

Accreditation of Flemish Civil Engineers programmes (2016): An experience of cross-border Quality Assurance

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Context of the accreditation

- Bucharest communiqué (2012) then Yerevan Communiqué (2015) promote transnational aspects of QA
- Difficulties usually come from national regulations
- Accreditation of **ALL** Flemish civil engineers programmes in Belgium by a French agency is a rather unique experience

Origins of the project

- CTI has a well established international experience (130 programmes already accredited) ; transnational accreditation is part of its missions since the beginning (1934)
- Since 1990, visitations (and later accreditation) of higher education institutions were mandatory in Flanders; the visitations of all faculties were planned yearly by programs and then grouped by domains, which caused repetitive work (each program had a SER to write!) to institutions
- Visitation by CTI was an accreditation specifically dedicated to engineering, accrediting Bachelor and Master programmes together, the whole faculty being visited in one movement, the SER being shorter

History

- First contacts from 2010 confirmed at SEFI conference in 2013
- Contacts and preparatory work between CTI & NVAO (former flemish accreditor), in the frame of ECA's Multira agreement
- Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR) together with the 3 universities and CTI set a procedure (TOR 2014)
- In June 2015, the Flemish Parliament approved an evolution towards full institutional accreditation for 2020
- The 3 faculties decided to go on with CTI: this collective initiative led to a remarkable implication of all faculty staffs and an outstanding quality of the SER

The accreditor's view: main inputs

- Homogeneity of Flemish regulations saved expert's time and efforts
- SER was written in English and the working language was English: however students works and teaching documents were often written in Dutch
- The 3 Universities are research driven: this favours a bottom-up approach to the collective decisions that can contradict with QA culture
- In Flanders, the employment rate for civil engineers is very good: this does not lead engineering faculties to develop statistics on the engineers job market
- Erasmus Mundus programmes are difficult to accredit: a curriculum designed in Flanders as an engineering degree can be presented as a pure research degree in a partner university

The view of KU Leuven's Faculty

- The Faculty of Engineering Science (FES) counts over 3500 students (2 Bachelors, 12 Master Programmes and 6 Advanced Master Programmes) with 1000 PhD students
- For each programme a detailed set of LO was formulated in the ACQA framework, followed by a mapping linking courses to outcomes
- All courses description were revisited insisting on goals and evaluation criteria
- Several questionnaires were launched (to students and alumni)
- Several Industrial Advisory board were set up
- Swot analysis resulted in actions plan: the writing of the SER started 18 Months before the deadline and was followed with internal discussions

Arising issues and outcomes for KU Leuven

- As KU Leuven is a research oriented university, pedagogy is not always the main focus of top researchers that are sometimes more concerned by their own contribution than by the programme as a whole
- SER and preparation of visitation gave rise to global enthusiasm towards quality of education
- However the level of feedback for each individual program varied strongly
- Less new insights were brought from the visitation and report; the main benefit of the process lies in the strong groundwork that was done: writing of the SER gave the faculty a mirror; it was a strong momentum

Conclusions

- The main difficulties concerned the « international » curricula because specific guiding principles were not anticipated
- Many personal benefits (intercultural knowledge) were reached by CTI's experts and CTI itself: very positive experience
- The benefits for institutions were more in the self evaluation process and preparation than in the visit itself: some professors felt frustrated because the assessment focused more on the general objectives and outcomes than on high scientific level of their teachings

- Thanks for your attention
- Any questions?

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