

# On the Philosophy, History and Management of Quality in Education

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*Continued from Volume 13, Number 1, 2010  
and Volume 13, Number 2, 2010*

## **A View on Quality: American Experience. Regional Accreditation**

During the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, problems of quality in higher education were on the table of intensive discussions and organizational works were held to formalize new associations, councils, boards, networks, agencies, institutes, committees, commissions, etc. to be engaged in evaluating and policymaking in higher education quality. Massification of higher education, collapse of the socialist camp, rapid expansion of private and virtual universities and colleges, growth of cross-border mobility, and dominant globalization processes have increased the importance of quality assurance systems and accelerated the process of decision making by governments, intermediary and international bodies and the higher education system itself. The brief history and substance (the latter in addition to previous parts of the article) of quality evaluation and accreditation matters within higher education are given here mainly through tendencies, conceptions and principles, not undertaking technical details and without any attempt to give a more or less comprehensive description of history. That is why we'll be limited to references given in two previous parts of the article (particularly [1], [3], [6], and [11]), not specifically revealing online updates, and general books and manuals.

Americans can be considered the pioneers in assessing the general quality and characterizing the education institution as a whole, that is, institutional evaluation by single agency, and also developing a professional opinion after evaluating the successes and shortcomings of the current situation in separate fields of study with different agencies.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, there were several urgent problems concerning American education policy and education institutions, and there were also discussions about means to their solutions. The rules for college admissions had not been defined well, and the standards to earn a degree from college had not been established. There was a great demand for elective courses, and the classic and fixed, invariable teaching curricula did not meet the existing requirements. The higher education institutions could not remain indifferent to the newly-formed disciplines, such as sociology and psychology. There were many discrepancies if a graduate with a bachelor's degree from one college wanted to study at a master's program in another college.

The universities and colleges facing such problems were obliged to search for the solutions. However, the issues concerning admission were more urgent. The University of Michigan sent its teachers to research the situation at secondary schools in 1871. The graduates of the most successful secondary schools could then become students of University of Michigan after presenting their diplomas and official documents upon graduation from their schools. Indiana University, Wisconsin University and University of California also acted in the same way. This was the beginning of the evaluation and implementation of quality parameters at American education institutions. With this method, the higher education institutions took on the role of evaluating the secondary schools. In this, they acted similarly to an accreditation agency.

Later this movement spread to other regions, and it became a common approach to college admissions. The next step was evaluation of higher education quality itself. Who could take responsibility for assessing and developing appropriate policy? Higher education institutions themselves or any of their direct unions were not candidates for this due to obvious conflicts of interest. Those with a special interest in defining education standards and measuring the quality of education started working together to establish independent institutions. Among the first of these were the New England Association of Schools and Colleges in 1885 and the Middle States Association in 1887; another two - the Southern and North Central States Association of Schools and Colleges - were created in 1895. Two similar agencies, Northwest and Western States Association of Schools and Colleges to be precise, were established in 1917 and 1923, respectively. These six region-based associations, which covered all states, started institutional accreditation of higher education institutions. From 1917 to 1954 they established a list of universities and colleges that passed accreditation. Today, the institutional evaluation of American universities and colleges is conducted by these six independent non-governmental agencies.

Institutional accreditation in the USA is more important for considering the purpose of diagnosis than accountability. These accreditation agencies were able to consider and to support the special features of institutions derived from their nature and objectives, their desire to be distinct. In reality, the minimum standards for accreditation in the USA are not so high. That is why some low quality institutions can pass the accreditation. Setting very high general standards is also dangerous, because it may bring higher education institutions too close to each other and remove major differences between them.

The role of students in quality evaluation was important all times, but the question of “how to do it?” has changed through time. If student performance demonstrated by subject examinations was one of the main indicators of external evaluation of institutions before (at the beginning of XIX century and a certain period of XX century), now appraisals of student experiences and graduates’ insights of programs and instruction quality are in focus. Together with this we have to note that graduates’ opinions are based on their knowledge about the past of their alma-mater; their arguments will be lagging behind concerning the current time under consideration, particularly if this institution has endured many positive developments recently of which graduates are not aware.

### **Specialized Accreditation in the U.S.: Past and Present**

Another type of evaluation is conducted by program/subject-oriented associations and agencies, which is quite different from the abovementioned institutional accreditation. In the U.S., the latter is called regional accreditation and the former is specialized, or professional, accreditation. The first step in specialized accreditation was initiated by the American Medical Association.

