

ÖSTERREICHISCHER AKKREDITIERUNGSRAT



Österreichischer Akkreditierungsrat

Accreditation between Gatekeeping and Quality Enhancement

Hannelore Weck-Hannemann
Vienna, May 2009

Opening the door – Private Universities in Austria

- Traditionally: Higher Education – Public Universities
 - » university sector as public domain – governments responsibility
 - » established by law - regulated by government - publicly financed
- 1999/2000: Opening the university sector to private suppliers
 - » University Accreditation Act (enacted 1999 as federal law)
 - » governing the accreditation of private universities

The dimension of the sector – an open question

- What is the adequate number of private universities in Austria?
- The answer to this question is both, simple but also challenging....
 - ⇒ ...as far as sufficient quality in supply is ensured... ⇐
 - there is no limit in the number and size of PHEI established or academic programmes offered

Admission control – by external quality assurance

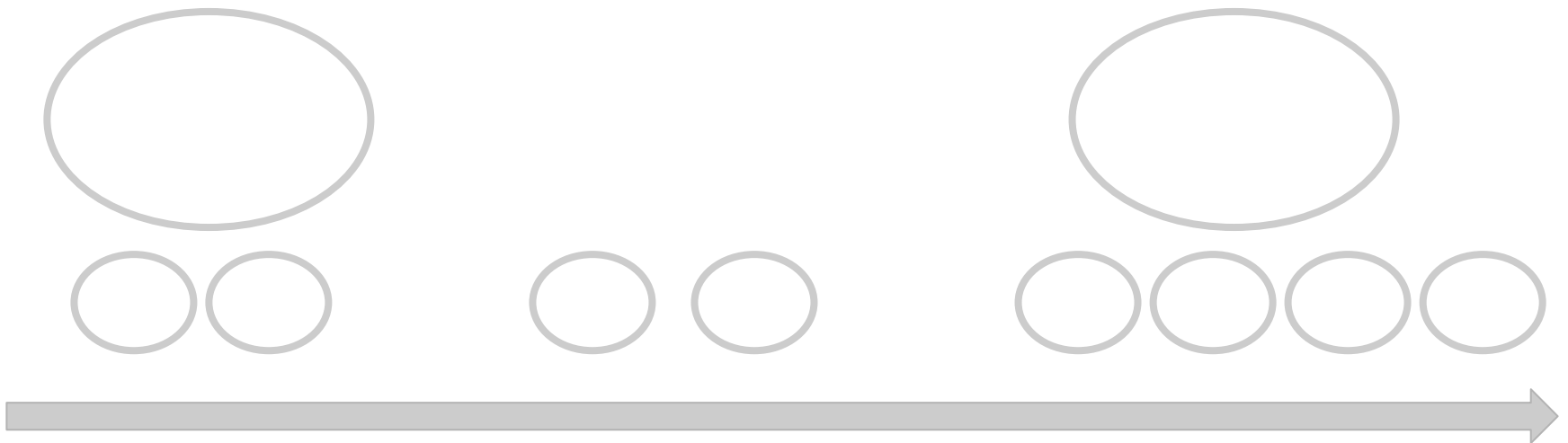
- PU in Austria \Rightarrow have to apply for accreditation
 - accreditation by the ÖAR is the prerequisite for the establishment as private university and supplier of academic programmes
- Austrian Accreditation Council (ÖAR): established in 2000
 - to open the university sector to private suppliers
 - to ensure quality in the private sector and to maintain general standards
 - to ensure transparency and security for the suppliers, students and the employment market
 - to promote innovative forms of training and further education

Main features of the Austrian Accreditation Council

- not an advisory but a decision-making body
- independent body with autonomous powers of decision, not bound by any directives
- non-Austrian majority on decision-making board
 - eight members
 - recognized experts in the field of international higher education
 - appointed by the Austrian federal government

The scope of the Austrian Accreditation Council

- Accreditation of institutions
- Accreditation of programmes
- Supervision of private universities
- Re-accreditation of private universities



Scope of assessment

- Both, institutional and programme aspects are relevant:
 - » Mission statement
 - » Organisation, Management and Planning
 - » Quality Management
 - » Financing, Space and Equipment
 - » Staff
 - » Academic Programmes and Student Management
 - » Research, Co-operation

Frame of reference

- **University Accreditation Act**
stipulates accreditation criteria and refers to ‚international standards‘
 - » e.g. legal form, range of studies, study standards, financing
- **Basic criteria** set by the Austrian Accreditation Council
 - » e.g. permanent staff, selection process, range/variety of study courses
- **Expert panel** – selection criteria
(the definition of domain specific standards is left to the experts)
 - » e.g. non-Austrian experts as a rule, acknowledged members of the scientific community, knowledge of management/QA/curricula dev.

