



Akkreditierungsrat

Work report

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Appendix

1. Developments in quality assurance

According to German higher education legislation, higher education institutions (universities and Universities of Applied Sciences (*Fachhochschulen*)) and the state (government) share responsibility for the content and organisation of studies and examinations as well as for the quality of higher education training. Consequently, § 9 HRG (Framework Act for Higher Education)¹ stipulates that the framework specifications for studies and examinations will be jointly determined by the state and the higher education institutions. In order to steer this coordination process, the *Länder* ministers responsible for higher education and the *Hochschulrektorenkonferenz* (Association of Universities and other Higher Education Institutions in Germany - HRK) established a *Gemeinsame Kommission für die Koordinierung der Ordnung von Studium und Prüfungen*² (Joint Commission on the Coordination of the Regulation of Studies and Examinations), which, observing §§ 7 ff. HRG, supports and advises the participating parties in this process. The Joint Commission is responsible, in particular, for preparing the recommendations issued by the *Kultusministerkonferenz* (Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Länder* in the Federal Republic of Germany - KMK) and by the HRK on the appropriate formation of framework examination regulations as a means of guaranteeing the equivalency of corresponding degrees and of giving students the opportunity to change from one higher education institution to the next. Experience has shown that the enactment of these framework examination regulations, which the HRG in its amended version of 9 April 1987 described as recommendations, has proven to be an extraordinarily ponderous procedure, often taking many years and producing results which, at the time when they finally came to be adopted, had already been overtaken by new developments and therefore proved to be counterproductive, especially with regard to study opportunities competing in the international market.

Whereas, therefore, quality assurance in teaching in Germany was primarily performed, as described above, through quantitative specification and approval of examination regulations by the state (*ex-ante* control), other countries increasingly pursued quality assurance in teaching on the basis of evaluation results (*ex-post* control). Following the international development and with a growing quality assurance awareness, calls for a change of

¹ dated 26 January 1976 (BGBl. I p. 185), last amended by Art. 1 of the Law of 20 August 1998 (BGBl. I p. 2190).

² *Länder* agreement of 1991 on the coordination of the regulation of studies and examinations in accordance with § 9 Hochschulrahmengesetz (Framework Act for Higher Education).

paradigm could also be heard in Germany. Based on the HRK recommendations³ and *Wissenschaftsrat* (German Science Council) recommendations⁴, work has been proceeding since the mid-1990s on introducing coordinated evaluation procedures for teaching with the goal of increasing transparency, strengthening institutional responsibility, supporting higher education institutions in the introduction of systematic quality-promoting measures as well as advancing the profile, image and competitiveness of German higher education⁵.

2. Developments at European level

In the wake of the process initiated by the 1998 Sorbonne Declaration, advanced by the signature put to the Bologna Declaration by 29 European education ministers and further advanced by the signature put to the Prague Communiqué by 32 education ministers in May this year, it has become clear that the structure of studies and degrees in the European Higher Education Area will be shaped by "two main cycles" in the future and that the system of quality standard development and assurance will have to be extended, with science and education substantially sharing responsibility in this field. The goals are to promote international quality standards, to advance and secure student and graduate mobility, and to improve "consumer protection" for employers and employees in terms of the supply for and demand of an international labour market.

Accreditation is a significant quality promoting, mobility advancing and securing, and "consumer protection" improving instrument. The realisation of accreditation's growing importance in and for Europe is documented in the Bologna Declaration and in the Prague Communiqué, as well as in the Convention of European Higher Education Institutions of March 2001; this realisation is increasingly shaping the development of quality assurance in European countries.

3. Goals and instruments

With the amendments to the German Framework Act for Higher Education (HRG) of 20 August 1998, which opened up Germany's higher education system for the implementation of developments and realisations acquired at European level, Germany's higher education institutions were given the opportunity, in accordance with § 19 HRG and initially for a test

³ Zur Evaluation im Hochschulbereich unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Lehre. Resolution of the 176th Plenary Session of 3 July 1995.

