Accreditation comparative study in higher education system of different countries to propose an appropriate accreditation

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Introduction

Quality assurance in higher education was until relativelyrecently an implicit activity. measured but could be recognized by academics when andwhere it existed were prevalent. However, over the last two decades, a number of factors have combined to challenge traditional views about quality in higher education and how it is assured. These factors have been elaborated by many commentators - individuals and organizations such as UNESCO and the World Bank – and have led to the making of quality assurance in higher education "a central objective of governmental policies and an important steering mechanism in higher education systems worldwide"

In the rapidly changing environment of higher education, the maintenance of high quality and standards in education has become a major concern for higher education institutions and governments; thus, the demand for explicit quality evaluation and assurance processes has increased. The result has been the introduction of national quality ssurance ystems into many countries and the planned introduction of such systems into other countries.

The challenges facing higher education worldwide include the following:
– the need to assure quality and standards against a background of substantially increased participation – a process often referred to as the massification of higher education. This process accelerated throughout the latter part of the Twentieth Century as many countries began to consider that their economic and social future was dependent, in part, on the availability of quality higher education for the majority of the population rather than
for a small élite. However, expansion has not always been well planned or controlled;

– the expansion in student numbers with either constant or declining (public) funding resulting in a lower unit of resource per student. This position has been compounded
by the inefficient use of available resources. Examples of inefficiencies include overly high staff-student ratios, programme duplication in many small institutions/units
with high unit costs, and under-utilized facilities. Such inefficiencies divert resources from such objectives as quality and access .

– increased demand for accountability in higher education institutions as a result of deregulation and the granting of increased autonomy in regard to such matters as
curriculum design, the selection of students, and the appointment of staff. However, increased autonomy has not always been accompanied either by financial authority
or by improved institutional management and strategic planning capabilities;

– the meeting of new expectations in terms of the "employability" of graduates in the knowledge society.

– the addressing of demands from a variety of stakeholders for increased and improved information about programmes and institutions and about the skills, competencies, and aptitudes which graduates possess;

– the contribution to the achievement of social and political agendas such as access, inclusion, and equity.

In addition to these factors, recent developments include the appearance of new providers of tertiary ducation, sometimes in competition with traditional public higher education, and new modes of provision, such as on-line learning, resulting from the information and communication technology revolution. An example of this type of competition is reflected in the "new technologies" and the rise of the "Academies" of Microsoft, Cisco, and SAP, *et al.*, that have created a parallel universe of IT qualifications and standards with global coverage .

Quality in higher education is not only a national concern but has become an international issue through academic, political, and commercial developments associated with
globalization, such as the rise of market forces in tertiary education and the emergence of a global market for skilled professionals and graduates. In some countries, the traditional

providers of higher education are facing competition from transnational education providers as well as from the emergence of local commercial providers. Through the
internationalization of higher education national systems, qualifications and individual higher education institutions have become exposed to the wider world. This exposure has
stimulated a demand for better information and transparency about quality and standards in order to attract and retain students and staff, both national and international students,
and to secure the recognition of qualifications.

Quality assurance is a central thrust in the process of change in European higher education following the signing of the Bologna Declaration and the Prague Communiqué
, and has been highlighted as a policy implication in the discussions being sponsored by the Global Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) on the further liberalization of the trade in education services. .(Leland Conley Barrows,2002,p:15-17)

philosophy of quality assurance

The philosophy of **quality assurance (QA)** is derived from industrial and commercial practice. Adoption of international standards ISO 9000 (used in industry and commerce) is proposed to assure and improve the quality and efficiency of the educational process.

The educational process will be seen as supplying knowledge (skills and understanding) for students - the customers. The customer is free to choose the suitable service provider (educational institution) and customer satisfaction is the most important factor for the commercial success of any service provider. (zbigniew MROZEK,Osei ADJEI,Ali MANSOUR,1997,P:157)

concepts of quality assurance in higher education

There are many different understandings of the term, quality, often reflecting the interests of different constituencies or stakeholders in higher education. Thus, quality is a multidimensional and often a subjective concept .

Conceptions of quality were categorized by Harvey and Green (1993), and were elaborated in the *PHARE Manual of Quality Assurance: Procedures and Practices* (1998). They include the following:

– *Quality as excellence*. This definition is considered to be the traditional academic view that holds as its goal to be the best.

– *Quality as "zero errors"*. The idea of "zero errors" is defined most easily in mass industry in which product specifications can be established in detail, and
standardized measurements of uniform products can show conformity to them. As the "products" of higher education, the graduates, are not expected to be identical,
this view is not always considered to be applicable to higher education.

– *Quality as "fitness for purpose"*. This view requires that the product or service meet a customer's needs, requirements, or desires. Learners (students) and prospective learners, those who fund higher education, the academic community, government, and society at
large are to a greater or lesser extent all clients or users of higher education but may have very different views of both "purpose" and "fitness".

A major weakness of the fitness for purpose concept is that it may seem to imply that "anything goes" in higher education so long as a purpose can be formulated for it. This weakness is more likely to be exacerbated in large and diverse higher education systems in which a wide range of "purposes" at institutional level may be identified by individual
institutions, generally through their mission statements, and at more precise academic levels through the learning outcomes of particular programmes. This diversity is often further complicated in transnational and distance education (situations in which educational provision crosses borders) as there is frequently a divergence of national views between "sending" and "receiving" countries as to both "fitness" and "purpose".

By complementing "fitness for purpose" with a notion of "fitness *of purpose*", an evaluation can consider and challenge the comprehensiveness and relevance of purposes in order to ensure improvements.

– *Quality as transformation*. This concept focuses firmly on the learners: the better the higher education institution, the more it achieves the goal of empowering students with
specific skills, knowledge, and attitudes which enable them to live and work in the knowledge society. This notion of quality may be particularly appropriate when

there have been significant changes in the profile of learners, for example, when changes in society or politics have enhanced access to higher education for large numbers of disadvantaged learners. It is argued that the delivery of a transformational quality approach involves five key elements:
• envisioning quality as a transformational process designed to enhance the experience of students;
• a bottom-up approach to continuous improvement;
• responsiveness and openness as the means of gaining greater trust;
• an emphasis on effective action;
• external monitoring which is sensitive to internal procedures (and values).

While this notion is popular, it may be difficult to measure quality as transformation in terms of intellectual capital.

– *Quality as threshold*. Defining a threshold for quality means setting certain norms and criteria. Any programme, department, or institution, which reaches these norms and criteria, is deemed to be of quality. The advantage of setting a threshold is that it is objective and certifiable. However, there are arguments that setting a threshold creates uniformity across the higher education system. This argument might well apply if institutions adopt a "compliance" mentality and only do what is sufficient to satisfy the minimum. There are significant disadvantages to this concept, especially when the criteria and standards are based on quantitative "input" factors enshrined in law. It cannot readily be adapted to changing circumstances or to stimulate change and innovation. In
this respect, the "threshold" can mitigate against improvement. Neither does it take account of "output" standards, the actual level of achievement by graduates, the criteria used to assess these achievements, and how that assessment is verified. Nevertheless, in many European higher education systems, a "minimum standards" variant has been used if only as a starting point in the quest for quality.
– *Quality as value for money*. The notion of accountability is central to this definition of quality with accountability being based on the need for restraint in public
Expenditure.

– *Quality as enhancement or improvement*. This concept emphasizes the pursuit of continuous improvement and is predicated on the notion that achieving quality is central
to the academic ethos and that it is academics themselves who know best what quality is at any point in time.Disadvantages of this concept

are that it is difficult to"measure" improvement and that the evidence of improvement may not be easily discernible to the outside world.

Some of these concepts of quality still hold true especially when explicit quality assurance and accreditation procedures are being developed and introduced for the first time either at system or at institutional level. But, notions of quality are evolving or merging, either as the result of the changing context in which higher education institutions are operating in some countries, or as a result of growing expertise within higher education systems and institutions in devising their own concepts of quality and models of evaluation and quality management. Mismatches between the requirements of the external quality assurance agency and institutional approaches to quality can be a cause of tension in relations. .(Leland Conley Barrows,2002,p:19-22)

Quality in University formation concerns, obviously, the calibre of the results of the teaching and learning process. This definition reveals its difficulties when we try to define the system of values and the relative indicators that "bite" into the problem of quality: the competence of the teachers, the suitability of the facilities, the existence of an organisation able to control and intervene in the formative process, the acquisition of knowledge by the students, their good results in exams, their pass rate etc. The ISO 9001 definition of Quality: "the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs" in higher education can be interpreted as:
"specifying worthwhile learning goals and enabling students to achieve them".
Where:
i) specifying worthwhile goals involves paying attention to academic standards, to the xpectations of society, to students' aspirations, to the demands of industry and other employers, to the requirements of professional institutions, to the fundamental principles of the subject, etc.; the "stated or implied needs" of these stakeholders are not all mutually compatible, so there can be many possible and valid interpretations of "worthwhile".
ii) enabling students to achieve these goals involves making use of research into how students learn, adopting good course design procedures and building on successful teaching experience, all of which may require professional development for most lecturers.
The concept of "fitness for purpose" cannot lead to acceptance of any system that operates according to any identified and declared purpose: "fitness for purpose" must be complemented with "fitness of purpose", i.e., the relevance of the purpose must be challenged .Such complement is guaranteed by due consideration of customer needs and requirements.(Di Nauta,Liisa Omar,Schade,Scheele,2004,p:26)

The Berlin Declaration of 19 September, 2003 reads as follows: "The quality of higher education has proven to be at the heart of the setting up of a European Higher Education Area." Ministers "commit themselves to supporting further the continued development of quality assurance at institutional, national and European level". They also stress that, "consistent with the principle of institutional autonomy, the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself", and emphasise that "this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework."