Applications since March 2000

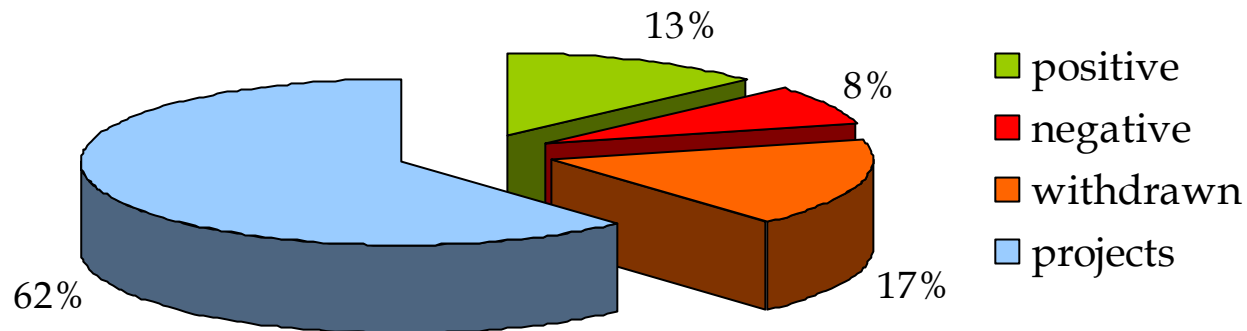
- 51 institutional applications for (re-) accreditation
- 86 applications for additional new programmes
- 1 revocation of accreditation
- 1 denial of re-accreditation

Status quo (April 2009)

- 12 private universities
- with 153 programmes
- in the fields: theology, law, social sciences, business, public health, medicine, information technology, cultural studies, music and arts
- about 5'000 students (in total)

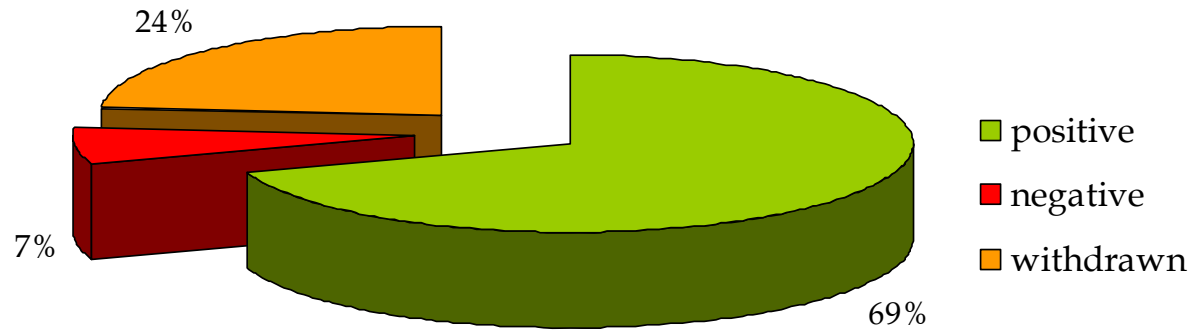
Accreditation - ÖAR as gatekeeper

Institutional applications/projects:



Accreditation - a learning experience

Programm applications:



Key positive features of the Private Sector in Austria

- ☺ selective admission requirements
- ☺ innovative forms of training
- ☺ intensive support/small classes
- ☺ student contract makes services enforceable
- ☺ completion of degrees on time
- ☺ niches

Key sensible features of the Private Sector in Austria

- ☹ small range and variety of programmes
- ☹ lack of ‚critical mass‘ / flying faculty
- ☹ qualification of staff / appointment and qualification procedures
- ☹ lack of research capacity
- ☹ business instead of quality / autonomy of the institution
- ☹ all inclusive QA / QM system

Between gatekeeping and quality enhancement ⇒ impact of accreditation on institutional level

Accreditation strengthens...

- ...the **institution's position** (independence from owners)
- ...the **management's position** to implement structural changes and internal quality culture ⇒ stronger focus on
 - strategic concept / development plan
 - stakeholder involvement
 - internationalisation strategy
- ...the **faculty's position** (long term contracts, teaching load, research funding)
- ...**students' voices** are heard

Between gatekeeping and quality enhancement ⇒ impact of accreditation on programme level

Accreditation requires...

- ...implementation of
 - consistent ECTS-model (workload)
 - modularisation of study programmes
- ...definition of learning outcomes, skills and competences



Accreditation encourages...

- ...stimulating teamwork for curriculum development and collaborative behaviour amongst academics
- ...stronger commitment of teachers for ,their' programme

Quality enhancement – most valuable elements (identified by PHEI themselves)

- most valuable effects of accreditation procedure for **developing internal quality**
 - » consultation during site visit
 - » expert reports
 - » writing the application document
 - » writing the statement to the expert reports
- most important **institutional effects** of the accreditation procedure
 - » increase of internal communication
 - » increase of transparency
 - » restructuring of teaching processes
 - » building a valid data basis

Future challenges – cross-sectional and cross-border aspects

- Sectional aspects: is there one approach which fits all needs?
 - » private or public institutions
 - » new or traditionally established institutions
 - » small or broad range institutions / programmes
 - » academic or professional institutions / programmes
- International aspects:
efficient procedures to assure transparency and accountability?
 - » internationalisation of education and research
 - » cross-border education – joint programmes
 - » international recognition of qualifications