⁴ Empfehlung zur Stärkung der Lehre in den Hochschulen durch Evaluation, Berlin 19 January 1996.

⁵ cf. KMK: Qualitätssicherung/Evaluation der Lehre: Die deutsche Position im europäischen Kontext, Bonn 2000.

phase, to introduce degree courses leading to the general internationally-recognised academic degrees, namely Bachelor's/Bakkalaureus and Master's/Magister. This process specifically aims to

- raise the flexibility of the range of study opportunities offered,
- improve the international compatibility of German degrees, and thus
- increase student mobility and demand among international students for study places in Germany.

The introduction of two-cycle, differentiated and, also interdisciplinary, degree courses equipped with a highly adaptable and very flexible content and time structure so as to allow them to better meet the various and constantly changing demands of science and education, of professional practice and of the students, calls for quicker and more flexible procedures than those that have previously been in place. In order also to be able to provide the higher education institutions with the necessary freedoms required for the implementation of higher education reforms, the past system of detailed state control of higher education was revoked. For example, the detailed provisions relating to framework examination regulations (§ 9 Abs. 2 Satz 3 and 4 HRG in the former version) were dropped. The reasoning for the amended version of § 9 states: "The equivalency of study and examination achievements will no longer be necessarily governed *ex ante* by framework examination regulations. The Länder and the HRK can continue to use this instrument in the future or can opt to use other instruments, for example, an accreditation procedure for institutions and degree courses, state approval of individual examination regulations or a system of *ex-post* control as part of an evaluation process."

4. The creation of the *Akkreditierungsrat* (Accreditation Council)

In view of this situation, the HRK and KMK established the *Akkreditierungsrat* for the purpose of providing accreditation services. The *Akkreditierungsrat* is responsible for the establishment of comparable quality standards for Bachelor's and Master's degree courses in an essentially decentralised accreditation process which will be carried out by accreditation agencies. The *Akkreditierungsrat* performs these responsibilities by accrediting, coordinating and monitoring these agencies. The participation of science, education and professional practice in this process, as provided for by § 9 Abs. 3 HRG, means that the *Akkreditierungsrat* can ensure that the obligations stipulated in § 9 Abs. 1 HRG regarding consideration of developments in science, education, professional practice and in higher education are met and will therefore contribute substantially to guaranteeing the quality,

transparency and "equivalency of corresponding study and examination achievements and degrees and will enable students to change from one higher education institution to the next".

On the one hand, the composition of the German *Akkreditierungsrat* demonstrates the general social dimension of the education policy restructuring process and, on the other, the necessity for the processes to be accepted within the higher education institutions themselves, including by those whom they most affect, namely students. At the same time, contacts with comparable organisations in other countries and some jointly-deployed personnel will ensure that international expertise is incorporated into the process and that the European dimension is also given due consideration.

5. The work of the *Akkreditierungsrat*

5.1 Fundamental KMK and HRK resolutions and recommendations

As far as the introduction of accreditation is concerned, the HRK Plenary Session of 6 July 1998 stated that in order to be able to recognise and accept the new degree courses in terms of the study and examination achievements which these require as well as the degrees which they award, "cross-Länder, nationwide accreditation ... incorporating international experts [would be] expedient, especially since Germany is entering new territory with a procedure which has already been tested and proven abroad. With regard to the test phase (§ 19 HRG - new), an accreditation procedure should initially be operated as a pilot project for a limited period of time and should be provided with a flexible structure without unnecessary bureaucracy so that it can be introduced quickly".

With reference to the HRK decision, the KMK decided on 3 December 1998 to introduce an accreditation procedure for Bachelor's and Master's degree courses and on 5 March 1999 decided on structural specifications for the introduction of Bachelor's and Master's degree courses. In order to give consideration to the differing areas of competence and responsibility of the state and higher education institutions in the establishment of degree courses, the Länder ministers of education and culture decided on a functional separation between state approval and accreditation; they additionally reached agreement on the establishment of a cross-Länder *Akkreditierungsrat* by the HRK and KMK, which has been affiliated to the HRK.

