC project finding: link between functional institutional autonomy & effective quality is essential

### III. The diversity of processes in external evaluation: some questions & answers

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- Evaluation versus accreditation: is it a problem?
  - ✓ Is it neutral to have a growing role of one or the other? Accreditation might provide more standardisation and uniformity and less support for creativity and diversity
  
- What future for the evaluation of programs?
  - ✓ In many countries QA agencies working on programmes are suffering from overload and looking to change the scope of their evaluations
  - ✓ It is the responsibility of HEIs to evaluate and monitor their own programmes

=> Institutional audits, the way forward

### III. The diversity of processes in external evaluation: some questions & answers

- Could evaluation of teaching be separated from evaluation of research?
  - ✓ They need to be at least thought through together and articulated at the level of discipline or institution
  
- Are national evaluations the way forward?
  - ✓ Due to globalisation and to progress in building EHEA, demand for international (or European) evaluation is growing from either universities or funding agencies or governments
  - => Growing demand for the EUA's institutional Evaluation Programme

## Conclusion: Strengthening a European QA dimension

- Continuing the 'E4' work – proposals for the European Register:
  - ✓ The register will provide information on QA agencies working in Europe and whether they comply or not with the QA standards adopted in Bergen, based on national reviews.
  - ✓ The register will be the responsibility of the main stakeholders: HEIs, students, QA agencies and social partners.
  - ✓ Its main added-value is to provide an instrument for evaluating QA agencies via a process based on a ***system of checks and balances.***