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**Abstract**

Quality assessment has been part of the feedback mechanisms of European higher education systems since around 1980. Due to internal dynamics, "erosion" of the effectiveness of first-generation quality assessment systems has led to loss of credibility (legitimacy) of these systems in the late 1990s.

External dynamics also necessitate designing a next generation of quality assurance systems. They include notably a loss of transparency (hence, legitimacy) of the European higher education system through increased internationalisation (most notably through the Bologna process) which puts new, increased demands on institutional arrangements for quality assurance. In this paper, we first intend to schematise the developments of quality assurance in higher education by introducing a phase model of the effects of internal and external dynamics. Next, we will analyse this phase model from the perspective of argumentative policy inquiry. Finally, we will contrast policy developments in higher education with one other example, viz. environmental policy in the Netherlands. The conclusions of this comparison, as well as the new challenges set for quality assurance in higher education by the

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Bologna process, are the subject matter for the final section of our paper. (HRK / Abstract  
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