5.2 Establishment of the *Akkreditierungsrat*

Once the HRK and KMK had reached agreement on the appointment of members, the *Akkreditierungsrat* was constituted and took up its work on 7 July 1999, around half a year after the KMK resolution. The registered office was opened in November of the same year.

To date, the *Akkreditierungsrat* has convened for 18 sessions, held at various locations in nine Länder. The *Akkreditierungsrat* plans to have visited all 16 Länder by the end of the pilot project, so that it will have been able to inform all the Länder ministries of education and culture of its work and to discuss experience gained and problems found with this new instrument.

5.3 Starting position

Working on the basis of the specifications formulated by the KMK and HRK, the *Akkreditierungsrat* had to develop an accreditation system. Although experience had been gained abroad with the accreditation of degree courses, the HRK resolution regarding the Federal Republic of Germany speaks of "new territory". The decentralised procedure through which agencies were to be accredited, while the content and procedural responsibility for the equivalency of results lay with a central organisation, the *Akkreditierungsrat*, was without precedence and therefore had to be completely drawn up from scratch. Additionally, the conflicting interests between the responsibility of the state, the scientific community's competence in matters of course content, the profile- and image-building autonomy of the higher education institutions, and the interests of the labour market had to be balanced out.

Thus the *Akkreditierungsrat* faced the task of having to

1. define a frame of reference for content differentiation between Bachelor's and Master's degree courses,
2. develop the procedures, organisational principles and decision-making standards which apply for and have to be observed by the accreditation agencies,
3. begin immediately with the accreditation of agencies, since the introduction of new degree courses was and is already in progress, and
4. devise and implement procedures to build up its own know-how on the accreditation of degree courses.

This outline of an accreditation system for Germany and the simultaneously necessary process of accrediting agencies and degree courses called for not insubstantial amounts of human and financial resources to be provided and demonstrated unequivocally that the

Akkreditierungsrat would have to see itself as a learning system right from the very beginning of its activities.

6. System-building measures

6.1 Accreditation of agencies

The *Akkreditierungsrat* has agreed on a two-phase procedure for the accreditation of agencies. In order to be able to meet its responsibilities of providing comprehensive quality assurance and control, the *Akkreditierungsrat*, following the resolutions adopted by KMK and HRK, formulated the principles and minimum standards which agencies would be expected to meet.

6.2 Specifications for the accreditation of degree courses

The accreditation procedure is expected to ensure equivalency, facilitate diversity, guarantee quality and create transparency. Only if the agencies observe a frame of reference, i.e. agreed criteria, standards and procedures, when they accredit degree courses can accreditation results be regarded to have met the condition of equivalency.

In order to be able to meet its responsibility of final accountability for the assurance and coordination of quality standards, the *Akkreditierungsrat* found itself faced with the need to develop criteria for the agencies to apply when they accredit degree courses. The intention of allowing higher education institutions as much freedom as possible in structuring their courses, without, however, jeopardising the comparability of future study opportunities, resulted in the formulation of relatively general criteria which would be applied to the accreditation of degree courses. In contrast to the somewhat rigid standards and specifications contained in the framework examination regulations, the criteria now provide a flexible content examination framework for the review of degree courses and thus clearly and outwardly demonstrate the quality dimension of accreditation.

HRK and KMK responsibility extended only to formulating aspects regarding the definition of Bachelor's and Master's degree courses. Consequently, the *Akkreditierungsrat* had to produce a new frame of reference which agencies would apply when accrediting degree courses. Since neither the Bachelor's degree nor the Master's degree existed *per se*, independent standards had to be developed in accordance with the academic culture in

Germany. These give consideration to the process which has been initiated in Europe as documented by the Paris and Bologna Statements and as confirmed in Prague.

