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Welcome Address to the International Expert Seminar on “Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Lifelong Learning”

Organized by the Berlin School of Economics and Law and the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP)

Berlin, February 24-25, 2011

Dear Director Lettmayr,
Dear Mrs. Bertzeletou,
Dear Erwin Seyfried,
Dear colleagues,

Let me extend a warm welcome to all of you as participants in the international expert seminar on “Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Lifelong Learning”, which has been jointly organized by CEDEFOP and the Berlin School of Economics and Law.

The Berlin School of Economics and Law is proud to host this event. It is a public university (in German terminology: university of applied sciences or *Fachhochschule*) specialising in higher education and research for managing private, public and non-profit institutions. We offer almost fifty degree programs in business administration, economics, law, public administration, criminal justice, police and security management. Degrees are offered at the Bachelor and Master levels. In addition, there are further training programs leading to an MBA degree and a number of cooperative doctoral programs. English is the language of instruction in almost all our Master programs and in a few Bachelor programs. 40 per cent of our students in the Master programs come from abroad. We have more than 9,000 students on two campuses, about 200 full-time professors and 500 lecturers (<http://www.hwr-berlin.de/en/>).

The international seminar that we are starting today brings together experts in quality assurance from two fields: higher education (HE) and vocational education and training (VET). HE and VET are two fields, or educational subsystems, that are institutionally distinct but are both part of a strategy of life-long learning. Life-long learning requires the permeability between VET and HE (in order to allow people, for example, to advance step-by-step from apprenticeship to an academic job). The life-long learning approach and the European Qualifications Framework have (in my view, for the first time) put these different educational subsystems into a common framework in order to facilitate the permeability between them and to facilitate the comparability of educational attainments. Nevertheless, the two educational subsystems continue to be institutionally clearly separated in most national educational systems. Similarly, institutional structures and processes of quality assurance are usually also clearly separated between the two subsystems. This is the case even at the European level, where, in my understanding, the necessity of linking VET and HE in a strategy of life-long learning has found its strongest advocates. In spite of this, quality assurance rules and regulations for HE and VET are still strongly separate also at the European level: On the one hand, there is a

clear framework of rules for quality assurance in the Bologna system for HE (the Common European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance) that has been implemented by the member states. On the other hand, there has been the fairly recent adoption of a Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on the establishment of a European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET.

In my view, the objective of the seminar is therefore very clear: It has brought together experts in quality assurance from the two educational subsystems (HE and VET) in order to

- explore commonalities and differences of quality assurance in the two subsystems – in terms of organisation, methodology, feedback mechanisms, etc.,
- explore what quality assurance in the two subsystems can learn from each other,
- explore necessities of convergence, but also necessities of maintaining distinctions of quality assurance in the two subsystems,
- explore how recommendations and regulations for quality assurance in the two subsystems can be linked – not only at the national levels, but also at the European level.

What is it that the Berlin School of Economics and Law can contribute to the topic and the objectives of the workshop? I think that our contributions can arise from three sources:

1. The expertise of my colleague Erwin Seyfried and other professors of the Berlin School of Economics and Law in the field: Erwin Seyfried has extensively worked on the evaluation of labour market training programs. In fact, I myself have extensively worked in the field of the institutional analysis and evaluation of national labour market policies and the European Structural Funds. I therefore feel very close to the topic of the seminar and regret that I cannot attend more than the introductory session. In addition, two more experts from the Berlin School of Economics and Law will also participate in the seminar: my colleague Matthias Tomenendal, the director of the Institute of Management Berlin (IMB, i.e. BSEL's Central Institute responsible for running our MBA programs), who is an expert on further training, and Simone Will, who is one of our in-house experts in evaluation.
2. Our own experience and expertise with quality assessment and quality management in higher education. This experience and expertise has three different origins:
 - o Internal evaluation: All the modules of all our degree programs are covered by regular student evaluation and the corresponding feedback mechanisms. These are complemented by regular surveys of our alumni and their employers.
 - o External accreditation: All our degree programs have been accredited at the national level. In addition, we have just started with the international accreditation of our degree programs.
 - o Regular benchmarking of internal processes of the university: The Berlin School of Economics and Law is part of an alliance of seven large and highly-reputed German Universities of Applied Sciences, known as the UAS7 alliance (<http://www.uas7.org/about-uas7.html>). One of the major purposes of this alliance is to engage in benchmarking

internal structures and processes of the seven universities. For example, we have just completed a comparative analysis of our recruiting procedures for hiring new professors. This analysis has not only compared existing procedures but has identified features of best practice in individual universities and has ended with the elaboration of common standards for recruitment processes. This has been a most stimulating experience of mutual learning. Similar benchmarking processes are currently taking place in the fields of teaching methods, the organisation of further training, and the organisation of support for research and doctoral studies.

3. Our expertise with the link between HE and VET: The second-largest department of the Berlin School of Economics and Law is our Department of Company-Linked Programs, where Bachelor students are recruited by firms before starting their degree programs. In these programs, the curricula provide for a close link between modules studied at the university and phases of practical training in the firms where the students are affiliated. These programs are known as “Dual studies” (*Duales Studium*; cf. <http://www.hwr-berlin.de/en/departments-of-cooperative-studies/>). They constitute a success story, linking elements of HE and VET. Similar links between modules studied at the university and phases of practical training “on the ground” are also provided in some of our degree programs directed at the public sector, in particular in criminal justice and police.

The more I talk about the objective of the workshop and its link to our own work, the more stimulating I find the topic. I regret that I cannot attend more than the introductory session. I wish you a most fruitful workshop. Enjoy Berlin, and please come back soon.