

Enhancing Regional Employability through Quality Assurance

Abstract by Dr. Andreas Keller

One important aspect of quality assurance for university degrees and study courses is that they should improve the professional qualifications of higher education graduates. The acquisition of professional skills is a major criterion in assessing the quality of a course. The trade unions call for every course to demonstrate that it actually qualifies people to exercise their profession. If the professional community believes in the quality of university degrees and study diplomas held by foreign applicants, these will benefit from the same opportunities as domestic applicants. Quality assurance thereby contributes to boosting the international mobility of students and academics.

How any particular course actually imparts professional skills, and hence its quality, cannot be decreed top down – either by the education bureaucracy or solely by the academic representatives of higher education disciplines. Study reform and quality assurance need, rather, to be organised as participatory processes in which students and representatives of professional practice also take part. Professional practice needs to be represented on both sides: by both the employers and the trade unions on behalf of those who work in the sector.

The first decisive factor is that a professional qualification cannot be reduced to the simplistic formula that training must above all impart skills of immediate relevance to the profession. In this respect, the widely used term “employability” is too narrow. But nor would the higher education institutions be doing their job properly if they sought to convey a canon of knowledge with no particular purpose in total isolation from professional requirements. A degree that enables students to exercise a profession is one that, first, relates to professional practice and, second, provides students with the scientifically founded skills they need to reflect critically on professional practice.