Considering the individual responsibility of the institutions of higher education on the one hand, and the responsibility of the overall national quality assurance systems on the other hand, the

Berlin Declaration of 19 September, 2003 lists both evaluation and accreditation as important tools for quality assurance. It has been agreed “that by 2005, national quality assurance systems should include the following: (...)

 Evaluation of programmes or institutions, including internal assessment, external review, participation of students and the publication of results,
 A system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures (...)”

These political concepts have been largely implemented to date: practically all countries in Europe have established national quality assurance systems in the domain of higher education, and accreditation procedures have become an important method for external quality assurance . (European consortium for accreditation ,2005,p:3)

Types of quality assurance methods

One of the major questions put to the agencies in the survey was therefore: How often do you use the different types of evaluation? in order to get a picture of the entire range of various types of evaluation used by European quality assurance agencies. Type of evaluation is defined as a method: evaluation, accreditation, auditing and benchmarking combined with one of the following categories of focus: subject, programme, institution or theme.

Evaluation

"Evaluation" is often used as a general term for the procedure of quality assurance. However, this survey defines "evaluation" as a method parallel to other methods, such as audit etc.

Accreditation

Accreditation is another widely used method in European quality assurance. It is especially common in the associated countries, where this method has been a traditional way of assuring the quality of higher education. Moreover, countries such as Germany, Norway, and the Netherlands have since the completion of the survey decided that this should be the main type of quality assurance of higher education.

Audit

An audit can be defined as a method for evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the quality assurance mechanisms, adopted by an institution for its own use in order to continuously monitor and improve the activities and services of a subject, a programme, the whole institution, or a theme.

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Benchmarking

In the same way as the term "accreditation", benchmarking may be discussed as a method or an element of evaluation. (Quality procedures in European Higher Education,2003,17-20)

Definition, Specific Features, and Purpose of Accreditation

The terminology of external quality assurance is anything but unified. Terms like external evaluation, review, audit and accreditation are being used at random. In the international debate on quality assurance, accreditation is increasingly defined as every formalised decision by an

appropriately recognised authority as to whether an institution of higher education or a rogramme conforms to certain standards. The European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) defines accreditation as “a formal and independent decision, indicating that an institution of higher education and/or programmes offered meet certain standards.” This definition also covers some quality assessments that are described as “accreditation like procedures” .

Accreditation is achieved through a multi-step process (selfevaluation/ documentation submitted by the unit undergoing accreditation; external assessment by independent experts; the accreditation decision). The accreditation decision depends upon a quality assessment based on internationally accepted quality standards. The final decision of the accreditation procedure itself is authoritative in nature, has been determined by an external process, and results in a “yes” or “no” judgment with a limited validity.

Accreditation procedures contribute to the continued quality development of the accredited academic unit: Institutions receive advice about quality improvement throughout the accreditation process, which may extend beyond the “yes/no” decision itself.

The present concept of accreditation in the area of higher education serves to assure and develop quality: it can focus on institutions, constituent parts thereof, and study programmes, in order to:

- ensure or facilitate recognition of “credits” and university degrees in an academic context, such as, for example, when changing from one institution of higher education to another, in order to promote mobility,
- inform current and prospective students on the value of certain study programmes (consumer protection),
- allow employers to check the value and status of qualifications,
- give institutions of higher education the opportunity to demonstrate appropriate allocation and use of public funds. .(European consortium for accreditation ,2005,p:3-4)

Accreditation is defined in many ways. Three examples are: – “Accreditation is a formal, published statement regarding the quality of an institution or a programme, following a
cyclical evaluation based on agreed standards” .

“Accreditation is a process of external quality review used by higher education to scrutinize colleges, universities, and higher education programmes for quality assurance
and quality improvement” .

“Accreditation is the award of a status. Accreditation as a process is generally based on the application of predefined standards. It is primarily an outcome of evaluation” . .(Leland Conley Barrows,2002,p:31)

According to Accrediting Commission For Senior Colleges and Universities, accreditation is voluntary process involving an association of schools and/or colleges to encourage high standards of education. Accreditation indicates that the Commission judges that the institution, in a manner consistent with Commission standards, offers its

students on a satisfactory level the educational opportunities implied in its objectives and is likely to continue to do so.(handbook of accreditation,2001, p:120)

Accreditation in higher education is a collegial process of self-review and peer review for improvement of academic quality and public accountability of institutions and programs. This quality review process occurs on a periodic basis, usually every three to 10 years. Typically, it involves three major activities:

- A self-evaluation by an institution or program using the standards or criteria of an accrediting organization
- A peer review of an institution or program to gather evidence of quality.
- A decision or judgment by an accrediting organization to accredit, accredit with conditions, or not accredit an institution/program. (www.chea.org)

Accreditation can mean one or more of the following:

- A college or university receives *general* accreditation from one of six regional accrediting organizations, depending upon its geographic location. These bodies are voluntary organizations that are run by higher education institutions themselves, and accredit entire institutions. The standards for accreditation, which vary by region, are based on an institution's self-study of the extent to which the institution feels it has met its own purposes. Regional accrediting bodies are funded by dues and fees paid by member institutions.
- Special purpose institutions, including proprietary career colleges, receive accreditation from one of 11 national accrediting organizations. These bodies are run by the institutions that are the objects of the accreditation, and are funded by dues and fees paid by member institutions.
- An academic program within an institution may seek *specialized* accreditation from one or more of the 66 specialized and professional accrediting organizations established for these purposes. Specialized accreditation is usually voluntary; an institution may choose to seek accreditation in an academic field (business, nursing, e.g.), but is not required to do so. In fields such as law and in numerous health professions, licensure is dependent on graduation from an accredited program. Standards for specialized accreditation are set by the profession or academic discipline, and generally are focused on inputs (proportion of faculty with terminal degrees, student-faculty ratios, etc.) rather than outcomes. Some academic programs have more than one specialized accrediting body, and the institution chooses which body – and its attendant standards – it wishes to use. Specialized accreditation is often seen as "guild-centric."
- Accrediting organizations themselves are "recognized" by a national coordinating organization, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). CHEA itself is only a few years old, having succeeded to this role after the dissolution of its predecessor organization. CHEA, according to its charter, seeks to "strengthen" accreditation by coordinating the other accrediting organizations.
- The 50 states get involved with accreditation through licensure and certification requirements established to regulate certain careers or professions. College programs in teacher education, for example, are accredited by individual states in order for graduates

of those programs to receive state certification to teach. Programs and standards vary among the 50 states.

• The Federal Government also recognizes accrediting organizations. Federal recognition aims to assure that the standards of accrediting organizations meet expectations for institutional and program participation in federal initiatives, such as student aid. This recognition is a powerful lever. Without accreditation institutions would not be authorized to disburse federal financial aid. (Dickeson,2007,p:1-2)

According to (Hämäläinen et al, 2001), the term accreditation *expresses the abstract notion of a formal authorising power, acting through official decisions on the approval of institutions (or not) or study programmes.*
However, if the provider of the accreditation is a public organisation allotting funds, the meaning becomes quite precise: accreditation is a process aimed at introducing standards of quality, according to objective parameters, for those subjects who implement actions in the formation system in order to realise public policies for the development of human resources.
Accreditation is a binary judgement (pass – not pass) on the award of a status or on an approval. It is a process, primarily an outcome of the evaluation. It can be considered an extreme case of summative judgement after an evaluation process. .(Di Nauta,Liisa Omar,Schade,Scheele,2004,p:26)

Accreditation in higher education is a collegial process based on self and peer assessment for public accountability and improvement of academic quality. An accreditation of an academic program or an entire institution typically involves three major activities:

- The faculty, administrators, and staff of the institution or academic program conduct a self study using the accrediting association's set of expectations about quality (standards, criteria) as their guide.
- A team of peers selected by the accrediting association reviews the evidence, visits the campus to interview the faculty and staff, and writes a report of its assessment including a recommendation to the commission of the accrediting association.
- Guided by a set of expectations about quality and integrity, the commission (a group of peer faculty and professionals) reviews the evidence and recommendation, makes a judgment, and communicates the decision to the institution and other constituencies if appropriate.

