

Changing Forms of Governance in German Higher Education (0229)

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German HE governance is complex (cf. Barnett 2000; Bungarten & John-Ohnesorg (eds.) 2015). The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the *Länder* in the Federal Republic of Germany (*Kultusministerkonferenz* or KMK), which was founded in 1948 and expanded by further *Länder* following the downfall of the German Democratic Republic, acts as an instrument “for the coordination and development of education in the country”. Furthermore, sixteen separate legislations, in addition to recommendations supplied by the German HE overarching advisory body, the Science Council (*Wissenschaftsrat*) and European resolutions, too, provide the legal framework within which Germany’s mainly state-financed HEIs are allowed to operate, and these can vary (see German Rectors’ Conference (*HRK*) *Higher Education Finance*, for details). *Länder* legislation usually includes role descriptors for the following bodies: senate, advisory council (*Hochschulrat*, since 1982, an advisory body which provides regional and industrial contacts), the university directorate and faculty boards. All Bachelor and Masters degree programmes in Germany need to be accredited (according to rules of the *Akkreditierungsrat*), either individually (through an external accreditation agency), or within the HEI-own quality management system, if the institution has been system-accredited (Kehm 2006).¹ When individual degree programmes are accredited, the process involves external reviews of self-reports followed by on-site visits of experts in cycles of 5 or 7 years, from first to re-accreditation. Since 2008 HEIs have been granted more autonomy if they go through system accreditation, whereby the HEI’s *entire* quality assurance system undergoes external review². In this case HEIs have to prove that their quality management systems include the participation of external experts and professional work experience, as would be the case if a degree course were programme-accredited. Once system-accredited, HEIs are able to award their degree programmes ‘accredited’ status as their own quality assurance standards ensure that standards are being maintained or even surpassed.

This research, which is situated within constructivist theory, proceeds in two main phases: the first reconstructs how the university systems have been modified (or not) as a result of system-accreditation. Five representative models from an online survey of 42 system-accredited HEIs are presented here. In the second phase, individual narratives will be gained through interviews with key

¹ Kultusministerkonferenz: *Ländergemeinsame Strukturvorgaben* gemäß § 9 Abs. 2 HRG für die Akkreditierung von Bachelor- und Masterstudiengängen. October 10, 2003, amended September 18, 2008.

² See website of German Accreditation Council for details in English <http://www.akkreditierungsrat.de/index.php?id=22&L=1>.

stakeholders in selected representative institutions. Qualitative evidence of motivations and experiences will add to the discourse on changing governance structures in German higher education. The University of Mainz (JGU) (Rheinland-Palatinate) was the first German HEI to become system-accredited in 2011. The university's academic Centre for Quality Assurance and Development (ZQ Mainz) became the accreditation-granting body. All new degree programmes at the JGU undergo a peer-review before they are introduced, in accordance with the legislation of the Rheinland-Palatinate (§ 5 Abs. 5 HochSchG). In turn, academic centres themselves are reviewed by an advisory board (*Beirat*) which is required by legislation and consists in this case of the Vice President for Teaching and Degree Programmes, six professors (four internal), two academic staff members, one administrative staff member, and two students. The independent Centre (ZQ) is highly reminiscent of external accreditation agencies.

In contrast to Mainz, at the University of Regensburg (Bavaria), which was system-accredited in 2015, a Working Committee for Teaching and Degree Programmes was instigated by the Senate and now works on behalf of the university directorate to conduct 'external' evaluations of degree programmes. The Chancellor has guest status. Further members comprise the Director of the Regensburg Centre for Teacher Education, the Director of the Centre for HE Pedagogy, six professors, one academic staff member, two students, and one external member from professional work experience. This model displays a newly-created fixed high-order commission, which works *on behalf of* the directorate and *includes* members thereof.

The University of Applied Sciences (HTW) (Berlin), which was system-accredited in 2014, reveals decentralized Advisory Working Committees (*Beiräte*) which have been introduced for *each* degree programme e.g. mini accreditation agencies. In this model a permanent group consisting of external representatives with professional experience (one), subject expertise (two) and one student comes together annually to discuss the degree programme in question, assess how it is fulfilling its own internally set standards and goals, and make suggestions for future developments. Degree programmes are accredited by these *Beiräte*.

The Rector of the University of Constance (Baden-Württemberg), which was system-accredited in 2014, established quality assurance in 2008 as one of his own presidial staff units. In the Constance model, his Committee for Teaching and Academic Development (ALW) assesses every four years the results of a subject area self-report and *advises* the Rector to re-/accredit degree programmes. The Committee consists of the following members: Pro-rector for Teaching, three Deans of Studies, Gender Equality Rep (advisory member only), Chancellor, Head of Teaching Matters (advisory member only), Director of International office (advisory member only), three members of teaching staff, three academic members, students from each area. The Rector is the accreditation-granting body. At the University of Frankfurt (Hessen), which was system-accredited in 2016, an independent permanent internal accreditation commission consisting of professors (7), two members of academic staff, one technical-administrative staff member and three students was appointed in 2013 to be the decision-making body for accreditations within the University.

Quality, and the management of quality, is linked to governance (Hénard & Mitterle 2008). Within the legislation of each state, HEIs are free to choose or alter their respective systems of governance. The above-named HEIs have implemented different models whereby the quality of degree programmes is accredited, either through awarding at leader level (e.g. Rector, or decision-making body of other university leaders), decentralized awarding by independent academic units (e.g. Mainz), or highly decentralized awarding at local level (e.g. Beirat-system HTW in Berlin). The next phase (interviews) will draw out how well these new systems are working or are already being adapted according to the Deming cycle (Plan-Do-Check-Act). (986 words)

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