

30.3.2026

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**Title**

The symbolic role of academic boards in university academic quality assurance

**Publication year**

2013

**Source/Footnote**

In: Quality in higher education. - 19 (2013) 2, S. 142 - 157

**Inventory number**

34909

**Keywords**

Qualitätssicherung ; Hochschule : Verwaltung allgemein

**Abstract**

While much research on quality assurance in higher education has centred on issues related to the impact on teaching and learning and academic staff, there is a significant gap in the area of quality assurance and academic governance. Within Australia the roles of university academic boards (also known as academic senates or faculty senates) have been redefined in the past 20 years and now include a significant focus on quality assurance. This paper reports the results of a case study of three Australian university academic boards and shows that despite their written terms of reference, the role of these academic boards in academic quality assurance was largely symbolic and performative and that responsibility actually rested with senior management. It further argues that in taking this position the universities were responding to the demands of the risk society by using academic boards to protect their academic reputations and financial positions. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)