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Quality Assurance in universities must allow for risk taking, says new report from European University Association (EUA)

Quality Assurance processes used in universities must allow more space for 'risk taking and failure' as this is essential for stimulating innovation and creativity in higher education. This is one of the recommendations of a new report published this week by the European University Association.

The report "Improving quality, enhancing creativity: change process in European higher education institutions" is based on a two-year EC-funded project, that EUA has carried out with partners ACQUIN (the Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute, Germany), the Higher Education Academy (UK) and the National University of Ireland, Maynooth.

The project brought together 29 higher education institutions and Quality Assurance (QA) Agencies from 18 different countries to explore what kind of quality assurance processes in teaching and learning (external and internal) can actually support creativity and innovation. In the past, there have been concerns that QA processes can actually inhibit creativity within higher education.

The new report contains seven recommendations for universities and agencies:

- QA processes must allow space for risk taking and failure, whilst at the same time enabling institutions to identify and rectify a failure when it occurs
- To ensure that quality assurance is context sensitive (e.g taking account of different disciplines, cultures and national context)
- QA should be inclusive – engaging the whole university community (academics and students) and should not just be the responsibility of a 'QA unit'
- Effective quality assurance is based on a successful partnership between agencies and institutions, which should leave space for 'trust and self-reflection'
- Sharing QA 'experiences' is essential, and the authors recommend the creation of platforms for dialogue both between departments, institutions and even at European level (These platforms should not however be based solely on copying good practices, but stimulating critical analysis)
- QA processes must support institutions' capacity to change and to reach strategic goals
- Agencies and institutions need to ensure engagement of all key actors in QA processes.

A full copy of the report and an executive summary can be downloaded from the EUA website: www.eua.be

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The European University Association, as the representative organisation of both the European universities and the national rectors' conferences, is the main voice of the higher education community in Europe. EUA's mission is to promote the development of a coherent system of European higher education and research.

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