

# HUMANE

Heads of University Management & Administration Network in Europe

## SEMINAR

Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg

Friday 25<sup>th</sup> to Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> October 2002

[Evaluation of Teaching and Research](#)

### ABSTRACTS

#### Session 1

##### **Evaluation of Research in Lower Saxony**

Christiane Ebel-Gabriel, Scientific Commission for Lower Saxony

The presentation will first describe the objectives and functions of the Scientific Commission – notably that of developing the structure of teaching and research in the Higher Education system of Lower Saxony. This includes developing and assessing centres of excellence in research, and also developing forms of research assessment. The Commission also provides advice on the allocation of state funding

The system of Research Assessment (RAE) will be outlined. The RAE is conducted by subject area, not by institution, and is based on informed peer review. The assessment is conducted independently of universities and of political involvement, and there is no direct link between RAE results and funding. The methods rely on initial self-reporting by departments, with the nomination of peer-groups and a process of audit. Universities can make comments before the reports are released by the Research Council.

The criteria which are employed include the quality and relevance of research in the particular subject area within the university (both in national and international terms), and the quality of that research relative to financial input. On the basis of such analyses, ratings are given.

Since the introduction of the scheme in 1999 several lessons have been learned. For example, the reputation of the peer assessors is a crucial factor for acceptance of the system. Quality assurance must be based on scientific, not administrative, political or other standards, but the RAE must take subject-related standards into account. Both Ministry and university leaders must be prepared to respond to recommendations.

Future work in this area will recognise that the RAE requires a lot of time and effort from universities and academic peers, but that there is a growing demand for reliable information as the basis for stable planning and funding. There must be a balance between standardisation and the appropriateness of RAE procedures to specific disciplines, and there is a need to monitor both the intended and the unintended effects of the exercise.

**Christoph Ehrenberg, University of Osnabrück**

When the Academic Commission of Lower Saxony (WKN) was founded five years ago, it was, like all new institutions, met not only with positive expectations but also with scepticism and concern. For example:

- What would the consequences of the Commission's work be for research activities at institutions of higher education?
- Would it lead to promotions or cuts? Or a mixture of both within the framework of a structural research policy developed by the *Land*?
- Or would the results of the evaluation be without consequence, as has been the case with previous research reports and structural reports by experts commissioned by the *Land*, only to be put on the shelf?
- Would the work and energy put into the evaluation by the institutions of higher education (writing of self-assessment reports, delivery of data, co-operation in on-site evaluation) be proportionate to the results gained?
- How would the research evaluation carried out by the WKN stand with regard to other evaluations, in particular in the field of teaching, carried out by the Central Evaluation Agency in Hanover?

Research achievements traditionally play an important role at German universities. Research activities and their expert evaluation are crucial to academic careers, in particular in the nomination of professors. The same goes for the acquisition of third-party (external) funding. Such third-party funding is only granted by large funding institutions, predominantly the German Research Foundation (DFG), on the basis of intensive evaluation of previous research achievements and planned projects. However, it must be pointed out that there is a clear distinction between the specialist disciplines: while the natural sciences are fundamentally dependent on third-party funding, academics in the humanities are still predominantly of the Humboldt type, undertaking research in freedom and loneliness. As such, for most academics in the humanities research evaluation was a step into a completely new world.

Today, after five years, an overall positive balance can be drawn for research evaluation in Lower Saxony. This applies on the one hand and predominantly to the work of the WKN. The research evaluation is viewed as an important element of quality control and development planning in the higher education institutions. Negative aspects still remain, however, in the implementation of the evaluation results by the *Land*, in particular with regard to the structure of the university and research system in Lower Saxony.

**Session 2**

## **Evaluation in Union - The Joint Evaluation of Educational Programmes**

***Elisabeth Sundermann, Technische Universität Darmstadt***

Since the late 1980's and beginning of the 90's „Evaluation“ has become more and more important at German universities. Gradually German universities have taken over more autonomy and self-responsibility in research, study programmes and administration instead of relying on governmental directives. This development has forced the necessity of creating a system of quality assurance - that is, Evaluation (looking at the process) and Accreditation (looking at the results).