*In general, the quality of medical training was at the center of attention of governments and societies all the time, from the middle ages to modern times...*

The Council of Medical Education established a list of existing medical schools by classifying them according to their capacity and quality of education. The work was conducted very seriously and 82 out of 162 schools were classified as approved (A class), 46 as candidates to be approved (B class), and 32 as not approved (C class). This evaluation was repeated until 1915 and the number of approved medical schools decreased to 66, the candidates to be approved dropped to 17, and 12 remained not approved. As a result of this work, U.S. medical

education fundamentally changed, and the curricula of the approved schools were essentially developed (this process is still continuing).

At present, there are several professional associations in the U.S. that evaluate the programs of the higher education institutions in science, arts, business, education, health, technology, etc. (for example, the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology - ABET, the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools, the American Bar Association). Some accreditation agencies may function beyond national borders and act as influential independent actors in specialized evaluation and recognition in other countries as well. ABET is a good example here. It is important to note that specialized accreditation is not applied in some areas (such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, history, political science, etc).

As the diversity in higher education increased and so did the number of institutions, with attempts to regulate federal level loans, grants and financing of universities and colleges, the need for quality assurance and accreditation rose as well. The number of various accreditation bodies increased accordingly. The question of who can decide on establishment, criteria and recognition of new accreditation agencies became more and more pressing. The process ends at U.S. Department of Education and Council for Higher Education Accreditation; they have been recognized as two main recognizing and supporting institutions.

The quality assessment of research and doctoral programs, which is a very complicated issue, also remained pertinent. This issue was comprehensively studied by the National Research Council for out of state interference, and the first results were published in 1982 and 1995. This research and its quality ranking were seriously accepted by both politicians and education institutions. This study evaluated 2,699 research-doctoral programs on 32 subjects in 1982 and 3,600 programs on 41 subjects in 1995. The work was based on evidence such as the number of doctoral students and professors for each field of study, number of degrees awarded, and the opinion of outside experts about the quality of the programs. The next step began in 2003 and ended in 2008; respective analyses and publication are ongoing. Over 5,000 programs, within 61 fields at 222 higher education institutions, have been covered for evaluation and publication; comparative analyses and rankings with an online database and the hope of updating information in the future add to the importance of this endeavor.

### **The Independence and the Significance of Accreditation Agencies and the Role of Government: the American Experience**

The existence of independent institutions working to deliver professional information to society about the quality and the capacity of higher education institutions is an indicator of how dynamic and complicated the educational system of the U.S. is. The accreditation movement is considered to be one of the key factors that developed American universities and colleges, and to make the U.S. higher education sector first in the world. American public opinion and many researchers explain this success with the fact that the accreditation institutions are independent, non-governmental. In 1992, an amendment to the Higher Education Act gave the federal government an opportunity to directly interfere in the issue of quality maintenance for the first time in American history. The founding of State Post Secondary Review Entities in each state was required to supervise the quality of education at universities that were given federal student loans. Moreover, under the pressure of the Federal Education Department, different accreditation agencies formed the National Policy Board on Academic Accreditation. The aim in establishing this institution was to prepare national standards on academic accreditation (“state standards,” as is usually said in Eastern European countries) and to define an appropriate measurement to evaluate the students’ level of learning outputs. Consequently, it was intended to establish a national system to maintain academic quality in the U.S. which would be close to other developed countries’ models. However, the work of this agency, which evaluated post secondary education, was found by the U.S. Congress to be invalid, and its funding was suspended in 1994. This unacceptability continued during the process of reviewing the Higher Education Act. Moreover, the higher education institutions (both state and private) publicly rejected the proposals of the National Policy Board on Academic Accreditation in 1995. They claimed that the centralization is inefficient and harmful, and that there is a good chance the findings of the central accreditation agency can be unreliable. One of the significant advantages of the American educational system is that it is dynamic, different, colorful, and there is no centralized control. Any kind of centralization or state interference can damage this academic significance.

Thus, the centralized and state-controlled accreditation system failed. On the contrary, it was decided, as a result of the special opinion poll of the presidents of higher education institutions held in 1996, to establish a council in charge of recognizing numerous independent accreditation agencies. American experience says that the right way is to have various independent agencies that discuss and come to an agreement among the interested actors. Of course, there are also opponents who are not happy with, as one can say, the American chaos and

unmanageable diversity in higher education; looking for a certain level of standardization, they are particularly sympathetic to the European tradition of centralized control through ministries. Simultaneously, Western Europeans are looking to a greater extent to move into a decentralized higher education system, and Eastern Europeans and Asians have set their gaze on having at least a Western European type of autonomy in higher education. Everybody appreciates what he/she lacks.

