

Working Group 3: Regional QA– Increasing Autonomy for the Universities?

There were three input statements before the discussion of the topic.

Presentation of the statement no 1 focused on the role of European University Association observation on Quality Assurance Agencies.

Dr. Karin Riegler as a Senior Programme Manager shared with group members about the concept of quality.

It was noted that there is no unanimous definition of quality. The working definition was worked out to fit each university.

The EUA advocates the definition of quality which are based on institutional mission and goals. Hence quality assurance is institutionally linked with the mission and goals of individual universities.

The autonomy as a term was explained as a self-governance when the university is related to the state. Once the state has set the standards or principles of operation it remains the responsibility of the university to govern itself without interference from the state. This is in line with academic freedom. (contextual autonomy – academic freedom, financial, organizational, staffing)

It was commonly observed that after establishment of the Quality Assurance Agencies within national laws the autonomy/ powers of managing the universities shifted from Accreditation Agencies and governments to institutions – Hence QA Mechanisms are giving more powers to the universities than before. Why? → Because:

- promotes quality culture
- feel responsible to maintain, improve the quality
- universities are more accountable to the public about the outcomes, use of recourses
- more responsive to the societal needs
- compliance with the set standards
- creative and competitive

Through autonomy obtained universities become more involving the stakeholders to know their expectations, plan together, satisfy stakeholders through demonstrated quality.

Student involvement is significant in designing the curriculum and determining the quality of outcomes.

=> However national bodies supported by laws are compulsory = legal framework is necessary for establishing the legal status, accountability of individual universities.

Comparability, employability, international mobility are more assured through regional bodies.

=> Governmental Agencies in East Africa are restrictive and limit the autonomy of some young universities.

(government + institutions: controlled and guided by quality for comparability, prestige, etc.)

Conclusion:

Regional quality assurance initiatives are enhancing university autonomy; limit governmental powers in leading universities (control of political, ideological influences). There is therefore shift of power from the government to the university which is more responsible and accountable to maintain and improve quality of education.