

Quality assessment and quality assurance in higher education institutions in Germany

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In Germany, there is no single assessment system at national level, due to the fact that operational higher education responsibilities are resting with the individual *Länder*. Therefore, multiple systems of external quality assessment exist, and the situation is characterised by a rich diversity. The subject-matter of this paper will be to give an outline of the different systems and practices of quality assessment and control in German institutions of higher education.¹

1 Introduction: political background regarding the increasing importance of Quality Assessment in the German higher education system

The increasing importance of quality assessment and assurance in institutions of higher education in Germany (and the establishment of quality agencies) has to be seen in the context of basic changes and reforms in the higher education sector over the last thirty years. The following processes are typical for this:

- The *expansion of the higher education sector* and the increase in student numbers have changed the higher education system, which was previously small and exclusive into a system of mass education. This set in motion structural and functional changes in higher education institutions.
- Higher education institutions compete with other social spheres for a *limited amount of public resources*. The public and parliaments demand accountability for the performance and efficiency of the higher education institutions, which are financed by tax money. The introduction of performance based systems of fund allocation in all *Länder* of the Federal Republic of Germany (in the following referred to as *Länder*) is one of the consequences. Increasing competition for third-party funds also exists.

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- In connection with the expansion of the higher education sector, internal *management and allocation of resource problems* have arisen, which cannot be resolved on the basis of the principle of cooperativeness (which was effective in smaller units). The reform of organizational structures (e.g. the enhancement of the position of the vice president and of the dean) and the implementation of financial monitoring initiated by the universities are reactions to these problems.
- *Challenges of globalization and internationalization have to be faced*: The globalization of education markets has resulted in international competition for high potentials.
- The *educational background, motivations and objectives of students* have changed. New ideas for the organization of studies have to face this. Moreover, the shorter life-span of knowledge makes a quicker modification of study courses inevitable and increases the question of the duration of study courses and of further training. One of the results of this development in Germany is the introduction of the internationally accepted bachelor and master courses.

These are challenges that higher education faces worldwide and hence in Germany too. In order to solve these problems and to be successful in a national and international context, higher education institutions and the state have established quality enhancement and assurance procedures according to international standards.

2 The allocation of accountability in the German higher education system

In Germany, there is no single assessment system at national level, due to the fact that operational higher education responsibilities lie with the *Länder*. The institutions of higher education are state institutions of the *Länder*, their current expenditure for research and teaching being primarily funded through the *Länder* budgets. The *Länder* are responsible for education and culture, including higher education institutions, while the federal government (*Bund*) is in charge of higher education framework legislation. The federal government has integrated the task of quality assurance within the Higher Education Framework Act, and the different *Länder* have amended it within their Higher Education Acts.

According to this allocation of responsibilities in higher education, various systems of quality assurance have been developed in the higher education sector over the last 10 years. Therefore, various systems of external quality assessment exist on the level of the 16 *Länder*. The *Länder* governments have established different kinds of advisory bodies or quality agencies. Meanwhile, the situation is characterized by a rich diversity. For this

reason, the subject-matter of this paper will be to provide an outline of the different systems and practices of quality assessment and control in German institutions of higher education.

Quality assessment in Germany can be divided into

- type of institutionalisation of quality assessment (quality agency – advisory body of the government or minister – committee of experts),
- permanent or non-permanent,
- contracting authority and closeness to the policy maker,
- extension of the instruction of the evaluation (teaching and studies, research, structure of a discipline).

Of course national bodies which practise approved standards of quality assessment do exist. These assessments refer mainly to major investments in the areas of buildings, equipment and (generally spoken) research. I will only touch on those elements of quality assessment that are at national level. This paper will concentrate on quality assessment in higher education institutions and therefore moves to the level of the *Länder*.

2.1 Quality assessment at national level (University Construction Act, joint funding of research, role of institutions – Science Council, German Research Foundation, Rectors' Conference, Accreditation Council)

As explained before, the higher education institutions are state institutions of the *Länder*, their current expenditure for research and teaching being funded primarily through the *Länder* budgets. However, there are a few exceptions: Larger investments such as *buildings and large-scale scientific equipment* are shared by the federal government to fifty percent as part of *the joint task of construction in higher education*. The joint task of setting up universities was incorporated into the Basic Law in 1969. It has since made a significant contribution to the expansion of the university system. The *University Construction Act* (Hochschulbauförderungsgesetz – HBFÜG) requires the German Science Council (Wissenschaftsrat) to issue recommendations on the overall plan for the extension of existing and the construction of new higher education institutions. These recommendations form the basis for the funding decisions made by the federal government and the *Länder* governments in the planning committee.