As the result of the strengthening competition and decreasing support from the state budget to higher education institutions in developed countries (in the U.S. this decrease commenced in 1992), universities and colleges started to review their goals and objectives, evaluate their strategic planning, and search for innovative ways to maintain academic quality. This search, which occurred under the pressure of competition in most developed and developing countries, demonstrated the trend that these countries are willing to apply the ideas and the forms of the U.S. model, even if it is not ideal.

The regional accreditation is very significant in the U.S. for getting federal loans and participating in programs of different funding organizations. There is no restriction on operating legally without regional accreditation, but having accreditation gives the right to full participation within the education system. However, in some fields (such as medicine, law, engineering, and education) only graduates of institutions that have accreditation from specialized associations have the right to apply for a license. Since the accreditation movement is very significant and widespread in the U.S., there is a special agency, namely the Council of Higher Education Accreditation, which recognizes and regulates the process of establishing independent accreditation institutions. The U.S. Education Department regulates the funding of accreditation agencies and accredited education institutions without interfering in their work.

### **Quality Assurance in the United Kingdom**

The institutionalization of the quality measurement in higher education in the U.K. started in the 1990s. In general, this country is considered the most experienced and successful in Europe in supervising the quality of education. It has as many advantages as disputable points. In 1992, funding councils were established in England, Scotland, and Wales to evaluate the quality of education in state-funded higher education institutions. In England, this agency was the Higher Education Funding Council for England—HEFCE. This Council was responsible for evaluating quality through investigating curricula and course developments. In other words, it started to work as a professional accreditation agency by evaluating

academic departments and programs. There were three grades given as a result of the evaluation: excellent, satisfactory and unsatisfactory.

On the other hand, the senior administrators of the higher education institutions also established the Higher Education Quality Council—HEQC, which conducted entire institutional evaluations of quality according to certain standards. Consequently, in England (and in Scotland and Wales as well) two separate quality measurement and assurance agencies, complementing each other, were established. The first one was independent, and the second was organizationally government-affiliated, but operating independently. Thus, in this way transparency and a serious foundation for state funding were guaranteed.

All these studies also emphasized that quality is directly linked with independence and the binary principle was canceled; polytechnic schools changed and became universities. In that way, all higher education institutions started to award diplomas themselves (before, the diplomas of the polytechnic schools had been presented by National Council of Academic Awards).

*In Azerbaijan and in most Eastern European countries, all university and college diplomas are presented by the government in a unique form by the Ministry of Education and this is considered a “sacred” issue of state importance; no light is seen at the end of the tunnel for an agreement between the government and higher education institutions on awarding their own diplomas.*

It is interesting that according to the 1992 and 1995 evaluations by HEFCE, 249 (26%) out of 912 programs were rated excellent, 711 (73%) satisfactory and 12 (1%) unsatisfactory. In 1994 a decision was made to combine institutional and specialized evaluation agencies to establish a new united, flexible, and independent agency that could conduct a comprehensive evaluation of quality. In the late 1990s, several other European countries also attempted to combine these two types of agencies. Beginning from 1997, the Quality Assurance Agency started to operate in both directions of evaluations, but was criticized. Starting in 2002, it continued to work only as an institutional auditing agency; it decided to consider academic programs only in very necessary cases.

However, HEFCE began to work on the matter of research evaluations once every five years. It aims to assess the research capacity of higher education institutions and define the appropriate amount of funding. The capacity is evaluated on a grade scale from 1 to 5. Those who receive a 1 or 2 cannot be granted funding. Those who receive a 5 are granted an amount that is three times more than those who receive a 3!

### **Struggle for Quality: Soviets, America and Europe**

The United States established its higher education institutions by learning from Europeans and applying their know-how (particularly, applying German research universities' ideas). At the same time the U.S. made two "pure American jumps" taking them to the front of higher education development: the Morrill Act of land grant movement (1862), and huge and decisive government investment in higher education during and after World War II. The result was not only the end of European hegemony in economics and politics, but also the creation of two polar worlds in the U.S. and Soviet Union with specific development of science, military and higher education in these two rivals.

In the case of evaluation of quality and accreditation, Europe in turn benefited from the American experience. UNESCO Education Institute, which was established in Hamburg (Germany) in 1952, played a role in this process.

