

How to get a newly established quality assurance agency up and running?

Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Vatican City

Wednesday, 14 November

Alexander Kohler
managing director of AQA

Background information on AQA (1)



A. Background information on the Austrian Agency for Quality Assurance (AQA)

- Context of external quality assurance in Austria:
 - divers approaches:
 - Public Universities (82% of students): no mandatory accreditation, but report on QA activities within performance agreements (since 2007);
 - Fachhochschulen (sector established in 1993; 10% of students): mandatory accreditation of programmes (by Austrian Fachhochschulrat)
 - Private Universities (sector established in 1999; 3% of students): mandatory accreditation of programmes and institutions (by Accreditation Council for private universities)
 - Teacher Training Colleges (5% of students): no mandatory accreditation
 - legal obligation for all HEI to establish internal quality management systems

Background information on AQA (2)



- Agency was founded in 2003 by Austrian Universities' and Fachhochschulen Conferences, Austrian Students Union, Federal Ministry for Science
- Scientific Steering Group (7 international members) decides on standards, procedures and on certification
- QA procedures for all sectors of higher education
- methods used:
 - evaluation (*programmes, organisations, thematic evaluations*) and quality audit (*institutional QM systems*)
 - benchmarking
 - certification (with formal recognition by relevant national authorities)
- external evaluation of AQA by ENQA in October 2007

A few critical factors for new QA agencies - following the ESG (1)



B. A few critical factors for new quality assurance agencies – following the ESG

ESG 3.1: Use of external quality assurance procedures

- What practice for external quality assurance is in place? Does the agency refer to existing procedures or develop new ones?

(case of AQA: for Public Universities no systematic external procedures have been in place before)

A few critical factors for new QA agencies - following the ESG (2)



ESG 3.2: Official status of the agency

- What does 'recognition of the agency' refer to: To the organisation itself? To the results of procedures?
(*case of AQA: recognition of the institution through stakeholder participation and formal recognition of the results of the agencies' procedures*)

A few critical factors for new QA agencies - following the ESG (3)



ESG 3.3: Agencies should undertake external quality assurance activities on a regular basis

ESG 3.4: Agencies should have adequate and proportional resources

- Engagement of high competence and know-how about quality assurance in the operational work of the agency (development and co-ordination of QA procedures)

(case of AQA: engaging experienced staff and staff development; international members of its steering group)

- International co-operation and recognition

(case of AQA: co-operation with other agencies on procedures has been gainful)

A few critical factors for new QA agencies - following the ESG (4)



ESG 3.5: Mission statement

- Is there a common commitment to a mission statement?
(*case of AQA: mission statement needed to be developed*)

ESG 3.6: Independence

- Are the mechanisms and procedures that guarantee independence clearly defined and communicated?
(*case of AQA: importance to illustrate the processes and competences for the decision of criteria, procedures, experts/peers, certification; independence of procedures and decisions through the Scientific Steering Group*)

A few critical factors for new QA agencies - following the ESG (5)



ESG 3.7: External QA criteria and processes should be predefined and publicly available

- Are procedures pre-defined – also in a process of development/enhancement?

(case of AQA: pilot implementation of new procedures has been needful)

ESG 3.8: Accountability procedures

- Adequacy of internal documentation, monitoring and QM?

(case of AQA: internal QM had to 'grow' with the agency)

C. Key challenges for a new quality assurance agency

1. clear mission, scope (kinds of HE) and competence (decision) of the agency
2. involvement of knowledge and expertise
3. involvement of stakeholders (HEI, students, policy, ...)
4. human and financial resources that permit the development of QA procedures
5. reference projects that help to get confidence and recognition
6. internal quality management