

Towards a European Certificate for Excellence in Internationalisation

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Sub-Theme 2. Innovative approaches to external QA in tertiary education: not a single approach towards excellence

Audio-visual requirements: Powerpoint facilities

Abstract

Over the past 25 years, the international dimension of higher education (HE) has steadily gained importance. Internationalisation is a vital force of modern HE but so far only few approaches have been developed to assess its quality. Based upon the positive experiences with a distinctive quality feature in the Netherlands and Flanders, the European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education (ECA) decided to establish a European certificate for internationalisation. The ECA certificate will be delivered to those institutions and study programmes which manage well to integrate an international and intercultural dimension into their education provisions. The EU funded project Certificate for Quality of Internationalisation (CeQuInt) has been initiated by ECA and is coordinated by NVAO. The project started in October 2012 and will run for 2 ½ years to establish the certificate.

Proposal

Higher education institutions started to pursue internationalisation as a pro-active strategic issue. Internationalisation of the curriculum and of the teaching and learning process has become relevant for HE institutions and various forms of cross-border education have become widespread in Europe (e.g. joint programmes). Today internationalisation itself is perceived as an indicator for the quality of higher education, but so far only few European-wide approaches have assessed the quality of internationalisation. There is a shortcoming in the definition and assessment of the quality of internationalisation at programme level. The current national accreditation systems in Europe do not assess international and intercultural learning outcomes of study programmes and a commonly agreed assessment framework on the European level is lacking.

Based on these observations and on the pre-existing knowledge in this area NVAO, representing two member countries (Netherlands/Flanders) of the European Consortium for Accreditation in higher Education (ECA), developed and tested a system of assessment of internationalisation on the programme level. The evaluation of these pilots resulted in a framework for the assessment of internationalisation at both the programme and institutional level. In the Netherlands and Flanders it is now possible for programmes and institutions to request, on a voluntary basis, to assess the quality of internationalisation at the programme or institutional level. The assessment can be carried out in conjunction with the regular programme accreditation or institutional audit. When assessed positively a so called distinctive quality feature on internationalisation is awarded and this achievement is included in the accreditation or audit decision which is published together with the assessment report. Based on these successful initiatives in two countries and the demand of HE institutions from different countries who participated or attended meetings where these pilots were presented, ECA declared an interest to develop a commonly agreed European framework for assessing internationalisation at the programme and institutional level. Those institutions or

programmes that have successfully incorporated an international and intercultural dimension into the function, purpose and delivery of education should receive a European certificate as a testimony to their achievements.

The overall aim of the CeQuInt project is to assess, reward and enhance internationalisation. The project provides HEIs in Europe with the opportunity to benchmark against good practices in internationalisation. This will bring internationalisation of the education to new quality levels and will have a positive impact on the international activities (cooperation and competitiveness) of the involved institutions and study programmes. The planned European certificate expresses that students achieve high international and intercultural competencies in the certified study programmes or institutions. This is a valuable orientation point for the labour market and has also the potential to facilitate cross-border recognition of the corresponding qualifications in Europe

The project will develop an assessment framework (i.e. methodology) that can be used to assess the internationalisation of a programme or an institution and which, if completed successfully, can lead to the award of a European Certificate for Internationalisation. The Certificate is intended to confirm that a programme or an institution has successfully incorporated an international and intercultural dimension into the purpose, function and delivery of its education. The project is based on the consortium's commonly agreed framework for internationalisation and will focus on both enhancement and excellence. The framework will be tested in a series of pilot procedures in all European regions in which expert panels will apply the methodology to assess programmes or institutions.

The final framework for assessment will be developed in close cooperation with HEIs from different European countries. The project includes a Stakeholders group and some 20 associate partners (mostly HEIs and HE associations) in addition to the 14 project partners. A ECA certificate will be handed out for good and excellent performances only. A special training will be offered for the involved experts. The project is enhancement-oriented and will provide HEIs with the means for improvement so that they can increase their competitiveness. The certificate will contribute to transparency of internationalisation in HE, which is beneficial for students, HEIs and society. The project incorporates a European dimension but can also be applied in other regions of the world

The knowledge gathered in the project will be exploited in workshops, conferences and publications. For further dissemination, the project intends to deploy a platform for good practice in internationalisation.

In the INQAAHE paper the methodology and the first phase of the CeQuInt project will be highlighted.