

Accreditation and Quality Assurance in the Netherlands

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1985-2000: Quality Assurance

- Until 1985, no autonomous system of quality assurance. Academic Charter. The State controlled and regulated the content of the curricula.
- In the eighties, more autonomy and deregulation became central in higher education policy.
- Universities had to become more accountable and had to focus more on quality improvement themselves.

1985 system of quality assurance

- Main functions: accountability and quality improvement, with a strong emphasis on the latter
- Performed under the responsibility of the higher education system itself
- Based on a system of self-evaluation and external peer review

1985 system of quality assurance (2)

- Stimulated institutions to develop their own internal quality management systems
- Was supposed to create more efficiency and quality
- Has become an example for quality assurance worldwide

Three phases

- 1986-1993: the development of the external quality assurance system
- 1993-1998: towards a more effective system of quality assurance: more emphasis on the impact of the evaluations and the role of the different actors: institutions, umbrella organizations and the ministry
- 1998-2003: further adjustments: faster and more clear reactions by the ministry on the recommendations from the evaluations: public warning, changes for improvement, possible deprivation of rights.

2002: Accreditation

- Impacted by the Bologna Declaration of 1999, including implementation of comparable qualifications and degrees and cooperation in quality assurance, as to create transparent quality assurance systems in the European Higher Education Area

Objectives

- Accreditation should lead to the strengthening of international benchmarking in quality assessment
- More transparency of the quality of education by giving a formal quality mark
- An independent position towards branch organizations and the government, in stead of being in the hands of the institutions of higher education themselves under the old system

Objectives (2)

- Consequences of insufficient quality: accreditation can lead to discontinuity of a program
- Assessing the quality in the growing segment of private programs: accreditation sets the same requirements for government-funded institutions as for private institutions

Objectives (3)

- Choice in assessment: accessibility of the quality assessment system for foreign organizations
- Role of the Inspectorate of Education: the ministerial responsibility for the accreditation will be in the hands of the inspectorate

Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organization (NVAO)

- Established in 2002
- Is an independent Administrative Authority
- Accreditation by the NVAO is compulsory for funding and granting degrees and access to study finance for students
- The Study Programs will be evaluated by Validating and Judging Agencies (VBI's), which should give directly a judgment on the quality of the program

Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organization (2)

- Hereby the former principle that quality improvement is decisive, is abolished
- The VBI's only provide input, the NVAO decides on the accreditation
- A rejection of accreditation by the NVAO is leading in nearly all cases to deprivation of funding

Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organization (3)

- The quality assessments are no longer the exclusive right of the umbrella organizations in higher education, the VBI's will compete on the choice of the institution, including from international organizations
- It is the first accreditation agency that crosses borders, as it is a joint Dutch-Flemish organization

Policy Rationales for Accreditation

- Increasing competition internationally requires high standards
- Accreditation leads to enhancement of quality assurance
- Accreditation leads to sanctions in case of insufficient quality, where the old system was too much inclined to settlements and corrugations

European context

- The Accreditation system has a strong European and international dimension
- It is a result of and link to the Bologna Process
- It has both similarities and differences with other European Accreditation Systems
- It is program based (like Germany) and not institution based (like the UK)
- The NVAO is part of the new European consortium for accreditation in higher Education (ECA), founded in Cordoba, Spain, 2003.