Another joint task in the field of higher education refers to the *joint funding of research*. This applies to the extra-university research sector and to the central public funding or-

ganization for academic research in Germany, the *German Research Foundation*. The German Research Foundation – Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) – is the main source of research funds for the universities² in particular. The allocation of research funds is linked to external quality assessment. The DFG uses a widely accepted peer review system³ on all project grant applications. Other public funds for research come from the federal and the *Länder* governments. In addition to that, higher education institutions can obtain private funds from industry and foundations. Most of the sponsors use a well-defined system of quality assessment. While extra-university research institutes are evaluated by the German Science Council by order of the federal and the *Länder* governments, no such evaluation system at federal level (Bundesebene) exists for the German universities.

In Germany, initiatives for a quality assessment of study courses and teaching at national level gradually gained practical importance, after two *pilot projects on the assessment of study courses and teaching* had been carried out by the *German Science Council* and the *German Rectors' Conference* (Hochschulrektorenkonferenz – HRK) in 1994/1995. Their main intention was to intensify the discussion on evaluation strategies on a national scale and to establish accepted quality assurance procedures as well as performance indicators. Both institutions adopted recommendations for setting up a system of quality assurance in German institutions of higher education. In 1996, the Science Council published "recommendations on the quality improvement of teaching at universities through evaluations" with the aim of orientating study courses at all universities towards clear-cut course objectives and training profiles.

According to the recommendations of the German Science Council and the Rectors' Conference, a *standard set of methods and procedures* has gained acceptance. The main elements of the entire quality assurance procedure are self evaluation (internal), peer

² The DFG budget totalled about 1,205 billion Euros in 2001. Contributions come from the Federal Government (about 60% overall) via the Federal Ministry for Education and Science, the *Länder* governments (about 40%) and the Donors' Association for German Science (Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft (0.4%). Some 25.000 projects (including fellowships) are currently supported through these funds. Cp. <http://www.dfg.de>.

³ The backbone of the DFG's peer review system are the elected review committees. Members of these committees must be consulted on all individual grant applications. They are elected every four years by direct, general and secret ballot by all researchers active in academic institutions who have held a Ph.D. degree for three years or more. Nominations for these elections are put forward by established learned societies on whom the Grants Committee has conferred this right, for their respective fields.

review (external) and follow up. The procedure employed is compatible with the international peer review standard.

The "Dutch approach" is predominantly in use. According to this, the evaluation procedures are expected to highlight the particular strengths and weaknesses of the evaluated department as well as standards and aims to be met. It should lead to a better self-awareness of the overall performance of the department under review. Furthermore, it is considered to be very important that evaluations will contribute to improve the internal communication between teachers and students.

Main aspects covered in most of the evaluations are: institutional context, mission and aims of the department, organisation and structure of study programmes, infrastructure (academic staff and equipment for teaching and research), integration of ongoing research in teaching activities, organisation of exams, supervision of students, academic cooperation.

In order to guarantee the quality of the recently introduced bachelor and master programmes in Germany, a German *Accreditation Council* was founded in 1999 after an agreement by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Culture.⁴ The Accreditation Council accredits single accreditation agencies which will then accredit degree courses. Additionally, the Accreditation Council acts as a co-ordinator and critical observer of the work carried out by the accreditation agencies. Accreditation is certain to replace – for the bachelor and master programmes – the traditional framework examination regulations.

2.2 Quality Assessment at Länder level

As I cannot give a detailed report about the situation in 16 *Länder*, I will concentrate on four *Länder* with a large higher education sector who have established advisory bodies or quality agencies: Bayern, Baden-Württemberg, Niedersachsen and Nordrhein-Westfalen (NRW). Nordrhein-Westfalen is also an example of the non-recurring work of a "Council of Experts". Since the publication of their "report of experts" for the higher education sector in NRW, other *Länder* have established councils of experts to assess the regional higher education system, e.g. Schleswig-Holstein and Hamburg.