On the basis of preparatory groundwork undertaken by an internal group and using the experience and insights it had itself gained in the accreditation of degree courses, the *Akkreditierungsrat* discussed this problem on several occasions and finally, on 20 June 2001, adopted an open-development frame of reference for Bachelor's and Master's degree courses for which the concrete, subject-specific details still needed to be defined.

Over and above this, the *Akkreditierungsrat* developed specifications on the accreditation application process for degree courses. These specifications cover:

- "reasons for the degree course",
- the planned "degree course structure and requirements in terms of content and specialisation",
- "human, financial and infrastructural resources",
- "quality assurance measures", and
- "study-related cooperation".

6.3 Procedures

To guarantee the equivalency and quality of the results, the *Akkreditierungsrat* added a number of principles to the "minimum standards and criteria" which it had already adopted. These principles aim to make the procedures logical and reliable. The *Akkreditierungsrat's* resolutions of 17 December 1999 and 4 February 2000 on the practice of accreditation procedures for agencies and/or degree courses offer applicants both assistance and guidance. To this extent, they also contribute to the comparability of different applications and help guarantee applicants equal treatment.

6.4 Student participation in agencies and review procedures

The introduction of the new Bachelor's and Master's degree courses has also supported and encouraged growth in the introduction of innovative degree courses by higher education institutions and faculties. The *Akkreditierungsrat* considers student participation in the organisation and practice of accreditation procedures to be desirable as a means of ensuring that their interests are met, and not least as a means of promoting student acceptance of the new degree courses. On the basis of the resolution to allow students to participate in the

accreditation procedures, as adopted by the *Akkreditierungsrat*, the *Akkreditierungsrat* encouraged and supported the establishment of a Studentischer Akkreditierungspool (Student Accreditation Pool) by student representations, groups and unions at Länder and federal level in summer 2000.

6.5 Evaluation and accreditation

After giving careful consideration to the fact that evaluation and accreditation ideal-typically serve differing goals, the *Akkreditierungsrat* sought to ensure that the various procedures are separated and that evaluation and accreditation are carried out in separate decision-making and consultative committees and on the basis of separate procedures. However, in accordance with the KMK resolution, the *Akkreditierungsrat* supported the view that evaluation results must be considered without delay in accreditation decisions.

6.6 Decision-making process

In the course of processing the application from the agency to be reviewed, the *Akkreditierungsrat* produces a review report which is based on

- the self-report (institutional profile) submitted by the applicant agency, and
- on one or several consultations with the applicant agency.

The *Akkreditierungsrat* then decides to accredit, conditionally accredit or not to accredit the agency. Subsequently, the *Akkreditierungsrat* monitors the implementation of any conditions imposed and, if the agency was accredited, monitors the observance of the targets agreed with that agency.

In the course of processing the application for degree course(s) to be reviewed, a review report is produced by the team of reviewers appointed on a case-by-case basis by the *Akkreditierungsrat*. This review report takes account of

- the self-report submitted by the applicant, and
- an on-site inspection by the team of reviewers,

and is presented to the *Akkreditierungsrat* for decision. The *Akkreditierungsrat* comments on the review team's report and decides to accredit, conditionally accredit or not to accredit the degree course(s) in question.

Each accreditation is issued for a limited time period only, which is followed by a re-accreditation procedure.

7. Past results

7.1 Accreditation of agencies

Applications from agencies differed greatly in quality and followed various models or systems. In order to be able to guarantee common standards, despite differing perspectives and starting points, the *Akkreditierungsrat* established a system in its consultations on applications and in the many meetings and discussions it held with the agencies which facilitates the compatibility of flexible procedures, guarantees equivalency and assures quality.

