

24.12.2024

**Author**

HOECHT, Andreas

**Title**

Quality assurance in UK higher education : issues of trust, control, professional autonomy and accountability

**Publication year**

2006

**Source/Footnote**

In: Higher education. - 51 (2006) 4, S. 541 - 563

**Inventory number**

20652

**Keywords**

Ausland : Großbritannien : einzelne Hochschulen ; Ausland : Großbritannien : Studium, Studenten, Lehre ; Qualitätssicherung ; Evaluation

**Abstract**

This article explores the issues of trust, control, professional autonomy and accountability in higher education quality assurance in the UK. The main part of this article is conceptual, but it includes results from semi-structured interviews with academic staff that were conducted at two ?new university? business schools. Both institutions are broadly similar in their key characteristics and have experienced a transformation to university status in the early 1990s. The article argues that there has been a change from informal ?light-touch? quality control systems based on local practices and a significant amount of trust and professional autonomy in the early 1990s to a highly prescribed process of audit-based quality control today. The article argues that accountability and transparency are important principles that academics should wholeheartedly embrace, but that the audit format adopted in the UK introduces a one-way accountability and provides ?rituals of verification? (Power 1997) instead of fostering trust, has high opportunity costs and may well be detrimental to innovative

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teaching and learning. (HRK / Abstract übernommen), Hoecht, Andreas, E-Mail:

Andr.Hoecht@port.ac.uk