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center of accreditation and quality assurance
of the swiss universities

2nd Athens International Conference on University Assessment

Towards Institutional Accreditation: The Swiss Experience



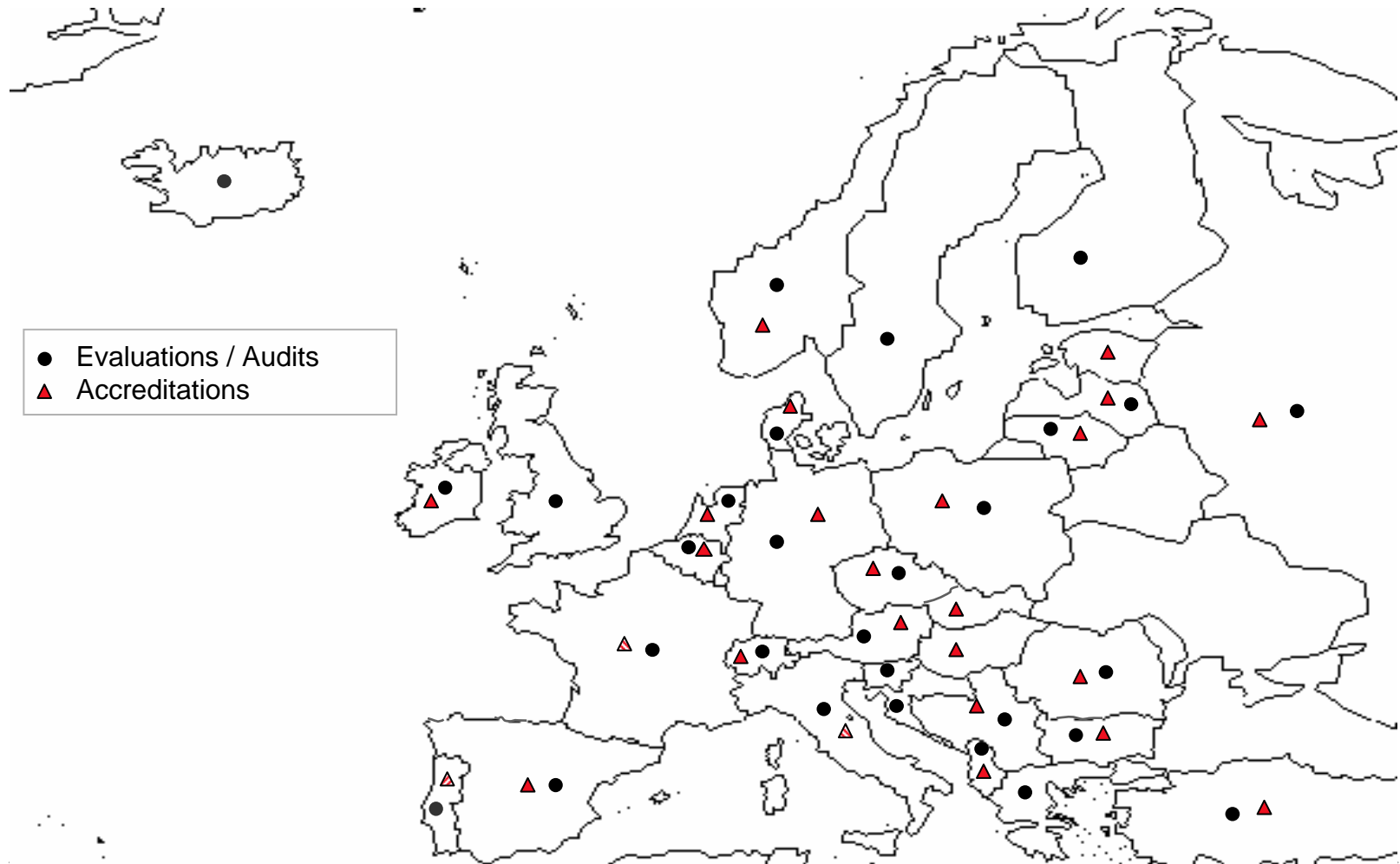
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International Conference, Athens, 12 October 2007

Presentation of Rolf Heusser, OAQ, Switzerland:

- 1. European developments in quality assurance**
- 2. External quality assurance at Swiss universities**
- 3. Outlook to future and summary**

National Agencies for Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Europe, 2007



