

International emergence of an accreditation regime in higher education, and last supplementation: fraudulent accreditations

This presentation examines the main elements that constitute the concept of quality control in education, the necessity of these mechanisms and some of the implications that follows.

Summary

Accreditation of higher education – is one of the mechanisms that shall contribute to quality in education, and has been a rapidly growing task in the European education landscape the last couple of decades. The concept is inspired by American systems, developed throughout the 20th century as a response to the strong expansion of private providers and lack of national systems for quality control and regulations. An increasing number of countries are now adopting the concept of accreditation, to control the quality of their education, with considerable implications for international mobility and cooperation. Institutional accreditation, program accreditation and recognized/accredited providers as a prerequisite to assessment of individual qualifications, implies a growing bureaucracy, both with respect to processes of quality assurance, international harmonization of these and the exchange of information on accreditation status across borders.

This presentation examines the main elements that constitute the concept of quality control in education, the necessity of these mechanisms and some of the positive and negative implications that follows. The effort of controlling quality in higher education follows a traditional trisection where responsibility and rights are divided between the provider, the program provided and the person that legitimate has passed a program and thereby qualify for an academic degree.

- educational institution (provider)
- study program (provision)
- individual academic qualification

By the establishment of NOKUT in 2003, a system of external accreditation of institutions and programs in higher education was introduced also in Norway, contemporaneous with the introduction of a system for academic recognition of foreign qualifications for the unregulated labor market – general recognition (generell godkjenning) – where recognized/accredited education form the basis. NOKUT has thereby been given the national responsibility for accreditation, recognition of individual qualifications from abroad as well as information on education and educational systems.

The number of countries outside Europe and USA pursue but systems and processes vary. The need and demand for noticeable processes of quality control have stimulated new and alternative providers, and we now experience the growth of a new market with corrupt providers and fraudulent and fictive processes, harming students, academia and the labor marked, and entailing a considerable stress to the administrative systems. Accreditation consortia are one of the initiatives for handling the challenges, but the need for international regulations or an international system for quality control in higher education, to protect the society against fraudulent providers and cooperation partners, still remains an open question.

Globalization of the education marked has entailed stronger regulations and growing bureaucracy, but might be the prize for the advantages and opportunities provided by global cooperation.