Accreditation is built on assessment, including both self and peer assessment. Since accreditation begins with a self study by the faculty of the institution or academic program being accredited, it involves self examination and study. Peers external to the institution are also involved in reviewing the self study reports, gathering additional evidence during a site visit, and judging the quality of the program. The commission also tries to understand the academic quality of the institution or program before it makes a judgment. The public announcement is a demonstration of accountability. "Sitting beside" is a good working metaphor for accreditation-one party first understanding the other, then making judgments followed by taking action to fulfill the roles of accountability and assistance.(www.chea.org)

Accreditation comparative study in higher education system of different countries

United State

Accreditation in the United States was started by institutions. Beginning in 1885, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges was established by institutions seeking some means of assuring inter-institutional quality. The other five regional organizations followed suit and were created by the institutions in their respective jurisdictions by 1919.

Accreditation is maintained by institutions. Although the regional organizations employ professional staffs to coordinate accreditation activities (New England has a staff of seven to oversee accreditation at 253 degree-granting institutions, e.g.), the bulk of the work is undertaken by hundreds of volunteer faculty and staff from the very institutions being accredited.

Accreditation is paid for by institutions. Through a system of dues and fees, usually based on the size of the institution and the costs of candidacy and site visits, the accreditation organizations are funded by institutions.

Accreditation coordination, through CHEA, was the product of institutional presidents, who, recognizing that overall coordination was needed, created CHEA in 1996.

Institutional interests predominate over public interests in the overall direction of accreditation. As the table below indicates, most regional accrediting bodies have included some members of the public in their higher education governance structures.

All this is not to suggest that institutions are ignorant of or antagonistic toward the public purposes of accreditation. But a system that is created, maintained, paid for and governed by institutions is necessarily more likely to look out for institutional interests. In the United States the main agencies for ensuring the standards of higher education are the various accrediting agencies, but both the federal government and the state governments also have important roles. The federal government does not have direct responsibility for the control of higher education, but it provides the bulk of research funding and has major programmes of student assistance; through its power to withhold these funds it can exert considerable pressure on universities. For instance, it will not provide such funds except to duly accredited universities; it requires that they publish reports on their performance in areas of concern to the government; and it now regulates the accrediting agencies themselves, specifying factors which such agencies are expected to take into account when accrediting.Since state governments directly fund public universities, they can exercise even more control and direction of universities within each state, requiring prescribed levels of performance and outcomes. Some of the accrediting agencies date from before the Second World War. They were established to facilitate movement of students

between comparable universities by establishing standards for admission of students and transferability of credits when students moved from one university to another. These agencies were set up by the universities themselves and participation in their work is voluntary on the universities' part; however there could be serious disadvantage for an institution not accredited by a recognised agency. There are six regional associations covering various regions of the USA and between them covering the whole nation. They have no legal control over universities or courses, but promote standards of quality and criteria of excellence. Universities and colleges which meet these standards are admitted to membership of the relevant association, which is their public

guarantee of quality. Only institutions with accreditation status may receive federal financial grants, and private foundations also usually confine their assistance to accredited institutions. The U.S. Secretary of Education has power to grant recognition to accrediting agencies, and has used this power to require agencies to include as criteria for accreditation outcomes such as test results, job placement rates and progression to graduate or professional study by students.
The accreditation process compares institutional performance against standards set by the agency, taking account of the purposes of each institution. The agency, through a team which it nominates, considers the educational programmes of the institution and the resources available to implement the programme: funding, staff levels, equipment, library, facilities and services. It considers also the institution's admission standards, and is moving towards considering internal processes of quality assurance, and student retention and completion rates. Each agency publishes a list of the institutions which meet its standards, and every 5 to 10 years revisits each institution to see whether it should maintain its accredited status. In 1996 the universities and colleges set up the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) which in effect accredits the accrediting agencies, certifying to their standards and processes. It also serves as a clearing house for information on accreditation, as a policy centre and a national advocate for accreditation and quality assurance and improvement. It coordinates research in its field, collects and disseminates data and facilitates communication and exchange of information between the agencies and the sector; it can also act as a mediator in disputes over accreditation. .(Anderson, Johnson,Milligan,2000,p:70-71)

Sweden

Quality assurance in the Swedish higher education system is the responsibility of the statutory National Agency for Higher Education (NAHE). There are three main components to the work of the agency:

- accreditation of institutions and courses;
- quality audits of individual institutions; and
- national evaluations of subject areas.

Accreditation

The right to award degrees is controlled by the State, in this case the NAHE.

The Agency may consult with various professional bodies, but the decision is the Government's. In certain cases, e.g. doctors and nurses, the degree in itself does not give the right to practise a profession; this is given by another state agency (the National Board of Health Care). In other cases, e.g. teachers, the degree legitimates the holder to work as a professional. Such 'professional degrees' have special terms of accreditation. All institutions with university status are free to award any degree in any field they may wish, including Ph.Ds. Other institutions, created by the 1977 Higher Education Act, have a general approval to award bachelors' degrees but not higher degrees. All new institutions (except those granted 'university status') have to apply for the right to award degrees in each discipline. An evaluation may result in the right to confer degrees in e.g. sociology but not in psychology. If an application is turned down, it cannot be resubmitted before twelve months have passed. There is a recent example of the right to award degrees in a particular field (economics in this case) being withdrawn from a university on quality grounds.
Accreditation assessments in a particular field may be conducted simultaneously across a range of providers or would-be providers. For example, the Government recently requested an evaluation of applications from ten private providers to offer courses in psychotherapy. Using a common set of quality criteria, the expert panel appointed by the agency recommended the rejection of all ten applications. Two were allowed to resubmit after six months, the remainder not before twelve months. .(Anderson, Johnson,Milligan,2000,p:72)

FINLAND

The Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) is an independent expert body assisting universities, polytechnics and the Ministry of Education in matters relating to evaluation. The scope of the activities covers 20 university level institutions and 29 polytechnics.
The main objective of FINHEEC is long-term development of higher education through evaluation. The main duty of the Council is to assist higher education institutions and the Ministry of Education in evaluations, and to develop evaluation procedures in higher education institutions nationwide. Consequently, the Council strongly emphasizes the role of the higher education institutions in evaluations as well as a communicative evaluation approach in its evaluation projects.
FINHEEC is appointed by the Ministry of Education for a four-year period. The duties of FINHEEC are based on a Decree (1320/1995), which stipulates the duties to the Council:
• Assisting institutions of higher education and the Ministry of Education.
• Conducting evaluation for the accreditation of the polytechnics.
• Organising evaluations of the activities of higher education institutions and evaluations related to higher education policy.
• Initiating evaluations of higher education and promote their development.
• Engaging in international co-operation in evaluation.
• Promoting research on evaluation of higher education,
and

• Evaluation and acceptance of professional courses offered by higher education institutions, entering of courses into a register stipulated in Article 14 of the Decree on the Higher Education System and maintaining such a register (Decree 456/98).
The types of evaluations conducted by FINHEEC can be categorised as follows:
1. Evaluations of official nature
• accreditation of polytechnic operating licences
• accreditation of professional courses offered by higher education institutions
• evaluation of applications to award polytechnic post-graduate degrees

2. Evaluations initiated by FINHEEC
• evaluations of higher education institutions: institutional evaluations, audits of quality work
• programme and thematic evaluations
3. Evaluations commissioned by the Ministry of Education
• selection of the Centres of Excellence in Education and Adult Education in the university sector
and Centres of excellence in Education and Regional Impact in the polytechnic sector to be used in performance-based appropriations.
The introduction of accreditation into the higher education sector in Finland is one element in the national quality assurance system. However, enhancement and assessment of the quality of education has so far been seen as more important than accreditation.(Mustonen,Moitus,2004,p:35)

GERMANY

In Germany the Federal States *(Länder)* are responsible for the shape and development of higher education and research. The responsibility for the contents and organisation of studies and examinations as well as for the quality of higher education is in principle with the *Länder*. It has been until recently finally implemented by the licensing of programmes and definition of the requirements of the exams. According to the Higher Education Framework Act, proposals for standards of study courses and degrees as well as for their mutual recognition have been for a long time made by framework regulations for studies and examinations (*Rahmenprüfungsordnungen*), which had to be jointly adopted by the *Länder* and the *Hochschulrektorenkonferenz (HRK)*.
The creation of these framework regulations has proven to be an extraordinarily ponderous procedure, often taking many years and producing results which, at the time when they finally were adopted, had already become inefficient because of new developments and therefore proved to be counterproductive, especially with regard to study programmes competing in the international market.
Whereas, quality assurance in teaching in Germany was primarily performed through quantitative regulations by the state in the way of *ex-ante* control, other countries increasingly pursued quality assurance in teaching on the basis of evaluation results (*ex-post* control). Following the international development and with a growing awareness of the necessity of quality assurance, a change of paradigm was claimed in Germany. Based on recommendations of *HRK* and *Wissenschaftsrat,* since the mid-1990s evaluation procedures for teaching have been introduced with the goal to increase transparency, strengthen institutional responsibility, support higher education institutions in the introduction of systematic quality-promoting measures as well as advancing the profile, image and competitiveness of German HE.