In the meantime, the following agencies have been accredited and are thus entitled to award the *Siegel des Akkreditierungsrates* (Quality Certificate of the *Akkreditierungsrat*) to the Bachelor's and Master's degree courses which they accredit:

- *Zentrale Evaluations- und Akkreditierungsagentur Hannover* (Central Evaluation and Accreditation Agency of Hannover - ZEvA), accredited on 4 February 2000 until 4 February 2003;
- Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation (FIBAA), conditionally accredited (several conditions) on 13 April 2000 until 13 April 2002;
- *Akkreditierungsagentur für Studiengänge der Ingenieurwissenschaften und der Informatik* (Accreditation Agency for Study Programmes in Engineering and Informatics - ASII), conditionally accredited (one condition) on 5 June 2000 until 5 June 2003;
- *Akkreditierungsagentur für die Studiengänge Chemie, Biochemie und Chemieingenieurwesen an Universitäten und Fachhochschulen* (A-CBC), conditionally accredited (several conditions) on 11 December 2000 until 11 December 2002 (chemistry, biochemistry, chemical engineering);
- *Akkreditierungs-, Zertifizierungs- und Qualitätssicherungs-Institut* (Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute - ACQUIN), accredited on 22 March 2001 until 22 March 2006.

Other agencies currently being established have announced their intention to submit applications.

7.2 Accreditation of degree courses by the *Akkreditierungsrat*

In accordance with the KMK resolution of 3 December 1998, the *Akkreditierungsrat* can also itself review and accredit degree courses when officially requested to do so by a Land (state) in the form of an appropriately substantiated application. The opportunity for direct participation in the learning process which this provides through direct and immediate experience with the introduction of the accreditation system has proven beneficial and expedient to the knowledge acquisition process, despite the structural problems which this produces regarding an overlapping of control and practice in the accreditation procedures.

Following its own recommendations to the agencies, the *Akkreditierungsrat* used the two-phase process commonly applied in the international field for processing accreditation applications for degree courses. A review report is produced by the review team appointed by the *Akkreditierungsrat*. The review team bases its report on

- the self-report submitted by the applicant, and
- on an on-site inspection.

The review report is submitted to the *Akkreditierungsrat* for its decision. The *Akkreditierungsrat* has produced a Guide for Reviewers to support the work of the review team. This is a response to the specially important role which reviewers play in the accreditation procedure as well as to the necessity to preserve the particular quality of accreditation over other quality assurance procedures.

The *Akkreditierungsrat* has so far accredited the following degree courses:

- Bachelor's and Master's degree course in "*Informationsmanagement*" (Information Management) at the *Universität Koblenz-Landau*,
- Master's degree course in "Chemistry of Materials" at the *Universität Mainz*.

The following degree courses are still under review:

- two Bachelor's and seven Master's degree courses at the *Landwirtschaftlich-Gärtnerische Fakultät* (Faculty of Agriculture and Horticulture) der *Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin*
- a Master's degree course in "*Kulturjournalismus*" at the *Hochschule der Künste Berlin*.

The involvement of reviewers facilitates a problem-oriented and specifically-targeted discussion on the respective degree course concept in the course of the review team meetings. It became apparent in the accreditation procedures carried out by the *Akkreditierungsrat* that the review team meetings not only allow constructive discussion on the plausibility of degree course concepts and their feasibility, but also on problematical

questions of detail. Both sides, applicants and reviewers, repeatedly emphasised the particular importance of the cooperative discussion on new and innovative degree course concepts, including consultation of external expertise. Thus, the procedures on the accreditation of degree courses are less involved with a thorough examination of the individual criteria, but rather and above all with cooperative problem-solving within the examination framework defined by the criteria. Nevertheless, individual conversations with representatives from applicant higher education institutions did reveal that faculty or departmental discussions held in the course of the application formulation had resulted in sometimes arduous, albeit in most cases productive clarification processes.