⁴ <http://www.akkreditierungsrat.de>

2.2.1 Bayern: Quality assessment of teaching, research and organizational structure at subject level on behalf of the Council for Science and Research

Legal status and policy context

In Bayern, the evaluation of disciplines by order of the State has been practised for 20 years. This is a widely unknown fact because Bayern communicated with the universities but not with the general public about the recommendations of the *Advisory Board for Research and Higher Education Issues* (Beirat für Wissenschafts- und Hochschulfragen) and the reports remained internal. From 1994 on, the subjects Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Electrical Engineering, Romance studies and Philosophy at all Bavarian universities were examined by external committees. At the centre of these evaluations at subject level was the attempt to integrate new international research trends within teaching and the question of what seminal structures are essential for a modern and forward-looking provision of teaching. Consequently, the question that resulted, was with what special orientation vacancies should be filled under the circumstances that a new generation of professors had to be appointed. The recommendations of the committees formed the basis for the future recruitment of professors.

When the *Council for Science and Research* (Rat für Wissenschaft und Forschung) was set up as an advisory body of the Bavarian Minister of Research, Science and Culture in 1998, the structural surveys continued. On the basis of the assessment of the present situation of a certain discipline, the evaluations placed another main focus on the future development of research. The Council also worked on recommendations to ensure a distinguished profile at Bavarian universities and a well-balanced representation of the disciplines in the State under a university-spanning, state-wide perspective. The intention of these quality assessments conducted by the Council is to develop the structures of the disciplines as well as to give them an improved profile in comparison with other universities at home and abroad.

With this emphasis, the *Economic Sciences* were evaluated first. Through this survey, the dialogue with the universities involved continued. Within this process, reform conceptions were worked out. It has to be pointed out that the results differ from the original recommendations made by the Council. In this way, a reorganisation of the Economic Sciences with new impulses for teaching and research was achieved. For instance, the reforms covered the full expansion of business administration (with technical orienta-

tion) at Munich Technical University ⁵ and the new organisation of the Economic Sciences, as well as a new degree course "Philosophy and Economics" at the University of Bayreuth.

These assessments were followed by those for Slavic studies, Indo-European studies, Geo-graphy and Education science. The Council also dealt with Law studies. All recommendations were discussed with the universities and are being implemented step by step.

The strategy of the Bavarian State Government for the future development of the higher education system is directed at the following aims:

- to give the Bavarian higher education institutions an appropriate new profile in view of international competition on the basis of external and internal quality assessment,
- to integrate higher education institutions in a state-wide web of profiles.

Method

One of the last evaluation reports accomplished applies to the degree subject Geography at Bavarian universities. The following remarks refer to this report. The task of the peer group⁶ was to describe the situation of this subject at Bavarian universities

- inside the particular university,
- in a Bavarian and in a German context,
- in an international context,
- with a specific emphasis on the future research tasks of the subject.

In order to fulfil its mandate, the peer group acted on the assumption that the complete research spectrum should be represented at Bavarian universities, that the international development in the branches represented should not only be followed but shaped, that the teaching structures should be adequate and that teacher training should be regarded appropriately .

The evaluation was carried out in accordance with international approved procedures and standards:

⁵ The Council originally recommended a combined study programme business management of Munich Technical University and the University of Munich.

⁶ The members of the peer group are authorised as elected reviewers of the German Research Foundation (DFG).

1. understanding by the peer group about the procedures and the evaluation criteria as well as the predefinition of a set of indicators (parameters),
2. collection of quantitative data and qualitative information of the particular unit (institute, department, subject group, chair ...) covering performance in teaching and research as well as in organisation and management (this was organized by the Bavarian State Institute for Higher Education Research and Planning which acted as a sort of office for the committee),
3. adjustment of the official statistics with the data of the particular unit,
4. visit of the peer group at the universities evaluated, discussions with the representatives (management board (vice-president, deans...), professors, non-professional teaching staff, students),
5. assessment of the performance of the particular units,
6. internal consultation and wording of recommendations for the further structural development of the subject in the context of the particular universities and in a state-wide context.