Since the beginning of 1998, the HRK runs a three-year national programme to enhance the exchange of information and experiences in the field of quality improvement measures in German HE – the Quality Assurance Project. Moreover, in recent years evaluation agencies have been established on regional level either by the federal states or by associations of universities. Besides the above mentioned activities, a lot of departments in many HE institutions have started evaluation initiatives using different approaches and different perspectives.
As a part of the process initiated by the Sorbonne Declaration and advanced by the Bologna Declaration as well as the Prague Communiqué, it has become clear that the structure of studies and degrees in the European Higher Education Area in the future will be shaped by "two main cycles" and that the scientific community will have to play an important role in the field of quality standard development and assurance. The goals are to promote international quality standards, to advance and secure student and graduate mobility, and to improve the employability of graduates on an international labour market.(Uwe Erichsen,2004,p:42-43)

HUNGARY

The Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC) was set up by the Higher Education act in 1993, mandating accreditation of all higher education institutions and all their programmes every eight years. The first cycle (at the time of 89 institutions) took place between 1995 and 2001. The HAC's concept of institutional accreditation was based on the premise that the output of higher education institutions was a diploma or degree, and the content behind the degree was the study programme, therefore it must be the object of evaluation. The institution was seen as the environment contributing to the quality of study programmes. The institutional level, in contrast, was not of equal significance because in the social-historical context in which Hungary found itself after regime change in the early 1990s, there was little experience in institutional management, and institutional leaders were selected based on academic merit. Linked to that, legally declared institutional autonomy was in fact limited, with numerous aspects of higher education legislated and severe financial restrictions imposed both by legislation and the amount of money available and allocated to higher education. Thirdly, there was no internal quality assurance in place at the time.
The accreditation decision by HAC pertained, therefore, to a whole institution, all its faculties, and all its study programmes. Roughly one third of the programmes were given "conditional" accreditation, with defined conditions to be met by a set date, reviewed in a monitoring procedure. Some small, new colleges were also given short-term, conditional accreditation and no institution was closed. There was small number of new institutions requesting preliminary accreditation that had to resubmit their application before being granted their request.
In the upcoming cycle of institutional accreditation, beginning in autumn 2004, greater emphasis will be given to the institutional level. Internal quality assurance is in place at all higher education institutions, who send their annual reports, reviewing changes in their institution and programmes as well as quality concerns, to the HAC. The reports will constitute the building blocks for accreditation. A selection of programmes will be reviewed in depth. Whereas in the first cycle, only the accreditation decision and a brief explanation for it, but covering the institutional level as well as the programmes, was published, accreditation reports will now be published in full. The HAC has already launched a pilot procedure in which it evaluates a specific discipline across the board, whereby the same visiting team reviews the study programmes in the given discipline at all institutions in the country within a limited time-frame. The pilot phase, still running at the time of this writing in early 2004, covers the disciplines of psychology and history, and no decision has yet been taken concerning the feasibility of the approach in the future.

The HAC has 30 full members, who are delegated by higher education institutions (the Hungarian Rector's Conference, the Conference of College Directors, and the Conference of Art University Rectors); by research institutes (of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences); and by professional organizations (chambers, unions). There is also one nonvoting student member, as called for by the higher education act of 1993. In addition, several nonvoting members are invited on a permanent basis to fill in for major disciplines not covered by the delegated members. This is necessary, since the HAC works in a multiple-level decision-making structure both in institutional accreditation and separate programme accreditation procedures. The latter involves the preliminary accreditation of new programmes on the national level (initiated by institutions but issued as national qualification requirements in the form of government decrees); the preliminary accreditation of new programmes launched by institutions (based on the national qualification requirement for the given study programme); and the preliminary accreditation of doctoral schools. Moreover, as noted, programme accreditation is also part of institutional, that is expost, accreditation every eight years.

The internal procedure for conducting institutional accreditation (which involves visits by a peer review team sent to each faculty and based on the institution's self-evaluation report) is as follows. The members of the HAC plenum head standing expert commissions for main disciplines or discipline groups. As expert commission chairs they recommend the leaders of the review teams. The review team leaders in turn recommend the members of the team, which may include non-academics. The team is approved by the institution to be visited, and approved by the HAC plenum. In the following cycle of institutional accreditation, students will participate in visiting teams. Another difference between the first and second cycles is that in the former the accreditation decision was made on a grading scale of Excellent, Strong, Adequate, and Not Adequate (with excellent being measured against the international standard), which will be discontinued in the new cycle, leaving only a yes/no decision. In both cycles there was and continues to be Conditional Accreditation (technically a yes decision), either if there were not yet any graduates in the evaluated programme or if weaknesses called for a monitoring evaluation, whereby set conditions must be met by a given deadline. The visiting team produces an evaluation report that is discussed by an ad hoc commission, made up of HAC members representing the disciplines evaluated, with a final accreditation report passed as a resolution by the HAC plenum. Prior to the final vote, the institution is given the report for comments. The final report is published.

The selection of evaluators for programme accreditation, which involves evaluation based on a written application, proceeds as follows. The chair of the relevant expert commission for the given discipline (usually a plenum member) recommends two external evaluators, usually but not always academics. A third evaluator may be called upon if the evaluation is not unambiguous. The HAC has a pool of over 500 peers. The expert commission discusses the evaluations and prepares its recommendation for the plenum, which passes the final decision on granting preliminary accreditation to a new programme in the form of a resolution.

With both institutional and programme accreditation, a HAC decision is an "opinion" given to the Minister of Education, who issues the final decision on accreditation. By law, the Minister must publish his or her reasons for passing a decision that is contrary to the HAC's opinion. Institutions have the right to appeal the HAC's decisions based on legal grounds. The frames of reference for the HAC's decisions are the higher education act; the government decree on the HAC that details the delegation of HAC members and the tasks; the HAC's By-Laws, which include procedures of operation and tasks of the committees; the HAC's Accreditation Requirements; the HAC's Strategic Plan; and its Code of Ethics.

All higher education institutions which applied for accreditation have been accredited (about half for the full eight-year term), and about 70% of the programmes were accredited for the eight-year

term, while less than 1% were closed. Almost all private higher education institutions applying for accreditation were accredited, though some had to re-submit their application. There are now 11 private HEIs in Hungary.

Accreditation in Central and Eastern Europe

Quality assurance in higher education in CEE countries began with the main aim to protect stakeholders by insuring the quality of higher education in the respective countries. It took the form of accreditation in almost all CEE countries from the start and is now being conducted in all countries.The reasons for this choice have been discussed in detail in the literature, but mainly had to do with the fact that higher education policy-makers, in conjunction with established academics, saw a form of control necessary at the time of regime change, whereby institutions were granted a certain degree of autonomy in exchange for allowing external control of the quality of the education they produced. In the given social-historical context the accreditation structure may have appeared as rigid and, indeed, the practice varies in the different countries. Other reasons for introducing accreditation in CEE countries was to protect stakeholders; to define quality standards and levels; to assure comparability of study programme content and level with those in Western Europe; and in some countries, most notably Romania and Bulgaria, to control the quality of education at proliferating private institutions. A survey showed that all quality assurance agencies professed an orientation toward helping higher education institutions to improve the quality of their education.
All CEE countries have national quality assurance agencies, although Poland until recently had only commissions set up with the voluntary co-operation of higher education institutions of various profiles. In recent years, as the new social structures are taking root, a development toward a more flexible implementation of quality assurance and a relaxation in the legislation can be witnessed. Higher education laws are being revised or new ones passed in several countries. The Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education was formally established on October 19, 2002 in Vienna as a non-governmental and non-profit organisation. The CEE Network has 18 members from 16 countries. The contribution of CEE agencies to the dialogue on quality assurance in Europe is to define educational and quality assurance strategies in each country; to co-operate among each other to define the needs and expectations for higher education and quality assurance; to channel their opinions to other European players in quality assurance; to participate in European projects in a pro-active way and to initiate own projects in order to arrive and mutually acceptable and comparable standards and methodologies in quality assurance.(Rozsnyai,2004,P:46-48)

