

Call for the special issue:
In Quality We Trust? –
Investigating the impact of more than two decades of QA in European
Higher Education

Guest Editors: Oliver Vettori (Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien) and Bernhard Kernegger (Universität für angewandte Kunst Wien)
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On the call

In the past twenty years, 'quality' and 'quality assurance' have become two of the most-used and most-discussed 'buzzwords' (LASKE et al., 2000) in international higher education, constituting a remarkably successful management fashion (STENSAKER, 2007). Yet after more than two decades of experiences (and experiments) with quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area, the 'impact question' is continuously becoming more relevant: What are the outcomes and effects of all these endeavours? What has been achieved and by which means? And how can the impact be observed? Practically all higher education actors and stakeholders have come into contact with various forms of quality assurance and quality management, and the issue on the positive and negative aspects of current developments remains heavily debated. The *Zeitschrift für Hochschulentwicklung* (Journal for Development of Higher Education Institutions) wants to seize the opportunity to undertake a critical yet constructive assessment of the status quo.

After a phase of Europe-wide pilot initiatives in the early 1990s, models of internal and external quality assurance, the next decade saw the implementation of formal quality assurance instruments and processes such as self-assessment, supporting documentation, peer review and public reports in most European countries (cf. HARVEY, 2006). Closely intertwined with the Bologna Process, quality assurance has since become a central element of higher education development all over Europe (cf. SCHWARZ & WESTERHEIJDEN, 2004). In 2008, an OECD publication named the development of external quality assurance systems even as one of the most important trends in higher education in the last decades (cf. RIEGLER, 2010, p. 157). This can also be seen from a growing number of institutional higher education systems (cf. LOUKKOLA & ZHANG, 2010). The increase in respective publications, conferences, forums, networks and QA professionals can in addition be regarded as an indicator of the incremental institutionalization of the field.

On the other hand, this phase of growth is also accompanied by an increasing number of critical analyses, and not just from the perspective of the academics affected by the system (cf. NEWTON, 2002; 2000), but also on part of the quality assurance community itself. It almost seems as if the quality assurance movement had entered a new phase of "realism" (cf. STENSAKER, 2008, p. 4), where the impact issue takes center stage. Yet in contrast to the Anglo-American tradition of evaluation research, where questions on the use and effects of educational evaluations have been the object of academic debate and research for years, the respective discourse in European Higher Education is still showing some considerable gaps and blind spots.

Consequently, the question on the effects and effectiveness of quality assurance (and related concepts such as quality management, quality enhancement or quality development) in European higher education constitutes the focus of the 2013 spring issue of the Zeitschrift für Hochschulentwicklung. The editors invite all researchers, experts and practitioners to contribute to this question and submit papers and studies that add to a critical discussion of the current situation and the paths that have led there. Contributions can address the micro-level of individual models, approaches or instruments, as well as the meso-level of specific organisations and communities and the macro-level of entire (inter)national systems and institutional fields.

The following questions and problems are of particular interest for this special issue:

- Which theories, methods and models could be a valuable contribution to the current impact debate, and how do they describe and explain impact in higher education and/or quality assurance?
- What kind of organizational changes and developments – on the HE-system level and on the institutional level – can be ascribed to quality assurance systems? What makes such changes and developments observable? How do different actors and stakeholder groups perceive the effectiveness of internal and external quality assurance?
- Which policies, strategies and instruments have proven to be successful? Which were less effective, and what are the reasons? How does internal and external quality assurance in theory and in practice come together?
- Institutional quality management systems generate different kind of data and information: how are these data used and interpreted in practice?
- Is there a relation between specific QA approaches, and instruments and specific institutional or group interests (and their agents)? How do national regulations and external QA systems effect the institutions? Do different levels of QA – e.g. faculty level, institutional level, national level, international level – influence each other?
- What kind of unintended effects are caused by quality assurance and quality management approaches? How can such kinds of effects be uncovered and observed?
- Which external influences have had a lasting impact on the development of quality assurance in European higher education in the past 20 years? What are the risks and prospects from this point of view?

This call invites all higher education researchers, practitioners and experts who are interested in or involved with questions and issues about the effectiveness and effects of quality assurance in higher education.

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On the Journal

The *Zeitschrift für Hochschulentwicklung (ZFHE)* is an Online-Journal, edited by a consortium of Swiss, Austrian and German scientists. The ZFHE pursues a practice-oriented approach, based on excellent theoretical and empirical backgrounds. More information can be found at www.zfhe.at (in German only).

Types of contribution

Contributions may be submitted in three different formats (in German or English):

Scientific papers should

- provide innovative perspectives, arguments and analyses
- concentrate on one topic of this call
- provide gain in relation to existing knowledge
- describe methods of analyses properly
- follow APA-citation style
- have ca. 12 pages (+/-2 pages, 2400 characters per page)

Practitioner reports should

- demonstrate potential for knowledge transfer
- elaborate generalizable aspects
- be written in a systematic, transparent and intuitive way
- have ca. 7 pages (+/-2 pages, 2400 characters per page)

Forum discussions

Forum discussions provide an opportunity to present and to reason theses, perspectives of lateral thinkers, incisive viewpoints and statements on current problems of the development of higher education institutions. Forum discussions should meet the following criteria:

- originality
- elaborate reasoning
- up-to-dateness
- potential for triggering discussion and exchange
- ca. 3-4 pages (2400 characters per page)

Submission

Please send your articles and papers to the guest editors (oliver.vettori@wu.ac.at or bernhard.kernegger@uni-ak.ac.at).

It is advisable to use the ZFHE's template available at http://www.zfhe.at/userupload/ZFHE_8-2_TEMPLATE_Artikel.doc (in German only).

Review

Each contribution will be subjected to double blind-review by independent reviewers with academic experience in the topic of the contribution. In case of differing reviews, the editors of the issue at stake decide on the acceptance of the paper.

Questions?

For questions regarding the topic of this issue, please contact the guest editors, Oliver Vettori (oliver.vettori@wu.ac.at) and Bernhard Kernegger (bernhard.kernegger@uni-ak.ac.at).

For technical and organizational questions, please contact Michael Raunig (office@zfhe.at).

Time schedule

- 15 November 2012 – Deadline for submitting the full paper
- 25 January 2013 – Notification/Review
- 22 February 2013 – Deadline revision
- 22 March 2013 – Publication

We are looking forward to your contribution!

The editors

Oliver Vettori (WU) and Bernhard Kernegger (University for Applied Arts, Vienna)