When the first Soviet satellite was put into orbit (1957), heated discussions in both political and scientific circles over the quality of education started in Western countries, especially in the U.S. The Soviet success was explained first of all by the advantages of the Soviet secondary schools (not higher education) in teaching mathematics and natural sciences. Consequently, there were many U.S. works implemented concerning curricula, subject programs, teaching methodology, and defining and realizing the standards of knowledge and skills. The National Defense Education Act of 1958 legalized this process. Afterward, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development joined the process. A very interesting pilot project was implemented from 1959–61, which delivered comparative and comprehensive evaluation of the education systems of the Western countries. In twelve countries, tests were conducted among thirteen-year-old pupils in mathematics, natural sciences, and reading-comprehension skills. The test materials were translated into the languages of the participant countries (eight languages). In general, the stimulus of the Soviet success laid the foundation of the new education era in Europe and U.S.

*The Soviets did not develop a competitive quality assurance system in higher education. Everything was a part of planned life, including the establishment of new educational institutions. Only if some political reason arose or if obvious signs of disgrace appeared concerning some institution, then so-called state commissions may start to work on evaluation and decision making. Such a commission was organized to investigate wide-spread corruption and acute decrease in quality of education at Azerbaijan Public Economy Institute in Baku (now*



*Azerbaijan State Institute of Economy) in 1987/88. The result of the Commission was discussed at Politburo (!) in Moscow and the Institute lost its independent status; it was decided to place the Azerbaijani institute under the control (in form of a branch) of Voznesenski Leningrad Institute of Finance and Economy. After two years, under the shadow of the movement/struggle for independence of Azerbaijan, old powers were able to return the Institute to its former position and status.*

Sometimes two countries or even a group of countries can sign an agreement on mutual recognition of higher education diplomas; this was peculiar to countries of a centralized education system (for instance, the socialist bloc). Another example of centralized recognition is: in some countries, the ministry or another agency in charge of higher education governance can approve higher learning institutions or some of their programs in this or that foreign country, and publish a relevant list (Turkey, Iran, and some Middle Eastern countries belong to this group).

### **International Cooperation in Education and Quality. European Movement**

Education and research are among the most vital and most developed areas of international cooperation. Since scientific research and its application play an important role in the development of society, most events related to research, applications, and innovations are in the stream of and inside of higher education institutions. Thanks to mutual relations and cooperation between higher education institutions and scientific centers, knowledge and know-how are not lost and are passing from generation to generation over time; they are also passing from country to country and eventually becoming universal decisive forces changing history. Serious cooperation requires that participating sides have above a certain level of quality and have power to keep up with the frontline of scholarship, to be on the same “frequency” as spirits of innovation. Benefiting from each other’s success catalyzes the development of a new area and increases the standard of research as well as education quality. The necessity of undergraduate and graduate students, post-doctors and scholars to benefit reciprocally from each other’s success causes the development of new common views about quality.

A tendency towards integration rose in the West in all spheres such as politics, economy and education with the American Marshall Plan, the European Economic Community agreement, Schengen Agreement, implementation of a common European currency, establishment of the first Pan-European educational organizations such as European Associations of Rectors (CRE), and development of mutual

recognition in the field of education; they can be considered essential steps forward into modern Europe.

The European Commission put forward and implemented a pilot project for evaluation of quality in education in 1991. The aim was not to compare or rank higher education institutions, nor to create common evaluation bodies. The main issue was to help create a culture of education quality evaluation in different countries. 46 different institutions chosen voluntarily in 15 European Union countries and in Norway and Ireland were studied and analyzed in two fields: engineering on the one hand and communication/information studies or arts/design on the other. During this process (1994/95) both self-assessment and external evaluation methods were applied. The ultimate goal was to find weaknesses and strengths and to give recommendations for improvement.

In 1993, at the initiative of CRE, three classic universities of Europe have been evaluated first internally and by external evaluators in various fields of study applying SWOT analyses. The main questions to be answered were “what are the internal and external factors/obstacles that influence the development of universities?” and “which changes are necessary to be made?” Passing barriers furnishes new horizons, new opportunities. European University Association, the successor of CRE (a merger between CRE and the Confederation of European Union Rectors’ Conference in 2001), now continues operating the University Evaluation Program within the European Higher Education Area.