NETHERLANDS

Accreditation in the Netherlands has been introduced in the reform of Dutch H.E. towards the bachelor-master structure. Accreditation is seen as the independent proof that a certain quality-level has been reached by a programme.
During the discussions between minister and H.E.- institutions, and minister and parliament, four goals for accreditation have been mentioned:
a.Accountability: politics, public opinion, the “taxpayer” ask from H.E.-institutions to be accountable for what they do with the money the government funds them with. Accreditation is one of the methods to show that quality has been delivered
b. Funding: government has obliged H.E.-institutions to let the programmes be accredited before they will get funded

c. Mobility-enhancement: if Europe really wants to be the most dynamic and innovative knowledge- economy then Europe should be developed as one labour-market with a European labour- population. One of the essential prerequisites therefore is the enhancement of mobility. Accreditation is one of the possible ways to improve comparability between programmes.
d. Information facility: accreditation may be used as a possibility for giving information to students, employers and the public. Of course, students and employers should be able to make a distinction between all different programmes, so for reasons of information only accreditation would not be enough.
2. Much to my surprise, most stakeholders have accepted accreditation as a fact of life in a very short time. Of course, some objections were raised, especially from the universities and one particular political party: they feared that institutions and programmes would only strive for the minimumdemands necessary for getting the accreditation decisions. Eventually, one chose for the following system:
a. Obligatory accreditation: necessary because of the funding-demand, each six years
b. Programme accreditation: two reasons for that:
– A well-known institute should not necessarily execute only good programmes
– Deinstitutionalization of the binary system.Universities were allowed to teach professional programmes whereas universities of professional education were allowed to teach academic programmes (as long as they reach the prerequisites for accreditation of these specific programmes).
c. Accreditation should be developed in line with the well-known and broadly accepted Dutch Quality Assurance system and it should not be developed as a new bureaucratic system parallel with the Q.A.-system. NAO decides on the basis of reports by quality agencies. All programmes that want to deliver degrees acknowledged by the Dutch government and want study-grants for their students younger than 30 years of age should be accredited. This means that all programmes by public as well as private institutions have to be accredited.
d. All accreditation-decisions have to be made public
e. An appeal is possible
3. Netherlands Accreditation Organisation (NAO)
has been established as an independent body in June 2002.
a. Board of three fulltime members and four parttime – fulltime members are three former university presidents, who are resigned from their universities. Part-time members are the former minister of Education, two people with ample experience from industry, and one from the public sector.
b. Budget is 3.6 million euro pro year, which means that programmes only pay a small fee for accreditation – each accreditation-application costs 2.500€.
c. Staff of 20 people, ranging from lawyers to experts in all different disciplines
d. The NAO has developed frameworks for:
– The accreditation of existing programmes
– The advising on the perceived quality of new programmes – eventually the minister takes the decision whether or not a new programme may start. These programmes must have had a positive advice by NAO.
– “Registration” of the Quality Agencies of which NAO thinks that they can deliver good and fair reports
– Some specific new programmes, for instance the research-masters and programmes that want to enlarge the period of years a master will take.
4. Starting points
a. Respect for the field of H.E. No one is purposely presenting a bad course. As former participants in the field of H.E., we are convinced that most programmes have a sufficient level to get accredited. We are not the accreditation police!

b. As close as possible cooperation or alliance with the existing Q.A.-system to keep the improvement- function of the system going.
c. No more bureaucratic burden or high costs. The burden of the quality assurance-system is already high enough.
d. Development of a framework that is compatible to international developments. We want our system and the framework to be in line with the international developments.
e. Close cooperation and dialogue with the institutes of H.E. I strongly believe that the institutions themselves and their staff should have the conviction that accreditation is sound and fair.
They are the ones that give the system the necessary legitimation.
5. The accreditation decision is dichotomous, it is either yes or no; in the Netherlands there is no conditional or provisional accreditation. As a result, there are four possible accreditation results: professional bachelor, academic bachelor, professional master and academic master.
Between academic and professional programmes exists a rather clear distinction:
• Differences in aim and goals of the course;
• Differences in content;
• Differences in quality of staff, esp. research experience;
• Differentiation in relationship with the professional field: very strong in the professional orientation, weaker in the academic orientation.

The Accreditation Process

6. Accreditation is based on an application by an institution. The basis for the accreditation-decision is a report by an external panel. The report has to be based on the accreditation-framework, developed by our accreditation organization.
The external panel has to be appointed by – preferably – a registered Quality Assurance Agency. Up till now, five agencies have applied for registration and three applications have been rewarded.
We have judged the agencies on 5 points:

a. The organizational and financial independence;
b. Their competence to compose panels of the required quality and diversity;
c. Their guarantees of the independence of the members of the panel and their way of conducting the evaluation-process;
d. The operationalisation of the NAO-framework;
e. Their competence to compose a domain-specific framework for validating the specific course.

Each institute or program is free to select an agency. They may do this on the basis of the price, proven quality, or method of executing the process. By and large, you might say this is a strategic decision following the choice for a profile a programme has made.
7. Let me elaborate on the composition of the panel. We demand:
• Disciplinary expertise;
• Educational expertise;
• Audit expertise;
• A student;
• International expertise or knowledge of the international developments in the field (where appropriate);
• Professional expertise/expertise from the professional field (where appropriate).
Of course one person may combine several expertises, but we obliged a panel to be composed at least of 4 persons (of which one is a student). This is called the GOD-criteria: Gezaghebbend, Onafhankelijkheid en Deskundigheid – Authority, Independence and Expertise.
8. The panel will execute their work on the basis of:
• Desk research: a thorough examination of a programme's self study, self-evaluation or management review;
• Site visit of two days, in which they will see the programme management, teaching staff, students, facilities, the examinations, final theses and if appropriate alumni and employers.

The judgement must be presented to staff and management, who – hopefully – will use the report to improve the course-quality and to apply for accreditation by NAO.

9. The NAO-framework

The framework has been composed of 6 subjects, 21 aspects and 30 criteria. Deliberately, they are made open, so that programmes themselves, the panels or the quality assurance agencies are able to operationalise them on the basis of their needs and wishes. Of course, the report that is part of the application must explain how the criteria are operationalised. Generally, the Q.A. use a general framework (which they presented to us during their application for registration), but they are completed with domain-specific criteria.

The subjects have to be judged as sufficient or not sufficient. In order to receive a positive accreditation all six subjects must be judged as "sufficient". Each subject consists of a number of aspects, varying from two to eight. These aspects have to be judged on a four point scale: insufficient, sufficient, good or excellent. This has been done to find "best practices" and to give the panel the possibility to weight the different aspects. An "insufficient" on one aspect may be countered by a "good" or an "excellent" on another aspect, so that the subject itself might be valued "sufficient" after all. Panels have to give an argumentation for their judgements on aspects and subjects.

10. Special features

a. Extraordinary elements of quality. These may be part of the accreditation report, although they don't have any influence on the accreditation outcome: it is an extra.

They may be for instance:

• Pedagogical system (for instance Problem Based Learning);
• Internationalization (composition of staff and students);
• Excellent relation with the workfield;
• Excellent quality.

Also, these special features have to be judged by a panel, in order for the NAO to validate the claim from the institute or programme.

11. International relations

a. From September 3, 2004 onwards, NAO is to be the accreditation organization for the Flemish part of Belgium as well. An agreement between the two governments has been reached. Netherlands Accreditation Organization will be the Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organization. Two more full time members of the board, four more part-time members; staff will be enlarged with nine more people. The H.E.-systems in Netherlands and Flanders look largely the same, but there are differences, which have to be taken into account in the frameworks and the procedures.

b. ECA: officially founded in Cordoba, November 2003.

– Goals: to understand and improve each other's stand on accreditation to get "mutual recognition" of accreditation decisions.

– Membership: officially recognized agencies that work with accreditations or accreditation-like procedures:

Germany: Akkreditierungsrat and organizations that have been recognized by the Akkreditierungsrat
Austria
Switzerland
Ireland: HETAC
Norway: NOKUT
Spain: ANECA
Netherlands/Flanders: NVAO

– Five working groups: "mutual recognition", "common framework of qualifications", "publication of accreditation results", "Ministers' conference in Bergen", and "development in the field of accreditation".(Dittrich,2004,P:55-58)

Denmark

Denmark like Hong Kong is a small country. But Denmark like Hong Kong also has strong ambitions that smallness shall be compensated by its higher education system being at the elite international level in terms of the quality of teaching and research. The period of a formalized approach and framework for quality assurance in Denmark, however, is only a decade old. Danish Higher Education Institutions did not till the very late 1990s have any very strong tradition for giving a priority to quality assurance of teaching and learning. On the contrary especially the university level institutions were securely based in the Humboldtian idea of the university mission to be first and foremost research. Accordingly the search for established and operational internal systems of quality assurance in the universities would by 1992 have been a very futile one. However, in 1992 the Danish government as one of the first countries in Europe decided to set up a national system for external evaluation of higher education.

The Danish Centre for Quality Assurance and Evaluation of Higher Education (The Evaluation Centre) was established with the mandate to evaluate all higher education programmes at university and non-university level at a regular and systematic basis.

The establishment of the Evaluation Centre was a reflection of many and varied interests, trends and experiences. In the 1990s evaluation became a serious issue within educational policy. Evaluation came to be regarded as the natural consequence of parallel developmental trends in higher education, in Denmark as well as in many other European countries.

