

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

18 - 20 June 2007 - Collegium Leoninum, Bonn, Germany

An International DIES Conference on Experiences in Europe, Southeast Asia, South America, East Africa, and the Arab Region

Welcome Address of Dr. Christian Bode, Secretary General of DAAD

Dear Dr. Gaethgens, dear Mr. Cheung, dear Dr. Hopper, dear Prof. Weiter, dear executives and Quality Assurance experts from around the globe, colleagues, partners, friends, ladies and gentlemen,

[Welcome]

DAAD is very pleased to welcome you here in Bonn, the German Capital of Science and International Cooperation. I am especially pleased that jointly with our dear colleagues of the German Rectors' Conference it has been possible to bring together experts and decision makers from five world regions which are of pivotal importance for us.

We have been in close and fruitful contact with you on a bilateral basis for many years:

- In Central America we have successfully supported the constitution of a regional Accreditation System. I met a delegation of 14 rectors just some weeks ago to discuss further cooperation.
- I also remember quite vividly meeting a delegation of 30 Vice-Chancellors and Commissioners from East Africa last year in the Federal Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development - which I would like to thank for its continuing support for the DIES programme - and for this event.

- Within the last months I met high ranking delegations from Arab and South East Asian countries, all of them very much interested in German and European Higher Education Reforms. Quality Assurance always has been a key topic.

Therefore, it deemed us high time to bring together our partners and facilitate direct dialogue. And we have been overwhelmed by the interest for our call. This meeting has been planned as a much smaller expert workshop - but when we discussed with our key partners we have been convinced of the importance to bring in not only university and technical experts but also decision makers from Ministries and regional bodies, employers, trade unions, professional associations and - representatives of the key stakeholder - the students.

I am especially pleased that also so many of our German and European partners followed the call for this conference. Finally, I would like to cordially welcome the Members of the Board of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education and the experts of the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, UNESCO and German Technical Co-operation - all key partners in international Quality Assurance who might become even more important in the future.

[DIES]

We are meeting here under the acronym of DIES which stands for Dialogue on Innovative Higher Education Strategies and be sure that we take Dialogue serious meaning a two way / mutual learning process. Our role is not that of a teacher since our universities are themselves part of a sometimes painful (but all in all successful) learning process (→ Bologna process) which demands courage, flexibility, change management, persistence, leadership (to name a few) our role is rather that of a training partner and a facilitator of inter-regional discussions.

Within the DIES programme we have developed an innovative approach supporting international partnerships of universities focusing on management and quality assurance. It is our conviction that innovations have to start bottom-up and top-down parallelly. Hence the bottom up approach is often neglected. Universities have to convince themselves that Higher Education reform is necessary. Within the universities the deans and heads of departments must support the process. Therefore, DIES actively includes all these levels. Supporting quality assurance co-ordinators on the ground and our newly developed Deans' Course on faculty management are just two examples of this conviction.

[Experience in supporting Quality Assurance]

In Germany Bologna has already started 20 years ago. With the decisive support of DAAD and funded by BMZ the urgent call from developing countries lead to the first English speaking Master's degree programmes in Germany. These courses and the many that followed within the support programme for professional Master's courses for participants from developing countries have been the model for German Universities. They spearheaded the very comprehensive structural reform underway presently in towards the introduction of a Bachelor / Master structure.

They were among the first programmes to be modularised and accredited. Presently they are again leading the movement for internationalisation of study programmes and the structural inclusion of cross-border elements.

As you can see, cooperation with your regions is having a decisive impact on change processes in Germany and Europe. Mutual learning is not just nice talking when working together with DAAD, HRK and German Universities.

[Experience in Supporting Regional Cooperation]

Central America may serve as an example for “best practice” in supporting the development of regional cooperation in Quality Assurance. On the request of the Central American Universities’ Association (CSUCA) and in close co-operation with other German partner institutions, DAAD and HRK since 2002 have supported the establishment of the Central American Quality Assurance System in Higher Education. Today nearly 150 study programmes have undertaken a thorough evaluation. Many of them did profoundly change their curricula and greatly improved their quality - and their relevance for society.

A new quality assurance institution, the Central American Accreditation Council, have been founded by the end of 2003, bringing together seven countries and five sectors, including private universities, professional associations and students. Today the CCA is an official organ of the Central American Integration System. Two specialized regional Accreditation Agencies in Engineering and Architecture, and in the field of Postgraduate Studies after a comprehensive dialogue process supported by DIES have been formally established in last August and now have started to work.

[Universities as Promoters of Good Governance]

Finally, let me stress a point which we in the North sometimes tend to forget:

Universities are not only places of teaching and research in an Ivory Tower. Good Universities are THE promoters of Good Governance.

Good Governance is THE key pre-condition for sustainable and socially adjusted development. Good Governance, however, can only be built on the basis of a sustained critical yet constructive public discussion with government.

Universities have a special responsibility in this field.

1.) They educate the future leaders (not all of them but more and more)

2.) They are often the only institutions that can bring well developed alternatives into the political debate. In so far

3.) They can be - they have to be agents of change and I am happy that this will also be on the agenda of this conference.

Yet, also to fulfill this role, the universities have to be good. Quality matters. Supporting university development, this means supporting Good Governance!

[Concluding Remarks]

In this sense, thanks to all of you for joining us this conference.

Dear Dr. Gaethgens, thanks to HRK for taking over the mayor share of the logistical work - and for selecting this beautiful venue.

I wish you a successful conference - and many surprises - as surprise is the key to learning and hence to quality.