8. Coordination and control

The *Akkreditierungsrat* guarantees equivalency and quality within diversity by coordinating the procedures practised by the accreditation agencies and by undertaking follow-up monitoring measures. In particular, the *Akkreditierungsrat* must monitor the observance of minimum standards, a fact which can certainly not be taken for granted, the implementation of conditions imposed on the agencies as well as the execution of other resolutions adopted by the *Akkreditierungsrat*. Already in the application phase, the agencies are made aware of the fact that any accreditation of degree courses must be immediately reported to the *Akkreditierungsrat* along with the review report. Over and above this, the agencies are required to submit an annual activity report to the *Akkreditierungsrat* as part of their accountability obligation; this report covers the experience gained in the organisation and practice of the accreditation procedures. Moreover, members of the *Akkreditierungsrat* may, in agreement with the agencies, attend, as guests, sessions of the agency's decision-making committee or review team sessions relating to the accreditation procedure. In order to guarantee external procedural transparency, the *Akkreditierungsrat* has additionally resolved to make its accreditation decisions public after completion of the accreditation procedure.

The communication process with the agencies does not end with their accreditation either. Regular consultations are held with the agencies. For example, the *Akkreditierungsrat* organised an Information Meeting on the accreditation of Bachelor's/Master's degree courses for established and establishing agencies in Bonn on 17 May 2000. At its 14th session in Bonn on 11 December 2000, the *Akkreditierungsrat* invited agency representatives to its first joint roundtable and asked them to report briefly on the agencies' work in progress and on any indications of possible problem areas. During the 18th session of the *Akkreditierungsrat* in Hanover on 20 June 2001, the *Akkreditierungsrat* held talks with the managing director of ZEvA to discuss various problem areas emerging from the practice of accreditation. Over

and above this, the office of the *Akkreditierungsrat* attends informal meetings held between the agencies.

9. Agreement and cooperation

The contacts between the *Akkreditierungsrat* and its supporter institutions KMK and HRK are maintained on a regular basis by means of meetings, attendance of sessions and an ongoing process of information exchange on the consultation results and accreditation decisions. Over and above this, regular and continual contacts are maintained with the higher education institutions, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the Wissenschaftsrat, and with other science and research policy institutions. A workshop on the "Accreditation of Degree Courses. Why, how, by whom?" was held together with the DAAD and the HRK in Bonn on 11 January 2001. There are plans to make the information on accredited degree courses which the *Akkreditierungsrat* publishes on the Internet accessible via the HRK database *Hochschulkompass* (higher-education-compass) and thus extend cooperation with the HRK. Such cooperation makes it easier for interested parties to identify accredited degree courses.

The *Akkreditierungsrat* introduces and represents German views at international discussions on (academic) degrees, transparency, quality and standards in higher education. Information exchange and coordination in Europe aim, in the future, to make it possible for accredited courses bearing the Quality Seal of the *Akkreditierungsrat* to be accepted abroad. Agreements must be reached, initially in Europe, in order to avoid the need for multiple accreditation. The goal is to ensure that accreditation achieved abroad should to be recognised in Germany and vice versa.

Over and above this, the *Akkreditierungsrat* maintains international contacts with accreditation institutions and organisations which perform comparable functions and responsibilities. In particular, these are *Österreichischer Akkreditierungsrat* (Austria), the Hungarian Accreditation Council and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) in the United States. Good contacts are also maintained with the European Association of Universities (CRE) and the Confederation of European Union Rectors' Conferences, which have meanwhile merged to form the European University Association (EUA).

The *Akkreditierungsrat* is a member of the International Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher

Education (ENQA). These memberships promote exchange with agencies abroad and help make the Quality Certificate of the *Akkreditierungsrat* known at international level.

Since the *Akkreditierungsrat* also aims to secure international recognition of study and examination achievements, it intends to consolidate and extend these contacts and cooperation in the future.