During the 1990's systems of external evaluation of higher education have been established in almost all European countries. First the Evaluation Centre and now EVA have played a major role in advancing cooperation between national systems. These have despite their differences a common methodological core and have provided a focus on quality, transparency and accountability of higher education in Europe. An important step forward was the European Pilot Project; a large scale quality assurance exercise initiated by the EU commission and conducted in1994-95 in 18 European countries. The Evaluation Centre in cooperation with the French agency, CNE, was responsible for the project and could in a later report conclude that the various national systems had each their individual character reflecting national tradition and culture of higher education, but at the same time they shared the same basic methodological approach. All national systems based thus their evaluations on self-evaluations, site visits by panels of experts and public reports.

However, the last few years have shown that there is a need for change and convergence of the systems of European quality assurance. The need for change is to a large extent related to internationalisation The international changes affecting higher education are a growing international market for higher education, transactional education and a need for recognition of degrees due to graduate mobility (Campell and van der Wende 2000). The Bologna-declaration can be viewed as a European response to these developments. In relation to quality assurance all the countries, which have signed the Bologna-declaration of June 1999 commit themselves to "the promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies".

In several European countries including Denmark a distinct debate has taken place after Bologna. The declaration is the expression of a serious attempt to harmonise the national systems of higher education. Briefly expressed the aim of the declaration is to stimulate a European system of further and higher education that in the terms of quality assurance solves the challenges of transparency, compatibility, flexibility, comparability, and protection. The Bologna process has turned out thus to be a remarkable catalyst for a faster development in the European debate on internationalisation of higher education and quality assurance. Thus a number of investigations and mappings of this problem area is under

way. One important framework is the established European Network of Quality Assurance (ENQA). The idea for ENQA was born out of the common experience of the European Pilot Project, which demonstrated the value of sharing and developing ex15 perience in the area of quality assurance across the member states of the Union and beyond.
The idea was given momentum by the Recommendation of the Council of Ministers that followed publication of the Project's final report, and which has provided the opportunity for the Network venture to be brought to its present state. However, it is not least remarkable that European universities and especially their organisations have taken upon themselves a very active role in relation to the Bologna process. This active role is no doubt more than anything fuelled by the recognition of many universities that they are in a market place of higher education and that market value is linked to stamps of recognition, certification and accreditation.
The problem with the Bologna process, however, may well be that it propels the Danish and other European governments towards a common solution in formal terms for which there may be little basis in the realities of national strategies towards quality assurance. One of these realities may be linked to the remarkable growth in recent years in the fields of transnational education and of what is termed new means of delivery: Distance education programmes, branch campuses, franchises and more.
The identification of relevant strategies is going to be a challenge in the near future. A list of possible scenarios could include:
 National strategies with an emphasis on regulation of importers or exporters of education.
 International or regional strategies based either on supra national quality assurance or on meta recognition of established national agencies.
 Multi-*accreditation* implying either international recognition of national evaluation organisations and education structures or national recognition of a foreign organisation as accreditors
One very important perspective for Denmark is that the existing well-established system of external quality assurance must now be reinterpreted in the light of the trend towards accreditation procedures. It is of course possible to argue that accreditation is a process that in methodological terms equals that of evaluations and quality assurance as practiced by most European systems. However this misses the point that accreditation is basically a process based on clear and predefined standards or criteria and that at the end of the process a yes or no given to whether quality meets these standards. In that specific sense there has been in Denmark as in the other Nordic countries little previous experience.
In 1997 many Ministers of Education in Western European countries received a letter from the chairman of the National Committee on Foreign Medical Education and Accreditation in the US: The letter said that the medical programmes in these countries could not be recognised by the US because of a lack of an accreditation system.
The Evaluation Centre drafted a reply to the Americans presenting the Danish evaluation system. The US reaction was a dismissal of the Danish efforts as not compatible with accreditation as understood in the US sense. The issue was eventually solved after more transatlantic exchanges. But the example illustrates that in the age of internationalisation of higher education the pressure on small countries such as Denmark and Hong Kong is strong to make their quality assurance systems visible and compatible in a wider regional and global context. Certainly this constitutes the major challenge for the Danes in the coming years.(Thune,2001,p:1&p:14-16)

Vietnamese

Although Vietnam has millennia of experience with higher education, its systems have

been totally redesigned twice in the last 200 years. Now comes the third reorganisation, based in the on-going renovation ('doi moi') of the country's social organisation so as to fit into a socialist market economy. In such conditions, with meagre resources but a high commitment to education, western 'quality' systems retain a freshness that might no longer be felt in more developed market economies. Therefore, Vietnam is now considering an opportunity to choose among alternatives, which have already been worked through and evaluated by developed countries, seeking to combine effective methods from different systems.

The first stages of university redesign have produced two national universities, one in Hanoi (VNU–Hanoi) and one in Ho Chi Minh City (VNU–HCMC). These National Universities make an especially interesting case, because they have been granted a significant measure of autonomy by being placed directly under the prime minister of Vietnam's government. This arrangement puts the universities into a position favourable for influencing the organisation and development of the entire tertiary education system in Vietnam for purposes of quality assurance. The accreditation system could eventually include all of the 153 universities and colleges in Vietnam, and it currently counts more than 50 members, all of which are universities.

During the past several years, one of the research institutes at VNU Hanoi, the Centre for Education Quality Assurance and Research Development (CEQARD), headed by one of the two vice-presidents of the entire university, has been engaged in an extensive qualityassurance project, which it undertook after submitting a winning research proposal to the government. This project has already produced an agreement among Vietnam's leading universities to engage in evaluation based on nine subject categories, which are articulated by 43 evaluative criteria. Most of the nine subject categories will be familiar to educators who have been engaged in various types of quality assurance and accreditation. They include evaluation of institutional governance, staff, students, teaching and learning, research, facilities, finance, consultancy and technology transfer, and international relations. Only the last two areas might require some special explanation. They are rationally included because the dissemination of technology is of critical importance to a developing economy. Relationships with educational and technological contacts outside Vietnam, especially with donor nations, are critical to the speed of reorganisation for which Vietnam is increasingly prepared.

The nine areas of assessment and the 43 specific criteria for evaluation have been carefully worked out and agreed upon in the context of quality initiatives being developed in universities throughout Vietnam. Moreover, they appear to fit well into discussions of quality assurance being conducted in Southeast Asia generally, largely through the new ASEAN University Network (AUN) organisation of Chief Quality Officers. These officers have been appointed by seventeen ASEAN universities pursuant to the 'Bangkok Accord on AUN – QA,' which was adopted in November, 2000. The Accord has, as its ambitious goal, the construction of 'standards and mechanisms for quality assurance in higher education, which could consequently lead to mutual recognition by member universities' (this comes from the Bangkok Accord cited above). This would presumably allow students to transfer freely among the member universities, at least insofar as academic qualifications are concerned. The Bangkok Accord was adopted by AUN's board of trustees, and it therefore provides a great deal of momentum at this point. (Phuong Nga, McDonald,2001,p:1-2)

India

The Indian higher education system has inherited many regulatory mechanisms from the British legacy of higher education. While the regulatory mechanisms have ensured satisfactory functioning of the system with unprecedented quantitative expansion, raising the standards of higher education could not be achieved. With 259 university-level institutions, more than 10,750 colleges, 8 million students, and 400,000 teachers, India has one of the world's largest higher education systems. While the numbers may look impressive, they cover only 6 percent of the relevant age group, and 88 percent of student enrollments are in undergraduate education. Ensuring the quality of education provided to this small percentage is vital to the success of the nation.

The situation gets further complicated with colleges taking a lead in undergraduate education and the affiliating system that loosely connects the colleges and universities. Most Indian universities are of the affiliating type where the affiliating university legislates on courses of study, holds examinations centrally on common syllabi for its affiliates, and awards degrees to successful candidates. With the larger affiliating universities having more than 400 affiliated colleges, the academic leadership provided to affiliates has come under severe criticism. Many of the preconditions that ensured educational quality, while granting affiliation to colleges, have now been either ignored or soft-pedaled, with the result that many substandard institutions have come into existence, with the possibility of many more to come.

The growth of private initiatives has also increased the concern for quality. To increase access to education, India has encouraged private initiatives. The government-run colleges are few, and privately managed trusts or societies have founded the greater number of colleges—about 70 percent of the total. Most of the private colleges established before the 1980s get more than 95 percent of their financial support from the state government, and they are called grant-in-aid colleges. With limited resources, government could not extend financial support to the private initiatives established after the 1980s. These colleges run on student fees, and they are known as self-financing colleges. Though self-financing, they have to comply with the rules of the government and the affiliating university. The growth in the number of self-financing colleges adds to the pressure on the affiliating universities. The direct public expenditure on the public-funded institutions, the high fee structure of the self-financing colleges, and the substandard facilities available in some of these institutions have raised the question of "value for money" and hence the need for an effective mechanism for quality assurance. Accreditation by an autonomous body was seen as an appropriate strategy for quality assurance. Consequently, as a part of its responsibility for the maintenance and promotion of standards of education, the University Grants Commission (UGC) established the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) in 1994.

