Introducing Accreditation in (Central) Europe: Lessons from Slovakia

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Visegrad countries: Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia

How it all Started ... (in Slovakia, but similarly in some other countries in the region)

- 1989, totalitarian communist regime was overthrown
- 1990, Higher Education Law
  - academic liberties
  - institutional autonomy
  - a provision for 2-tier Bc/Mgr degree system was made
  - Accreditation Commission was established

... and Why

- A guess on law-maker’s intention:
  - to overcome the past
  - to open door for the future
  - to make transition viable
- (in plain text):
  - away from state control
  - towards quality control
  - checks and balances
Slovak legislation

- A provision for 2-tier Bc/Mgr degree system was made in 1990
- Compare:
  - German Hochschulrahmengesetzes from 1998: § 19 Bachelor- und Masterstudiengänge
  - THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA Joint declaration of the European Ministers of Education, convened in Bologna in 1999
- A consequent implementation of Bologna, including the 3 level degree system and credit transfer and accumulation system in 2002

Accreditation Commission

- Mission:
  - To assist in development of higher education system in Slovakia by evaluating level of educational and research activities of institutions and by accrediting courses
- Legal Status:
  - Advisory body of the Government
    - Both before and after the new Law 131/2002 on HE

Principal Tasks

- To accredit newly proposed degree courses and re-accredit the running courses
- To accredit institutions
  - To evaluate institutions
    - (Faculties before April 2002)

Principal Tasks

- To give opinions on proposals to establish / close down institutes / institutions (Faculties or HE institutions)
- To make recommendations regarding the status of the higher education institution

Principles

- Accreditation is compulsory for all degree courses at all three levels
  - Note: also PhD programmes
- Accreditation is performed periodically
  - 6 years period

Principles

- Composition of the Commission:
  - Both from academia and industry, including research institutes
  - Members from abroad
  - Similar pattern applies for the working groups
**Principles**

- programme accreditation criteria are based:
  - (inputs:) mostly on evaluating resources: human, infrastructure, information, material, financial, laboratory etc.
  - (process:) programmatic reviews
  - (outputs:) quality, employability of graduates

**Institutional accreditation**

- results in report
- recommendation regarding the status of the higher education institution
  - university
  - research university
  - polytechnic

**Evaluation**

- Principles:
  - evaluation is based:
    - comprehensive report on outcomes of principal activities (mainly research, publications, projects)

**Procedures**

- accountability with respect to its outcomes:
- accreditation criteria:
  - proposed by the Commission
  - discussed with the representative bodies of HE
  - adopted by the Ministry

**Procedures**

- transparency:
  - Rectors have the right to comment panel reports before decision are made
  - Rectors and Deans of institutions on agenda are invited as a rule
  - documents including minutes of meetings on public web site
  - meetings are public;
    - frequently Minister, President of Rectors’ Conference, President of HE Council, President of Students’ Council take part
Outcomes from Accreditation

- recommendations to the Minister:
  - to grant the right to confer degrees
  - to grant the right to nominate professors
  - to suspend the rights …
  - to establish a new university

- recommendations to the Rector:
  - to establish a new Faculty

Outcome from Institutional Accreditation

- a detailed report that
  - identifies strengths and weaknesses
  - makes recommendations to the Institution
  - evaluates research
  - recommendation regarding the status of the higher education institution
    - university
    - research university
    - polytechnic

A broader view on situation

- similar situation in several countries in the region, including Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland
- the situation has been, and for some time will remain specific (to a lesser and lesser extent)
  - starting point: non-market, or a completely controlled market of HE
  - “standard” rules in still not completely standard conditions do not always work
  - students seek diploma, not quality
  - universities are so under financed they compromise quality
  - universities do not have a fully functioning QA system
  - very few overseas students
  - very few teacher mobilities

Lessons

- accreditation has been introduced
  - to address “standard” issues of HE quality
  - by novel approaches
  - in a specific context
  - fits this purpose
  - the ultimate safeguard of a minimum quality
  - its role has been strengthened in the new legislation

Lessons

- accreditation is a flexible concept
- as the situation is becoming more “standard”,
  - more focus on recommending, supportive approach
  - less stress on (non-)approving

Discussion

- Quality of education:
  - Accreditation Commission serves as a kind of “safeguard” against attempts to open new courses below any reasonable:
    - threshold of quality
    - amount of resources available
  - How do the attempting institutions assure their quality?
  - New Law requires: university has a QA system
Issues for the future

- Implementation of changes in the legislation
- Further promoting the concept of quality in HE system and institutions
- Strengthening international dimension
  - More experts from abroad – from region
  - Mutual recognition of qualifications through meta-accreditation
- Strengthening professional dimension
- Discussing relation of quality and financing