10. Accreditation costs

The *Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft* (Donor's Association for the Promotion of Science and Humanities in Germany) has provided start-up funding for the *Akkreditierungsrat* for a period of three years. A sum of DM 350,000 per annum has been budgeted for the project, giving a total of DM 1,050,000 over the three-year period. The project began on 7 July 1999 with the constituent assembly of the *Akkreditierungsrat*, respectively on 15 November 1999 for the staff of the Office of the *Akkreditierungsrat*. Expenditure in 1999 amounted to DM 95,079.61, in 2000 to DM 380,162.15. *Akkreditierungsrat* income to date from degree course accreditation amounts to DM 30,444.

The accreditation of agencies has been performed free of charge to date.

Costs for degree course accreditation arise from staff and material costs. Costs for the accreditation of a degree course depend on the effort and resources required and can amount to as much as DM 25,000. Experience has shown that simultaneous accreditation of several degree courses can produce substantial cost reductions.

The *Akkreditierungsrat* works in an honorary capacity. Members of the *Akkreditierungsrat* receive no expenses or session fees, with the exception of travel expenses.

11. Future prospects for the work of the *Akkreditierungsrat*

Accreditation aims to guarantee the national and international recognition of (academic) degrees and, at the same time, to provide higher education institutions, students and employers with a reliable guide to the quality of study programmes and degree courses. Accreditation represents a flexible tool with which quality assurance in the fields of studies and teaching can be organised, structured and practised with responsibility and with the involvement of the state, higher education institutions and professional practice. Higher education institutions can use the preparations for accreditation for their own quality assurance activities, while the result can be used for the purpose of international higher education marketing. In contrast to evaluation, accreditation has the added value that the quality review produces results without delay, namely accreditation and approval or rejection.

Although still in the test phase, the work of the *Akkreditierungsrat* has not passed without some higher education policy consequences. The option of accreditation which has become possible as a result of the introduction of an accreditation system has resulted in an intensive discussion in the Länder and higher education institutions on structuring curriculums, content and on the quality assurance of new degree courses. It is already possible to see that higher education institutions are making stronger use of the opportunities open to them for implementing new and innovative ideas.

At European level, initiated by the Sorbonne Declaration, continued by the Bologna Declaration and the Communiqué of the Prague Meeting, a process was set in motion to create a European Higher Education Area in which accreditation and its cross-border, international recognition plays a central role, just as it does in the Convention of European Higher Education Institutions of March 2001. The German system of decentralised accreditation by regional or subject-group oriented agencies coordinated and controlled by an accreditation council is seen as guiding model.

The discontinuance of the previous, quantitative system of nationwide framework examination regulations, which generally produced outmoded results, led and is still leading to the irrefutable question as to how the comparability of quality and standards can be assured across all German Länder. Consumer protection, mobility and the greater competitiveness in international markets as well as the ability to recognise qualifications are only a few of the keywords which illustrate this. After all, a coordinated and quality-guaranteed accreditation procedure for Bachelor's and Master's degree courses is not least

indispensable, because a large number of new degree courses have been approved subject to accreditation.

The experience gained by the *Akkreditierungsrat* to date has shown that the applications for the accreditation of agencies and their accreditation practice are shaped by very differing conceptions in terms of their independence and the implementation of standards relevant to the subjects. This is why accreditation and re-accreditation are absolutely essential quality assurance instruments in higher education.

Faculties and institutions have only sought accreditation by foreign agencies in a few individual cases. Should accreditation not be continued in the Federal Republic of Germany, then German higher education institutions will and will have to, in the interest of and to document their international "credibility", increasingly seek accreditation by foreign, especially US American, in some cases for-profit, agencies.

If such a development is not desired and if, on the other hand, the danger of profit orientation and of qualitative arbitrariness are to be countered, then a coordinating and controlling cross-Länder organisation is required for the decentralised accreditation system. Since this is about quality assurance and not about approving degree courses, the scientific community, including students, must be decisively involved in the decision-making process which this organisation carries out. In order to guarantee a link between the employment system and the higher education institution, representatives of the higher education institutions and of professional practice must be integrated into the system and share decision-making responsibility. In order to ensure that the previous effects of overall state responsibility, which act in the approval procedure, are considered, government representatives should also share in the decision-making process. The current composition of the *Akkreditierungsrat* and its policy of consensus decision-making meet these requirements.