The methodology is in line with the international trend—a combination of self-evaluations and peer review based on predetermined criteria for assessment. It is a voluntary process, and the final outcome of the process is an overall grade on a five-point scale and a detailed assessment report, valid for a period of five years. Both the grade and the report are made public. Although the NAAC has the provision to do both institutional and departmental assessment, during the first cycle, institutional accreditation has been promoted consciously. By the end of 2001, the NAAC has

assessed around 200 institutions of higher education, and it recently conducted a study to analyze the impact of accreditation on the institutions of higher education.(Stella,2007,p:1-2)

Islamic Republic of Iran

Major global changes have influenced higher education systems (HES) around the world to be more responsive to local needs, national concerns and global issues. In this context, the HES need to be accountable and consider rapid policy changes to meet the realities of the changing world. Different countries have responded differently to this need by designing, developing and implementing quality assessment (QA) frameworks at the institutional and national level. For instance, almost all European countries have established national systems for the assessment of quality in higher education and. Toward this end, developing countries have been also attempting to build capacities for continuous quality improvement and accountability.

In Iran, such attempts started a decade ago. Research and experimentation in program and institutional quality assessment in higher education begun in 1996 . First, a pilot project in departmental self-evaluation(SE) was introduced.Based on the impact of the pilot project, the SE has been implemented across the university departments in Iran. However, implementation of subsequent external evaluation process has been slow. Since then efforts have been made to build capacity for quality management and assessment (QMA) at the institutional and national level. Results at the institutional level have been satisfactory, however, a national QMA system(QMAS) has not been realized yet. The question is " What are the factors which have caused delay in implementing such a system?" To answer this question, in the first part of this paper, the stages of building a (QMAS) in Iran is reviewed. Then, in the second part of the paper, problems of organizing and reporting self-evaluation and external evaluation in Iran are investigated. Furthermore, factors which have been considered as impediment to the organizational development of the QMAS are analyzed.

Based on the experiences of different countries (Brennan and Shah, 2000),the process of building a quality management assurance system within a national higher education system, may be divided into six stages Bazargan (2004:154). These stages are as follows:(1) reflection on national needs for the QA and the trends of evaluation and accreditation around the world;(2) conducting pilot studies and experimentations in relation to the QA;(3) conceptualizing about an appropriate QA system(QAS) for the country;(4) developing a sense of ownership for the QAS among faculty members, higher education managers and promoting the evaluation culture;(5) organization development for the QMAS; and (6) implementing the quality assessment mechanism.

Toward analyzing the process of building the QMAS in Iran, it would be helpful to mention that higher education system in Iran is divided into two major sub-systems: a) medical university system(MUS) and ,b) comprehensive higher education system.The MUS is under the Ministry of Health and Medical Education and the comprehensive higher education system is under the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology.

Implementation of the first stage of building a QMAS started in 1995.Through a comprehensive review of literature of evaluation and accreditation, a report was prepared

about application of educational evaluation in higher education and quality assurance practices(QAP) around the world(Bazargan,1995).This report was presented at a national seminar on higher education and attracted the attention of academics. The MUS was emphasizing the need for strengthening institutions of higher education through a quality assurance system.

The second stage of building the QAS was implemented in 1996. At this stage, on the basis of recommendations of the QAP report, a pilot self-evaluation project was prepared and implanted in the medical sciences universities(MSU). Six MSU departments conducted collegial self-evaluation in 1997. Based on the findings of this pilot project, a local version of self-evaluation process was developed which includes 12 steps. These steps have been already reported and are in use since then Furthermore, the results of the pilot project was so impressive that all the medical universities in Iran decided to implement self-evaluation voluntarily in 1998 -1999. Gradually, the experience of self-evaluation in medical education was transferred to the comprehensive universities. As such, the department of agricultural education and extension at the University of Tehran volunteered to conduct the SE process.
The third stage of building the QAS was activated when the evidence from research projects and pilot self-evaluation projects conducted at the departments, were analyzed. These evidence indicated that the process of self-evaluation made a very impressive impact on faculty participation in enhancing departmental quality. In this context, in 1999 the Iranian Educational Research Association (IERA), held a national seminar and analyzed the impact of self-evaluation on enhancing the quality culture at university departments. As a result, the seminar recommended a quality assurance model for higher education in Iran that includes a collegial self-evaluation process followed by an external review. This event attracted the attention of authorities at the ministerial level. Then , during preparation of higher education section of the 4th five-year national development plan, special emphasis was given on the implementation of the QAS through allocating financial resources.

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The process of building the QAS was continued through the fourth stage when the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology(MSRT), delegated the authority of providing back-stopping and support services of self-evaluation to State Organization for Educational Evaluation(OEE). Since 2000, the OEE has been active in conducting workshops at the university and departmental level to familiarize faculty members with the collegial self-evaluation process.

Furthermore, in order to formulate policies on self-evaluation, a central council of self-evaluation (CCSE) was established at the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology(MSRT) in 2004. The CCSE was chaired by the Minister of the MSRT and its membership was composed of faculty members and the MSRT deputy ministers. It was supposed to draw guidelines for the QMAS. However, only two meeting were held during the course of 2004. In 2005 the minister of MSRT was changed. Due to ministerial changes, the CCSE has been active.

The evidence from interviews with the head and faculty members of those departments which have conducted self-evaluation, indicate that they have developed a sense of ownership for the quality assessment. However, organization development for the QMAS and implementing the QA mechanism are the two stages which have not yet been realized. In the next section of the paper, major problems with organizing and preparing report of self-evaluation and external review are analyzed.

As mentioned previously, the quality assessment model applied in Iran is comprised of a collegial self-evaluation followed by external quality assessment. Based on this, during the past decade, more than 400 university departments have indicated willingness to conduct self-evaluation (SE). However, only ten per cent of them have been successful in completing the process and prepare a comprehensive final report. The SE is sponsored by the state, through Centre for Evaluation Studies and Research(CESR).The CESR is attached to the State Organization for Educational Evaluation. Although, the CESR is willing to be considered as a national quality agency , it lacks operational autonomy. It is mainly concerned with allocation of budget to the departments for conducting self-evaluation.

The CESR has neither been able to gain the confidence of the faculty members, nor influence policy makers at the national level to arrange a framework for the self-

evaluation in terms of rewards /incentives, policies/structures and promotion of evaluation culture at the institutional level. Although ,the model which is applied requires participation of faculty members, in practice the level of faculty participation depends to the commitments of the self-evaluation steering committee of the department . In this process judgment is made about the quality of a department through a set of 25 indicators comprising inputs, processes, products, outputs and outcomes of the departmental system against the departmental objectives. Then recommendations are made for quality improvement of the department. Subsequently, external assessment is conducted through peer review. However, the number of departments which have completed external assessment are not many. One of the major problems is that transparency and responsiveness, as part of value systems of academic profession, need to be practiced to a higher degree in higher education management processes. In this respect, there is much room for improvement.

Higher education system in Iran, as in other active developing countries like India (NAAC,2004), is concerned about equity, access and quality of higher education. To address these issues, the QMAS should be institutionalized. As mentioned previously, an eight-stage conceptual model to capacity building for quality management and assessment system has been proposed. Based on this, Iran has gone through the first four stages. Among the challenges facing institutionalization of the QMAS in Iran, there are two stages to be undertaken: organization development and implementation of quality management and assessment mechanism at institutional level.

Based on the above, there is need for commitment and attention from the policy makers. Toward this end and in order to develop capacity to link knowledge to economic growth, higher education decision makers are expected to give higher weights to evaluation culture. In this regard, six dimensions of evaluation culture should be strengthened. These dimensions are as follows: 1) awareness and participation of all faculty members in the voluntary self-evaluation; 2) holistic view in quality enhancement; 3) practical approach in making recommendation for quality improvement; 4) applying the recommendations of self-evaluation report as feedback to departments and at the institutional level; 5) promoting institutional responsiveness through self-evaluation;6) strengthening transparency of higher education in general managers in particular.

As mentioned in the above dimensions, an important challenge is to have a holistic view of quality through systems thinking. The importance is due to the fact that "systems thinking is a discipline for seeing wholes, recognizing patterns and interrelationships, and learning how to structure those interrelationships in more effective, efficient ways." (Senge, P., & Lannon-Kim, C., 1991). Therefore, one of the challenges is to consider the relationship between motivation of faculty members to participate in the quality enhancement and enhance their ownership of the QMAS,and stimulate the academic environment to develop confidence in the other stakeholders of higher education.

