

Working group3: Regional QA - Increasing Autonomy for the Universities?

Enhancing Quality Across Borders - Regional Cooperation in
Quality Assurance in Higher Education

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European University Association (EUA)

- **EUA:** main representative organisation of universities (c750) and their national Rectors' Conferences (34) in 47 countries across Europe
- **Mission:** to ensure that universities have the means to fulfil their three-fold mission (research, teaching and services to society)
 - ✓ Policy development and advocacy
 - ✓ Support to members (projects, services & publications)
 - ✓ Particular focus on Bologna process implementation

Quality and institutional autonomy

■ Quality

- ✓ Great variety of possible approaches and definitions (fitness for purpose, compliance, excellence, enhancement, control etc.)
- ✓ Different perspectives (input, output, processes)
- No shared definition of quality along HEIs with differing missions - a relative concept, primarily based on institutional mission and goals
- ✓ Quality is not a neutral concept, but closely related to questions of ideology and power

■ Autonomy

- ✓ "Living by ones own laws" → self-governance
- ✓ Contract between the university and the state (but cf. relevance of other factors and actors beside the state)
- ✓ What constitutes autonomy? (cf. academic, financial, organisational and staffing autonomy in EUA Lisbon Declaration 2007)
- Ability of HEIs to make decisions and manage their affairs in the best interests of students and society (Trends V)

Bologna - quality - autonomy: key issues

- Explicit link between the institutions' responsibility for quality and autonomy in [Berlin Communiqué 2003](#)
- ➔ Power shift for the benefit of HEIs, away from QA agencies and governments
- Indications that in the course of the Bologna reforms, institutional autonomy has increased
 - ✓ cf. Trends III (2003): 50% of HEIs viewed their autonomy as satisfactory vs 75 % of HEIs in Trends V (2007)
- Indications that HEIs are making use of increased institutional autonomy for quality development
 - ✓ Quality Culture (2002-2006), Trends IV (2005) & V (2007)
- Implications for HEIs:
 - ✓ Stakeholder involvement (students, staff, external experts)
 - ✓ Accountability (internal and external)

Thank you very much for your attention

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- For further information on EUA publications, please go to: <http://www.eua.be/index.php?id=128>

Primary responsibility for quality in HE lies with higher education institutions

"[Ministers] also stress that consistent with the principle of institutional autonomy, the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself and this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework."

Berlin Communiqué, September 2003