In February 1998 the presidents and rectors of the Technische Universität Darmstadt, the Universität Kaiserslautern, the Universität Karlsruhe and the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich agreed to a joint evaluation project whereby the three German universities would undergo comparative evaluation processes within their disciplines under the moderation of ETH Zürich at every step of the procedure.

The relationship between input and output has been very positive. The procedure combines internal and external components, optimises the mutual learning process and is economical because of its self-organisation. Finally there is a high level of identification with the procedure and results within the departments.

### **Session 3**

#### **Quality Assurance and Enhancement: the Scottish Experience**

**Bill Harvey, Scottish Higher Education Funding Council**

External quality assurance of Higher Education in the UK became a central feature of the funding model under legislation introduced in 1992. Over the last 10 years, this has been a controversial issue which has led to concerns about the accuracy and value of published quality data; the administrative burden imposed by external audit; the funding implications of quality; and the relationship between government, funding bodies and institutions.

Scotland is about to embark on a new approach to quality in Higher Education, developed by the Scottish HE Funding Council (SHEFC). The approach is informed by a fundamental analysis of quality assurance and enhancement, and of the different roles of institutions, students, and national policy bodies in quality processes. Our new approach is still being developed and will be fully introduced in 2003.

The Scottish approach is based on a number of key premises:

- All parties should share a common vision of what we mean by 'a high-quality higher education system'
- Quality must be owned by the institutions which deliver it, and not by funding or regulatory bodies
- Quality systems must take account of the needs of students, and provide opportunities for the student voice to be heard at all levels

- External quality assurance should be universal in principle but selective in practice, based on a balance of risk and cost
- Processes which are based on quality assurance are not ideal for promoting quality enhancement

The paper will discuss the implications of each of these premises.

Our experience has identified a range of important issues which may be of interest to this audience, and these may provide useful points for discussion at the seminar. These include:

- the status of students within universities (are they customers or not?);
- the concept of 'reflective practitioners' as a model for continuous quality enhancement;

- the balance between ‘teaching’ and ‘learning’ activities within institutions;
- the role of external viewpoints in institutional quality systems; and
- the scope for institution-wide approaches to quality within highly-developed academic structures

## **Funding Council Evaluations – the Experience at Aberystwyth**

### ***Noel Lloyd, University of Wales Aberystwyth***

I shall describe some of the experiences of Aberystwyth in relation to Funding Council assessments of Teaching and Research. I should point out that there are some differences between the approaches adopted by the English, Welsh and Scottish Funding Councils.

- (i) The programme of direct evaluation of individual subject areas (‘Teaching Quality Assessments’ or TQA) concentrated on process. A great deal of effort was required to prepare for these events; we found wide variation in the value of these exercises, and much depended on the individual members of the panels. The system of institutional observers introduced in Wales was particularly helpful. A distinction is drawn between ‘quality’ and ‘standards’.
- (ii) In parallel with TQA there has been a programme of Institutional Audit. Again much depended on the individual members of the panels. I shall comment on the methodology adopted.
- (iii) Research Assessment : this has had a profound influence on academic planning in universities which see themselves as ‘research-led’ in some sense, and has led to quite an intrusive level of research monitoring. I have no doubt that an improvement in the overall quality of research has occurred, but the future pattern is now being considered.
- (iv) I shall also comment on the increasing tendency of hypothecated funding (‘something for something’) and the intrusive nature of the Funding Councils’ monitoring of programmes which are funded in this way.

## **Quality Evaluation in England – The Future**

### ***Jane Hopkinson, University of Plymouth***

The system of teaching evaluation in Wales (discussed in the previous presentation) has closely mirrored that operating in England. Following considerable concern within institutions at the burden placed on teaching staff and institutional resources as a result of those particular forms of review, a new system has been developed and is to be introduced from the current academic session, 2002-03.

The two bodies most obviously involved in this process are the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA).

