

# **RETHINK - Reform of Education Thru International Knowledge exchange**



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# What is quality?

- The word “quality” has not a peculiar meaning within the higher education context



It refers to the position that a reality has in comparison with an ideal situation of excellence....The nearer that reality is to the ideal of excellence the more quality it has.

- So, in our context, it refers to the distance that a university, its staff, programmes, research, international mobility keeps from that ideal of the excellent higher education institution



Being a distance from an ideal situation, the quality of a university could be measured and assessed.

# The evolution of quality assessment at the EU universities

- ▶ Quality is not a new concept in academia. On the opposite, it has been a purpose of the academic community since the first days of the modern university
  - Quality was an integral part of the academic community's quest for truth and the higher good
  - Quality was supported and controlled by an informal process of self-regulation in the community
- ▶ Hence, quality is an integrative part of the academic core value system

# The evolution of quality assessment at the EU universities

- ▶ Several factors contributed to the erosion of academic self-regulation and the ‘externalisation’ of quality:
  - Massification and fear for decline of quality
  - Role of the state in higher education (Public Administration reform)
  - Increasing public demand for transparency and accountability
  - Competition between institutions (Rankings)
- ▶ The consequence was a loss of public trust in academic self-regulation

# The new Quality Assurance System

- ▶ The consequence of the situation described was:
  1. Substantial changes in the internal quality assurance proceedings: formalization and standardization.
  2. The emergence of external quality assurance systems, in most cases based on explicit mechanisms of peer review.
    - ▶ It was a renegotiation in the power field of the triangle of academia, the state and the market. Where powers gradually shifted from academia to the state (agencies) and the market (rankings, accreditation companies)
  3. The increasing importance of quality and quality assessment in university life: The formation of a «culture of quality»

# The formation of a «culture of quality»

1. A transparent and active commitment to quality at all levels
2. A willingness to engage in critical self-evaluation (ideal: universities want to know and do not mind to inform the public about their own weak points and problems at every level).
3. An internal regulatory framework with clear and consistent procedures (QA rules)
4. Explicit and clearly assigned responsibilities for quality control and assessment (QA authorities).

# The formation of a «culture of quality»

5. A drive to obtain feedback from a variety of internal and external constituencies (internal and external QAS should work together)
6. A clear commitment to identify and disseminate good practice (stakeholders and society)
7. Prompt, appropriate, and sensitive managerial action to redress problems, supported by adequate information



# Threats and risks

- ▶ ‘Reputation race’, rankings and superficial quality perception
- ▶ ‘Mission overload’: institutions trying to do everything and do nothing well
- ▶ Very intrusive external quality assurance
- ▶ Internal tolerance for low quality
- ▶ Excessive competition, undermining academic self-regulation and collaboration
- ▶ Over-demanding and over-critical consumers • Lack of society’s respect for academia



# Related assumptions and risks



## Assumptions

- ❑ Many of the PC universities involved in the Project have not any *Quality Assurance System*, as it is understood within the EU countries
- ❑ Any project aimed to create higher education degrees equivalent to those existing in the EU should assure that its whole performance meets the EU quality culture evolving requirements, since quality is at the heart of the construction of the EHEA
- ❑ Quality assurance should be always a balance between internal processes and external assessment



## Risks

- ❑ The situation could put in danger the durability of some of the project results and deliverables
- ❑ It could be hard to obtain a relevant feedback from the project stakeholders of the non EU countries in quality related issues
- ❑ Formal procedures associated with quality control could be contemplated as an unnecessary burden by the PC partners staff

# OBJECTIVE



## Quality of the new programmes

The quality of the new joint programmes should be assured by means equivalent to those required for approving any official programme within the EHEA.

# HOW TO ASSURE THAT A QUALITY ASSESSMENT ACCORDING TO THE EU STANDARDS IS IMPLEMENTED IN ALL THE PARTNER INSTITUTIONS?



1. The first step to take will be to explain, by all the available means, the role and significance of what QAS is intended to be in the frame of the EHEA.
2. At the same time, organisation should get to know the current formal QAS characteristics at the PC institutions, providing that they have one model of their own.

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3. Draw up a document with principles and guidelines for implementing a QAS in the PC institutions. This document is intended to be a guide for the PC institutions to design and approve their own internal QAS according to the EHEA standards.
  - Within the limits of the guidelines, each PC institution will have some room to decide the better way to implement and reach internally the quality goals expressed in the document. Suitable courses, activities and materials will be organized for staff and students to make them familiar with QAS

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4. The Quality Control Council will support the PC institutions effort in order to introduce an internal QAS. At the same time, the consistency between any PC institution decision and the principles and guidelines for quality assurance will be assessed by the Quality Control Council.