The *assessment of teaching* is based on the following *indicators*: courses of studies and degrees, number of students, number of degrees, duration of studies, support relations, waiting period for study courses with a restricted number of students (e.g. practical courses and excursions), equipment of libraries, laboratories, computers etc., offer of further training. Further aspects taken into consideration are the profile and range of study courses offered, their relation to vocational practise and participation in international student exchange programmes.

The *assessment of research* is based on quantitative indicators like: the number of publications, research projects and amount of third-party funds (spent), number of invited lectures (presentations), number of dissertations and habilitations, activity as evaluator for scientific institutions, ministries etc., consultants' and experts' reports for applied research, editing of journals and periodicals, function of visiting professor abroad, awards and honors, holding conferences (esp. international symposiums), residence of visiting professors and scholarship-holders from abroad. As important as these quantitative indicators is the qualitative assessment of research performance by the peer group.

A third part of the evaluation refers to the *structure and management* of the department or institute, which is quite often underestimated. In this context I will only mention a few qualitative indicators: internal communication and decision flow, organization and planning of the study courses offered, course guidance and study counselling, international

student exchange, consideration of student concerns, staff affairs and staff management, budget affairs, administration of houses and rooms, organization and support service of libraries, collections, computer pools, laboratories etc., public relations, alumni service.

The final report is sent to the universities for comments. The universities' statements flow into the consultations of the Council for Science and Research. The Council itself recommends following the peer group's recommendations and implementing them or deviating from them for certain reasons.

2.2.2 Niedersachsen: Quality assessment of teaching and research by means of the Central Evaluation and Accreditation Agency and the Scientific Commission

Legal status and policy context

The Central Evaluation and Accreditation Agency Hanover (ZEVA) was set up in 1995 as an institution of all universities and universities of applied science in Niedersachsen. It is maintained by the Rectors' Conference of higher education institutions in Niedersachsen and is funded by the state.⁷ The Ministry for Science and Culture in Niedersachsen attends and monitors the work of the agency as a member of the steering group. ZEVA is the oldest quality assurance agency in Germany. In 2000 an independent department of accreditation was added to ZEVA.

Method

It is ZEVA's task to organise and coordinate an assessment at all universities and universities of applied sciences in Niedersachsen in a university-wide, systematic and periodical way. ZEVA regards itself as a centre of competence, information and consulting. The evaluation procedure is in line with the international standard of internal evaluation, external evaluation and follow up. The coordination of teaching assessments by ZEVA comprises⁸

⁷ A steering group is assigned to ZEVA which governs the evaluation procedure. Altogether the steering group consists of three representatives from universities and universities of applied sciences, one representative from the Ministry for Science and Culture and one expert on international research into higher education. The composition of the steering group should ensure that, on the one hand the specific interests of higher education institutions are guaranteed and that, on the other hand, the interests of the state are appropriately maintained.

⁸ <http://www.zeva.uni-hannover.de>

- informing higher education management boards and departments about the evaluation procedures,
- the appointment of peers by mutual agreement in the subjects concerned⁹, the preparation of the peer group for the evaluation and providing assistance during the procedure,
- accepting the self-evaluation reports of the departments based on a manual,
- the publication of reports and
- assistance in the follow up.

After two years, the departments are asked to give a report on the implementation of results. Since, meanwhile the evaluation agency has existed for about seven years, all subjects have been assessed.

The evaluation procedure organised by ZEVA includes aspects of research. Nevertheless, the assessment of research is the main task of the Scientific Commission of Niedersachsen, an advisory body of the Government of Niedersachsen established in 1999 in consensus with the higher education institutions. The central task of the Scientific Commission is to assess research at all higher education institutions in Niedersachsen in an effective evaluation procedure. Extra-university research institutions are partly included. Moreover, the Scientific Commission decides on special grant applications requested for outstanding research projects¹⁰. The results of the research assessments form the basis of recommendations for the Government. The reports are published. Up to now, evaluation reports for the subjects Chemistry, Biology, History, Construction Engineering, Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Architecture, Economical Sciences, Computer Sciences and Teacher Training courses have been published.

ZEVA and the Scientific Commission of Niedersachsen are committed to mutual information and coordination about the time schedule for the assessment of the particular subjects.

⁹ All members of the peer group do not come from Niedersachsen.

¹⁰ Assessment of proposals for research funding from Niedersachsens preliminary funds of the „Volkswagen Foundation“(Niedersächsisches Vorab der Volkswagen-Stiftung) .