In summary, the new system will involve an 'institutional audit', conducted by QAA, and, in the initial transition period (2002 – 2005) 'developmental engagements' focused on specific subject areas. The developmental engagement is similar to the old-style subject review, in that it involves sending QAA a short self-evaluation document prepared by the subject team and a subsequent visit by a team of reviewers. However, the key differences are that:

- the University Students' Union may also make a separate and potentially confidential submission.
- the University may nominate a fourth member to the review team, from its own staff
- the review team will communicate largely by email or telephone rather than meeting, except for the two days of visits to the University.
- the outcome will be based on 'threshold' judgements of academic standards and learning opportunities, not on numeric scores

Institutional audit is similar to 'old-style' continuation audit except that:

- the Students' Union may again make a separate and confidential submission
- the audit will also involve a number of discipline audit trails, for which the subject areas will have to prepare self evaluation documents on the part of individuals.

At the same time, there will be an increased focus on 'customer evaluation'. A HEFCE Report: *Information on Quality and Standards in Higher Education* requires institutions to publish on their Web site detailed information about their courses. This includes quantitative information such as statistical data on the entry qualifications and degree classifications of students, and benchmark comparators on things like progression and completion rates, or first destinations (that is, graduate employment statistics). It also includes qualitative information such as reports from external examiners' reports, summaries of institutional quality review processes, student feedback, and learning and teaching strategies. This is intended to enable potential and current students to make informed choices, and is a major part of Government policy in this area.

The presentation will detail some of these changes and explore implications for institutions.

**Note:** Full details of the QAA process can be found on the QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk) (entitled *Handbook for Institutional Audit*)

Full details of the HEFCE publication can be found on the HEFCE website: [www.hefce.ac.uk](http://www.hefce.ac.uk)

## **Session 4**

**The Role of the Head of Administration in Monitoring Quality**

***Rafael Zorilla, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid***

The wave of Evaluation and Quality-Techniques that began invading European universities in the 1990's has met with very different responses in our universities. The patterns of Evaluation methods though, have been similar in many countries.

Evaluation systems, like Quality Plans, are tools or techniques that can be used in order to focus an organisation, and to involve its workers. They can also completely change the way of working.

The success of this Evaluation Process, like any other road to change, needs considerable technical support which includes the adaptation of information systems and an alliance with university services. But it also demands constant leadership in order to maintain the organisational effort that is necessary in order to obtain the best results.

The role of the Head of Administration can and should be very important as a leader, at the very heart of this journey towards change based on the philosophy of quality.

Even though the goals of the Bologna Conference still await us, Quality and Evaluation Plans remain a challenge for Heads of Administration, and a lever that could be very effective if used correctly, to help our universities adapt to the demands of a new century.

## **Session 5**

### **The Evolution and Assessment of the ELT (English Language Teaching) Service Systems at the University of Pavia.**

***Anthony Baldry, University of Pavia***

Reforms introduced in the last two or three years in the legislation governing Italian universities require all students to be assessed in terms of their skills in a European foreign language. From being a small centre concerned with a few specialist degree courses, the Language Centre, like all University Language Centres in Italy, was called on to scale up its services to a point where it could provide a University-wide English language teaching and testing service.

The presentation describes how, in the space of three months and using existing resources, a new teaching and testing system was built, and how the results from research into computer-based teaching were integrated into the service delivery system. In particular, the system focused on creating a standard product that could be reproduced throughout the University and which could also be delivered via web services to students' homes. The system uses streaming video and relational database technology.

The first part of the presentation will illustrate the system and the innovative technology using a visual, as well as a linguistic, approach. The second part will be concerned with evaluating the new system and understanding its further capacity for growth. What new staffing, and what financial, organisational, research and other resources will be needed? What further development of the technology? What training of staff? And above all, how can an overall evaluation strategy be developed?

The presentation will describe efforts, still at a skeletal stage, to build an evaluation system capable of measuring the system's success and its overall contribution to the goals of University education. But how well can these evaluation strategies measure the system's future potential - its capacity to grow and to incorporate, for example, the results of research? These matters will hopefully be the subject of general discussion.

The final degree obtained by students in the UK has traditionally been divided into four main classes (a First, Upper or Lower Second, or Third class degree. In the past these distinctions were of use mainly to the student. Now – and especially when correlations are made between such outputs and the inputs of student qualifications on entry, they are of significant interest also to the institution.

Progression rates will measure the successful movement from one year (or module) of a course to the next; the completion rate will show the proportion of students who complete the nominated degree.

Official surveys generally take the student's „occupation“ six months after graduation as the „first destination“.