The option open to the *Akkreditierungsrat* in which, in exceptional cases, it can itself accredit degree courses is of substantial significance for the evaluation of accreditation applications by agencies, for the coordination and control of the work and for the development of new procedures (e.g. accreditation of all the degree courses offered within a faculty or department in the form of "quasi institutional" accreditation). The know-how acquired by the *Akkreditierungsrat* itself gaining direct experience provides a basis and standards for consultations with agencies and for the monitoring process.

The system-building work of the *Akkreditierungsrat* has resulted in standards and procedures becoming established for the accreditation of two-cycle degree courses which need to be guaranteed and stabilised in the future. The system of accreditation and its results must be made known abroad to a greater extent than has previously been the case and must be further developed in the international field.

Since the establishment of the *Akkreditierungsrat*, 25 degree courses have been accredited by agencies. The procedures in progress allow us to expect that the number of accredited degree courses will have more than doubled by the end of the year. Moreover, the agencies have well over one hundred accreditation applications waiting to be processed.

On average, the procedure from application to decision takes around six months. As the accreditation system continues to grow, a central problem will be raised by the amount of accreditation work involved and thus the question as to whether or not procedures can be completed in a shorter period of time. This applies all the more so since the system plans periodic re-accreditation procedures for already accredited degree courses.

In view of the recommendations of the *Wissenschaftsrat* on the introduction of new study structures and degrees (Bachelor's and Master's)⁶, which, for example, have resulted in even the NRW Council of Experts (NRW = North-Rhine Westphalia) recommending the transition to Bachelor's/Master's degree courses, sustained growth in the number of new degree courses must be expected. This makes the need for cross-*Länder* coordination and quality assurance all the more important. The agencies must be encouraged to increase the efficiency of accreditation procedures in order to reduce the ensuing costs. This may be achieved by means of certain subject/discipline clusters or by institution-based groupings (such as is already the case at the Faculty of Farming and Horticulture at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin). The costs must be set on the basis of the resources and effort required for each accreditation and must not be standardised. The experience of the *Akkreditierungsrat* and of the agencies signify that efficiency reserves are waiting to be tapped in this field.

Review and decision on the basis of the submitted documentation in obvious cases, reductions in the number of reviewers, even at the price of restricting the specialist differentiation, are further ways of reducing the accreditation costs. The *Akkreditierungsrat* is

⁶ Wissenschaftsrat: Empfehlungen zur Einführung neuer Studienstrukturen und -abschlüsse (Bakkalaureus/Bachelor - Magister/Master) in Deutschland, Berlin 2000.

responsible for working toward the introduction of leaner procedures while, at the same time, guaranteeing quality standards.

For those questions arising in connection with the new degrees regarding the accreditation of continuing education and postgraduate degree courses, criteria will be drawn up as quickly as possible and made available to the agencies. An open question which still awaits an answer also needs to be addressed in respect of the consumer protecting quality control of - as a rule fee-charging - transnational education courses.

If the "dual" system of degrees is maintained (Diplom + Bachelor's/Master's), then in the medium-term, the question of accrediting Diplom degree courses as well, which is repeatedly put to the *Akkreditierungsrat*, will have to be addressed and answered.

The *Akkreditierungsrat*'s work has resulted in standards and procedures becoming established for the accreditation of two-cycle degree courses which still need to be stabilised. The clearly increasing demand that can be identified and thus the need for extensions to the capacity of the accreditation system increase the risk of a disparate and centrifugal development of the quality of accreditation decisions made by competing agencies. In order to be able to continue to guarantee equivalency and quality as well as transparency and logical structure plus correlativeness of the system with developments in Europe, the comprehensive coordination and control of the generally decentralised accreditation of two-cycle degree courses, as provided for in § 9 HRG, also need to be maintained in the future.