2.2.3 Baden-Württemberg: Quality assessment of teaching and research by an Evaluation Agency

Legal status and policy context

In Baden-Württemberg (BW), the Government had decided to introduce a system to review the performance and to enhance the quality of all higher education institutions (universities, universities of applied sciences and teacher training colleges) throughout BW. In August 2000 the Evaluation Agency (Evaluationsagentur Baden-Württemberg, EVALAG) was established. EVALAG is a foundation under the terms of Public Law, endowed by the Government, but set up as a non-governmental body. It started operating in the summer of 2001.

EVALAG consists of a Board of Governors and an Executive Department, the latter carries out the operational business. The Board is an independent body consisting of 10 members: three professors elected by the Council of Vice-chancellors (Rectors) of the universities, two professors elected by the Council of Vice-Chancellors of the universities of applied sciences, one from the teacher training colleges, one member of the Ministry appointed by the Minister of Research and the Arts of BW and three non-voting external experts for quality assurance appointed by the Minister in agreement with the three Councils of Vice-chancellors.

The task of the EVALAG is to organise, coordinate and monitor quality assessment at higher education institutions in BW. Assessments will be carried out regularly (normally every five to eight years) and if specifically requested by institutions of higher education, the Research Council (an advisory board for the further development of the structure and funding of the research system in BW) or the ministry. The purposes of quality assessment are ¹¹:

- to ensure that the public funding provided supports excellent quality education,
- to encourage the improvement of standards and performance in teaching and learning at institutional, faculty, departmental and subject level,
- to provide information for students and the general public on this education by publishing reports,
- to create transparency in the higher education sector by standardised assessments, and
- to provide both higher education institutions and the Government with data for strategic decisions.

¹¹ <http://www.evalag.de>

Method

The main principles of the assessment method are:

- to combine internal and external review procedures,
- regular assessment intervals,
- involvement of students in the process,
- publication of results.

Internal evaluation

Quality assessment is carried out in relation to the subject aims and objectives set by the faculty. They will prepare a self-assessment on the subject, reporting on classroom/seminar/laboratory situations, organisation of student assessment and examinations, students' work and achievements, the curriculum and how it relates to examination requirements, staff and staff development, the situation of female students/researchers, the application of resources (library, information technology, equipment), and student support and guidance.

External evaluation

A two-day assessment visit follows, carried out by a panel of at least four academic peers¹² (including one not representing the subject) who are generally drawn from higher education institutions in Germany, but from outside BW. They are supplemented by one peer with an industry/business/professional background. Each panel will examine the situation found against the information provided in the self-report. They then give an overall judgement and prepare an assessors' report from their findings.

In 2001, three assessments across different categories of higher education institutions were carried out. For organisational and logistic reasons (time of the evaluation procedures, different types of higher education institutions) the subjects Architecture, Geography and Social Studies were evaluated first. After a subject has been assessed the evaluation agency will publish final reports on individual institutions as well as subject reviews, enabling comparisons of a subject's performance to be made.

¹² Appointed by the Board of Governors on the basis of proposals of the higher education institutions regarded in the evaluation and scientific research associations (wissenschaftliche Fachgesellschaften).

The university-wide assessments will be continued with the subjects Business Administration, Educational Science and Process Engineering. Furthermore, it is intended to assess teacher training courses in the subjects Physics, Chemistry and Biology at the teacher training colleges.

2.2.4 Nordrhein-Westfalen: Quality pact and Council of Experts

Legal status and policy context

In Nordrhein-Westfalen (NRW), a Council of Experts was assigned to assess universities and universities of applied science on the basis of the quality pact between the higher education institutions and the Ministry for Schools, Science and Research in NRW signed in 1999. The basis of the quality pact made between higher education institutions and the ministry were the following agreements:

- a reduction of 2000 jobs at universities and universities of applied science within 10 years,
- the promise of planning reliability and stability of funds for staff and materials (equipment) on the basis of the 1999 budget,
- establishment of a new supplementary fund for innovations in teaching and research which all universities could benefit from. The innovation fund is financed by the savings made from cutting 1000 jobs,
- requirements for the Evaluation Committee were the guarantee of locations for all higher education institutions and the expansion of universities of applied science.