Although, an attempt has been made to institutionalization the QMAS through establishing a central council of self-evaluation (CCSE), due to socio-cultural factors, this

council has not been successful. The major reason is that the CCSE was considered as an administrative body in the ministry, rather than a decision making body .

Improvement of higher education systems in developing countries requires a self-reflection. This could be achieved through self-evaluation. In this context, there is need for developing increased capacity for self-reference, self-correction, self-direction, self-organization, and self-renewal in higher education environment

As it has been argued by Brennan and Shah (2000), central to the establishment of quality management and assessment systems, whether national or institutional, are questions of power and values. In general, the national quality management and assessment system should be in balance with the extrinsic socio-cultural structure of the country. However, in developing countries, where there is a deeper need to develop capacity to link knowledge to economic growth, such balance requires concerted efforts form the faculty members in general and managers of higher education in particular. Iran has been active in designing and implementing a pilot program for internal quality assessment since 1996. Then a national self-assessment program at major departments has been implemented during the following years. Although, a national quality management and assessment system has been designed , it has not been fully implemented yet. The University of Tehran (UT) is the only institution which has developed a center for university quality assessment. Therefore, the UT could be considered as a self-accrediting university.

As a final point, it should be mentioned that although the private higher education institutions count for about 52 per cent of enrollments(Bazargan,2006) has neither participated in the self-evaluation process nor in the external evaluation practice.(Bazargan,2007,p:2-7)

Australia

Higher education in Australia is provided predominantly by universities. As autonomous institutions established or recognised under Commonwealth, State or Territory legislation, Australian universities are responsible for accrediting their own courses. Higher education is also provided by non university institutions which, in general, are non self-accrediting organisations. Their courses are normally accredited by State and Territory accreditation agencies.

In the latter years of the 1980s, the Australian higher education sector experienced major structural changes. A period of rapid growth in university participation followed in the 1990s, including enrolments of full-fee paying overseas students. Universities grew larger and more diverse and their methods for delivering courses became more varied, with franchising arrangements, virtual course delivery and the use of distant campuses. Non university providers also experienced growth and diversification.

Commonwealth and State governments saw a need to ensure that the quality of

Australian higher education continued to be of an appropriately high standard. This would benefit local students and the Australian community and would also protect the good reputation of Australia's international students program. As greater emphasis was given to developments in quality assurance, governments recognised the benefits of having a common approach across the States and Territories. In the new era of globalisation, national consistency would promote mutual recognition and portability of qualifications at both national and international levels and would benefit institutions wanting to deliver higher education courses in two or more States or Territories. In March 2000, the national Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) endorsed the *National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes*. MCEETYA also agreed to the establishment of the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) to carry out quality audits of universities, other selfaccrediting institutions and the accreditation agencies. The National Protocols together with AUQA are key elements in a new national quality assurance framework for Australian higher education. The National Protocols deal with:

• criteria and processes for the establishment and recognition of universities (National Protocol 1)

• operation of overseas higher education institutions in Australia (National Protocol 2)

• accreditation of higher education courses offered by non self-accrediting institutions (National Protocol 3)

• delivery arrangements for higher education institutions involving other organisations (National Protocol 4)

• approval of courses for overseas students (National Protocol 5).(Higher education division, department of education , training and youth affairs , the Australian higher education quality assurance framework,occasional paper series, 2000,P:1)

Types of accreditation

Institutional Accreditation: The terms refer to the accreditation of the whole institution, including all its programmes, sites, and methods of delivery, without any implication as to the quality of the study programmes of the institution.

Regional Accreditation: (USA) Accreditation granted to a higher education institution by a recognized accrediting association or commission that conducts accreditation procedures in a particular geographic area (usually that of three or more states). The United States has six regional accrediting commissions.

Specialized Accreditation: The accreditation of individual units or programmes (e.g., professional education), by "specialized" or "programme" accrediting bodies applying specific standards for curriculum and course content. (Vl□sceanu , Grünberg , Pârlea ,2004, p:20)

Appropriate accreditation models

US model

One great strength of the American model is that each agency is set up and owned by the institutions themselves, so that it is readily accepted. While participation in an agency is voluntary, an institution would seem foolhardy to decline to participate; strong institutions have nothing to fear, and weaker ones can only be helped by the recognition and status that accreditation brings. Each regional agency is well placed to assess the health of higher education in its region and to act as an advocate to government and other funding sources. They can also serve as a counterweight to governments, especially state governments, if these seem to be imposing unreasonable or undesirable requirements on their universities and colleges.

A possible weakness of this model is that accreditation could be based on a minimum standard which could be quite low. This seems to be obviated by the mission, common to all agencies, to raise standards, although the standards referred to in this context refer more to the quality of academic inputs than of academic outputs, including the intellectual standards achieved by graduates. The establishment of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation is another device to ensure that the accrediting agencies act in a positive and proactive manner.(Anderson, Johnson,Milligan,2000,p71-72)

A Modern Australian Model

• The current Australian model which leaves matters entirely to each self-accrediting institution, has the virtue of cheapness and zero violation of institutional autonomy. It fails, however, to give any satisfactory answer to our opening questions: 'How can anyone know how good a university's degrees are? How do universities themselves know?' Furthermore, in the current highly competitive climate, it does little to protect our international reputation in respect of the quality of our educational processes or of our standards.

• The Australian system for VET is designed for a tradition of teaching and learning which is different to university traditions: it assumes a body of knowledge which can be specified in detail and packaged for transmission to students. The model lacks any conception of intellectual standards or focus on outcomes.

A model is needed which builds on current and recent practice, which embraces both quality assurance and accreditation. It must accommodate not just the existing self-accrediting universities, but institutions aspiring to university status, whether public or private. It must also be appropriate for non-university providers of courses, some of which award their own degrees, others which prepare students for the awards of existing universities. It must be relevant to those providing in novel ways, such as corporate providers and 'virtual' (computer-based) providers.

Its purpose would be to ensure, for the institutions themselves, for the Australian Government and the general public, and for students that degrees are all of a sound standard in which the Australian people may have confidence and pride. Its methods would include audits of institutions' quality practices and for this purpose an independent agency would be needed.

Self-assessment and audit

The central quality activity of the agency would be an audit of institutions based on a detailed self-assessment, including benchmarks of standards. By audit we mean an independent check on an institution's quality assurance. The process assumes that institutions have appropriate quality assurance policies and procedures in place and that convincing evidence can be produced that these are working to good effect. The audit checks the extent to which this is the case, and that the methods used by institutions are sufficiently reliable and rigorous to assure stakeholders of quality and standards. This assessment would be audited on a whole-of-institution basis over a five year cycle. On this basis the agency would undertake eight to ten audits each year. The audit team would be made up of distinguished academics plus some representation of the wider community; the purpose is to assist the institution to fulfil its aims, it is not a punitive exercise. Should the audit reveal serious areas of weakness, the institution would be given a reasonable period to address such matters. Failure to rectify serious deficiencies could result in removal of the institution from the AQF list of accredited institutions, or financial penalties.

Higher education institutions now make annual submissions to DETYA in the Profiles context on their Quality Assurance and Improvement Plans for the forthcoming triennium. These plans outline the institution's goals, strategies for achieving those goals and the indicators used to monitor progress in achieving those goals. These plans should be made available to the agency to assist in the audit process.

It is not proposed here that there be any direct review by the quality body of subject areas or departments within institutions as there is in UK. But an important activity of the audit will be to scrutinise ways in which institutions ensure that there is a high standard of teaching and learning in specific subjects or disciplines at department or faculty level.

Reviews of faculties, schools or departments are now standard practice in nearly all universities. They are usually conducted by panels which include external representation and cover such matters as curriculum, methods of teaching and assessment, student achievement, student support and guidance and learning resources. In line with trends in quality assurance these reviews should give particular weight to degree standards and graduate outcomes. The reports of these reviews and the follow up action taken on them within the university would be of major interest to the agency. Copies of the reports of these reviews should be supplied to the agency to assist it in its preparations for audits and in its general oversight of quality practices in the sector.

To summarise: the evidence from the institution to be examined by the audit team would include:

- an analytic account prepared in advance of arrangements that it has to assure the quality of its academic provision and the standards of its academic awards;
- other documents, including quality improvement plans, to demonstrate how it satisfies itself that its policies, strategies and processes for these matters are being effectively applied;
- reports from subject/department reviews and professional accreditation;

• evidence of the academic standards of awards and detail of any internal or external benchmark and moderation processes; and
• interviews with the Vice-Chancellor and the senior management team; members of central committees, heads of departments and chairs of boards of studies, representatives of staff and students.

The report of the audit should refer to the institution's quality strategy, the academic standards of programmes and awards and arrangements for teaching and learning. After opportunity for comment, the report should be published and available to the public.

Participation in periodic quality audits and adequate response to any negative reports should be a condition of Commonwealth funding. Furthermore, failure to do so should result in removal from the list of quality approved institutions. .(Anderson, Johnson,Milligan,2000,p:75-78)

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