The Sorbonne-Bologna movement on Harmonization of the Architecture of the European Higher Education System, which started in 1998, put on the agenda implementation of comparable higher education systems in all participating countries (4 countries in 1998 and now 46 in 2010). Application of credit hours earned by students in their own and host institutions, namely the European Credit Transfer System, has been developed for student mobility between countries and institutions. Quality assurance was announced as a touchstone of the common European Higher Education Area and European Research Area. Probably, exhilaration about the standardization and arithmetic of credit hours may, in some instances, go beyond the required level. To catch up to and surpass all others, i.e. the rest of the world, which has been announced as an aim of this Sorbonne-Bologna Process, has not been achieved yet (...?!), but together with the TEMPUS/TACIS program for development of higher education relations between Eastern and Western Europe, it has really helped to put quality on the frontlines and to start to harmonize European higher education. Attempts to set up the Register for Quality Assurance Agencies operating in Europe have not yet given serious results. The hope was to establish a Pan-European external evaluation process which may

help to free higher education institutions from their government pressure in Eastern and Central Europe; it is required to prepare European agreement on this issue within the Sorbonne-Bologna Process and to try to gain its recognition by member governments.

Lovers of standardization from other regions, and first of all from the U.S. and South-East Asia, are watching this European experience.

Another broad international evaluation effort on quality in higher education was the project “Quality management, quality evaluation and the decision-making process” started by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in 1995-1997. The intent was to investigate goals, methods and expectations of quality evaluation systems in different countries and to learn their impact on management issues and decision-making processes. 40 higher education institutions of Europe, Australia, Canada and Mexico participated in this project.

Organizations like European Network for Quality Assurance, European University Association and UNESCO try to play an active role in the policy of evaluation of quality in higher education. As an interesting example of cooperation among different countries, the Washington Accord agreement is worth mentioning. It was signed in 1989 among Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, and Great Britain; then Japan, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Singapore all joined it. This agreement envisaged reciprocal recognition of accreditation systems in these countries and provided reciprocal reliability of accredited engineering programs. Thereby if one graduates from an engineering faculty in one of these countries, he/she would not have any formal obstacles in getting employment in any of these countries. The Sydney Accord (2001) and The Dublin Accord (2002) are similar to the Washington Accord for engineering technology and technician engineering accordingly. There are also agreements on personal-expert recognitions.

For a good example of accreditation affairs outside the U.S. and Europe, one can observe Japan. The Japan University Accreditation Association was developed during 1947-1951, using American experience as a model. Since 2002 quality evaluation has been compulsory for all universities one time each seven years as a minimum.

Widespread national and world-wide ranking and rating systems for universities and colleges are also popular for their role in and interpretation as an external evaluation of quality.

## Summary

### ON THE PHILOSOPHY, HISTORY AND MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY IN EDUCATION

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Higher education institutions are currently facing new levels of competition due to globalization. In order to maintain their effectiveness, universities must constantly work to increase their quality. To fully understand the complex nature of excellence in education, we must consider quality from various viewpoints, including philosophical, historical and management perspectives.

First, to form a philosophical foundation, this paper discusses reforms in education and the need for an appropriate level of government financial support. To determine the objectives of higher education, the diversity of institutions and their goals are taken into account. Then the concept of quality is defined, and a formula is offered to approximate the quality of a given institution.

The next important question is that of who should measure quality. The suggestion is made that independent accreditation agencies are best suited for this job; on the contrary, government influence should be limited. It is crucial to determine what should be the consequences of such evaluations; the conclusion is made that the main result of accreditation should be a determination of the level of state financial assistance offered to the institution or department under evaluation.

From a management perspective, the paper discusses the logistics of running a higher education institution, including the importance of near-academic and non-academic service sectors to meet the needs of students. The suggestion is made that institutions should be given freedom to govern themselves in proportion to the responsibility they demonstrate in doing so. The role of governments to preside over higher education is compared in Azerbaijan and in other parts of the world. The suggestion is also made that the capacity of institutions should be monitored in proportion to their availability of campus services, laboratories, etc. to maintain a high level of quality along with growing numbers of students.

Finally, the issue of quality is discussed from a historical perspective. The paper summarizes the origination of accreditation agencies in America and traces the evolution of regional and specialized accreditation agencies. The limited centralization of such evalua-

tion is praised as an asset in the American model. Next, the background and present situation of evaluation in the United Kingdom is discussed as another model. The Soviet system is described, and the changes that it influenced in worldwide education after World War II are highlighted. The paper concludes with a discussion of the current situation in Europe.