It was the official task of the Council of Experts to assess the 27 higher education institutions in NRW by way of a cross section survey and to give recommendations for their further structural development. In terms of an overall planning of the higher education sector in NRW, it should conduct the overall planning of the higher education institutions to work towards regional coordination and cooperation.

Method

The evaluation procedure consists of the following main elements: Each higher education institution and each faculty was asked to provide information and various data (including performance indicators, number of graduates, duration of studies, success rates, third party funds) about their starting position and their overall planning based on a structural pattern. After analysing the information, visiting committees visited the universities and universities of applied sciences. Thereafter, a report was formulated. The Council of Experts agreed to draft recommendations for all higher education institutions

based on the reports made by the visiting committees. In connection with this overall view the following aspects were considered¹³:

- development of subject groups and selected subjects in NRW
- structures, capacities and locations of teacher-training institutions
- cooperation and concentration
- further structure of study courses and degrees
- internationalization of higher education institutions
- life-long learning
- multimedia in teaching, open university and open university lessons
- development of comprehensive universities
- development of universities of applied science
- quality management and quality assurance
- gender studies and the promotion of women

To implement further recommendations, the ministry intends to conclude target agreements with the higher education institutions.

Important results drawn from the report, which are being implemented at present, are the merger of the universities of Duisburg and Essen, the closing of the teacher training department at the University of Bonn and the reduction of departments and concentration of research areas at the University of Wuppertal.

Self-evaluation of universities and universities of applied science in NRW

To support the self-evaluation of higher education institutions in NRW, two administration offices "Evaluation of Universities" and "Evaluation of Universities of Applied Science" had been established by the two Rectors' Conferences in 1996 and 1997. The target of these administrative offices is to support higher education institutions in NRW in using evaluation methods as instruments for self-controlled quality assurance and improvement. The administrative offices see themselves as service institutions for higher education institutions in NRW. Their principal tasks are

- to provide advice to higher education institutions on the need for information demand, questionnaires, guidelines and implementation of evaluation procedures,

¹³ Profilbildung im Dialog. Hochschulland NRW im Aufbruch. Bericht des Expertenrates im Rahmen des Qualitätspakts zwischen der Landesregierung und den Hochschulen des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, Hrsg. vom Ministerium für Schule, Wissenschaft und Forschung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf 2001.

- to offer personal support with the coordination und organization of evaluation procedures,
- to organise meetings and panels to exchange information about quality assessment and evaluation procedures.

3 Internal approaches to quality assessment in German universities

Evaluation of courses and teaching reports

Apart from methods of internal and external evaluation, various procedures to assess the quality of teaching and courses of studies were developed throughout the nineties: the evaluation of courses, teaching reports, surveys of students and graduates. The main objective of the *evaluation of courses* is to provide the lecturers with information about their courses from the students' point of view and to inform them about positive aspects and possible improvements to be made.

Moreover, the *Länder* have introduced so-called regular *teaching reports* to be prepared by the university departments to provide a common information base at faculty level. The teaching report is a pre-evaluation element of a faculty's quality assessment. It comprises a continuing internal reporting system containing basic data and performance indicators.

HRK Quality Assurance Project:

The Quality Assurance Project (Projekt Q) was established by the German Rectors' Conference (Hochschulrektorenkonferenz – HRK) in 1998 as a central platform to increase the exchange of information and experiences in quality improvement measures in the German higher education system. The main task of the project is to ensure and develop common standards of evaluation at the national level, to boost communication and co-operation between evaluation agencies, higher education institutions, peers and staff involved and to provide information to those who are going to introduce systematic evaluation procedures.

There are some other institutions on the national scale who are active in the field of quality assessment and which help to implement quality enhancement procedures upon request of a single university or faculty. The procedures employed by the following institutions differ to some extent from the common standard of peer review:

- Higher Education Information System Ltd. (Hochschul-Informations-System – HIS GmbH) Hannover
- Centre of Higher Education Development (Centrum für Hochschulentwicklung – CHE) Gütersloh
- Interdisciplinary Centre for Research and Development in Higher Education (Interdisziplinäres Zentrum für Hochschuldidaktik – IZHD), University of Bielefeld

For instance, the IZHD uses an evaluation model which is characterised as organisation consulting. The evaluation refers to a department as a whole (not to single study courses) and is carried out in a cooperative procedure with the department. The evaluators are independent higher education researchers who adopt methods of empirical social research. The evaluation procedure is completed by a comprehensive report to the department. The objective of this report is not to make a final judgement but to reach conclusions and to draft plans related to the faculty's own concepts and objectives.

