

Quality assurance in higher education in Europe : Challenges and opportunities

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With the proposed European Higher Education Area due for 2010, there are many quality assurance challenges and opportunities facing colleagues in different institutions and countries in adapting to the Bologna Agenda. Indeed, there is still much baggage to be shed and good practice to be adopted.

Particular concerns to be overcome will be addressed in the paper, including the adoption of Learning Outcomes, the acceptance of a quality enhancement agenda, the importance of the “student voice” and the binary divide between so-called “academic” and “professional” universities.

It is also essential for our European universities to modernise and embrace new modes of learning and teaching, to address the “life long learning” agenda. Examples include the use of information technology for distance learning and to consider the needs of those in employment, enabling them to enhance their professional skills.

Equally, European universities cannot afford to be complacent. A modern Higher Education system in which all or most universities deliver courses in English may not be far away. This will mean an increased competition for a more mobile European student population who will enjoy more choice of university and vote with their feet. Furthermore, this is not solely a European agenda, as modernisation has the potential to increase the attractiveness of European higher education in a global market.

As the Chinese curse reminds us, “May you live in interesting times”. Academic colleagues in Europe are increasingly aware of the quality assurance challenges and opportunities in higher education and hopefully can face these interesting times with a degree of confidence.