Challenges for external QA in Europe

Challenges Europe	Solutions Switzerland
Implementation of ESG	External Review OAQ in 2006
Recognition barriers	Mutual recognition agreements within ECA
Orientation towards learning outcomes	Establishment of NQF; Link to accreditation
Institutional vs. Programme assessment	Combination strategy

Institutional Assessments – Strengths

- **Enhancement of institutional quality mechanisms and facilitation of the development of a quality culture**
- **Sustainable effects at the level of institutional management**
- **Assures flexibility and autonomy of HEIs at programme level**
- **Resource saving method**

Institutional Assessments in Europe - Some recent Initiatives

Country	Method	Start
Switzerland	Quality Audit	2003
United Kingdom	Institutional Audit	2003
Norway	Quality Audit	2003
France	Institutional Evaluation	2004
Denmark	Institutional Audit	2004
Finland	Quality Audit	2005
Germany	System-Accreditation	2007

Bologna Conferences - Internal Quality Assurance

Berlin 2003: „ ... the primary responsibility for QA in higher education lies with each institution and this provides the basis for real accountability“.

Bergen 2005: „ ... we urge the HE institutions to continue their efforts to enhance the quality of their activities through the systematic introduction of internal mechanisms and their direct correlation to external QA“.

London 2007: „Since the main responsibility for QA lies with HEI's, they should continue to develop their systems of QA“

Center of Accreditation and Quality Assurance of the Swiss Universities (OAQ)

- **Established in October 2001**
- **Based on a legal act; independent body**
- **Mission: assure and promote the quality of education and research of the Swiss Universities**
- **Tasks: carry out quality assessments, both at institutional and programme level**

OAQ – Philosophy

- **Aiming at quality improvement**
- **Access to well reknowned experts**
- **Dialogue and close cooperation with partners**
- **Minimising bureaucracy and respecting autonomy of HEIs**
- **Internationalisation**

OAQ - International Co-operations

Memberships:

- **ENQA: full member status**
- **Presidency: European Consortium for Accreditation**
- **Other international initiatives (INQAAHE, WHO/WFME, UNESCO/OECD, etc.)**

External QA at Swiss Universities

- **Combination of systematic institutional assessments and selective programme accreditation**
- **External assessment of QA systems of public universities is mandatory: audits every four years**
- **Link to financial aid of federal government**
- **Programme accreditation on demand**

Institutional Audits at Swiss Public Universities

- **Self evaluation and external evaluation**
- **Audit team: Four international experts with expertise in QA and with leadership experience**
- **Standards for internal QA-systems developed by OAQ; (compatible with ESG) --> adopted by political authorities**
- **First audit cycle 2004 showed good results --> next audit cycle planned for 2008**

Accreditation in Switzerland - Concept

- **Based on international «best practices»**
- **Swiss national specificities taken into consideration**
- **Activities both in public and private sector**
- **Focus on education**

Accreditation - Procedures and Decisions

- **Three step procedure including on-site-visit by group of independent experts**
- **Decision by political authorities conform with proposition of OAQ**
- **Decisions: yes/no/conditional yes**
- **Certificate and accreditation seal: validity of 7 years**

Accreditation in Switzerland

- **More than 120 accreditation procedures carried out by the OAQ (both in private and public sector)**
- **New methods: Cluster accreditations and cooperation projects with other European QA-agencies**
- **Evaluation of procedures showed good results**
- **Revision of accreditation guidelines 2008**

Accreditation in Switzerland: Some open questions

- **Marked orientation vs. national sovereignty in accreditation**
- **Basic quality or excellence as benchmarks ?**
- **Shift towards learning outcome oriented accreditation systems: how to do ?**
- **How to combine internal and external quality assurance ?**

New federal law on higher education (2012 ff)

- **Same QA-requirements for all types of higher education institutions**
- **Accreditation council and national agency: independent**
- **Mandatory institutional accreditation, selective programme accreditation (on demand)**

Summary and conclusions

- **Bologna process stresses the need for the development of internal quality assurance mechanisms at HEI's ---> basis for accountability**
- **Swiss external QA-system focuses on institutional assessments, but still preserves room for selective programme accreditations (combination strategy)**
- **Good experience with national QA system so far; positive evaluation results**
- **Swiss national QA-system is conform with European Standards and Guidelines ---> facilitates mutual recognition of qualifications accross borders**

Further Information about OAQ:

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