Approaches using other methods

Quality assessment has close links to other important issues in higher education development, such as long-term strategic planning, performance-related resource allocation, management restructuring, target agreements, controlling and ranking. Approaches using business administration methods comprise easing the traditional cameralist system and introducing cost accounting, which makes financial monitoring easier for higher education institutions.

A high level of transparency in the allocation of funding is vital for increasing the performance and competitiveness of universities. Data warehouse systems can provide this information if provided as an adequate tool. In Bayern, a computer based Decision Support System (CEUS) is being developed for Bavarian universities by the Bavarian State Institute for Higher Education Research and Planning in cooperation with the Department for System Development and Database Engineering at the University of Bamberg. The objective of CEUS is to supply relevant up-to-date information to support planning and decision-making. The users of CEUS are administrators in Bavarian universities as well as decision and policy makers. In addition, CEUS offers information to the public in order to support and improve university PR. The system was first developed as a prototype at Munich Technical University and the University of Bamberg. After completion, it will be implemented step by step at all Bavarian universities.

4 Conclusions

To go back to the objectives of this paper, a general survey of the institutions and procedures of quality assessment in the German higher education system has been given at national level and at the level of four typical *Länder*. Everywhere, quality assessment responds to a political call for action. The development of quality assessment is not only connected to the expansion of the higher education sector, but also to the limited amount of public resources provided for it and to the demands of internationalisation and international competition. What conclusions can be drawn from these developments? And what analogies and differences arise if the "German system" is looked at from an international point of view?

- Universities have got *used to quality assurance procedures*. One important effect of quality assurance is that departments have to become clear about their needs regarding their *priorities* and their future development. They have to clarify which international trends they want to follow.
- The fact that universities are state institutions financed and governed by the *Länder*, has led to *competitive federalism*. Universities feel obliged to introduce quality assessment in order to enhance the quality of their institutions in a highly competitive global market for teaching and research.
- Quality assessment is expected to *highlight the particular strengths and weaknesses* of the evaluated department as well as standards and aims to be met. It should lead to a better self-awareness of the overall performance of the department under review.
- In Germany, universities and *Länder* governments are convinced that a close *correlation between university budgets and research or teaching performance* as is the case in some other states (e.g. UK) is *neither workable nor desirable* for different reasons.
 - With reference to teaching, universities have to maintain subjects that generally do not operate at full capacity at present (e.g. Engineering Sciences, Physics, Chemistry) with regard to further demand. This also refers to the "smaller" humanities subjects.
 - With reference to research, disciplinary differences and cultures should be taken into account in quality management. Tasks, objectives and perspectives vary considerably between different disciplines. In addition, there is a growing trend towards multi-disciplinary research between neighbouring fields. Therefore, the structure of the evaluation procedure can bias the results of the assessment if it is fixed too rigidly.

- Common to all evaluation procedures is *the peer review system*. The bottom-up-system of the German Research Foundation operating with elected peers is accepted by all researchers in Germany as being indispensable, even under increasingly competitive conditions. Most quality assessments appoint peers from outside the Land. This helps to avoid the risk that recommendations are reduced while they are discussed with the universities concerned.

Länder-specific differences generally relate to the federal system:

- The *institutional connection* of the quality assessment procedures carried out in German institutions of higher education varies. Type of institutionalization (quality agency – advisory body of the government or minister – committee of experts), permanent or non-permanent work, contracting authority and proximity to the policy maker are diverse.
- The extension of *the assignment and the comprehensiveness of the evaluation system* varies. Some place the main focus on teaching (Niedersachsen, ZEVA), others comprise *teaching, research and organizational structure* (Bayern). According to the German tradition of the unity of teaching and research a two-tier evaluation of teaching and research by two separate bodies as is the case in Niedersachsen is not considered suitable by many researchers and peers. There is a strong belief that the evaluations must include all elements to produce proper results. In this respect, the Bavarian system can be considered to provide a good standard.

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