

Despite the differences in political discourse, the quality systems of European countries share important procedural elements – internal self-evaluation, visit by an external evaluation team, external evaluation report and public reporting.

Recent trends related to the emergence of New Public Management show an erosion of trust in institutions with increasing demands for accountability. This results in a number of changes including a move towards accreditation mechanisms and away from quality assurance guaranteed by agencies owned by the institutions themselves; a preference for agencies independent both from the state and higher education institutions as determined by the European guidelines for registered agencies; an increasing internationalisation of the quality processes.

Some believe that quality assurance must combine “a mutually reinforcing system of institution-based quality assessments of teaching and learning and a coordinated regional system of external academic audits” (Dill *et al* 1996: 24). Trow (1996) also recommends that the US accreditation systems should be replaced with institutional audits. Recently, Frank Ziegele (2007) *a propos* of the German accreditation system referred that the very high costs of the system have led Lower Saxony to replace programme accreditation, using instead institutional audits and that other states might follow this development. It is possible that other systems will follow the German developments, which is just what the EUA/CRE has been doing over the years. However, this will require that trust in higher education institutions be re-established, which is a mighty task. As Trow (1996) recognises: Trust cannot be demanded but must be freely given. In Trollope's novels, a gentleman who demands to be treated as a gentleman is almost certainly no gentleman.