

“Development studies, accreditation and EADI”

Executive summary of the vision Paper prepared for the workshop on accreditation at the EADI General Conference (Bonn 21-23 September 2005)¹

Introduction

On request by the EADI Directors, a task force composed of Jacques Forster, Richard Jolly and Hans Opschoor, assisted by Joost Mönks, was set up to draft a vision paper. The taskforce was asked *to advise and formulate recommendations to EADI on where it wishes to go with quality management and accreditation guidelines. It was asked to provide EADI with recommendations on how best to cope with the present trend in Europe for accreditation and quality assurance, especially with a view to the need of criteria for evaluating interdisciplinary programmes in development studies.*

The presentation of the vision paper in Bonn aims at sharing and consolidating the findings of the paper and to mobilize additional institutional support and sponsorship from EADI institutes for the initiative. The vision paper will be finalized after the Bonn conference.

As a consequence of the Bologna process a certain sense of urgency exists among development institutes that are or will be going through an accreditation process, since they may have to face accreditation frameworks that are not (fully) adapted to specific (interdisciplinary) nature of DS. In the emerging European Area for higher education, the EADI institutes wish to where possible, proactively influence the options for accreditation and quality assurance as far as Development Studies is concerned.

Yet, *no articulated consensus* seems to exist presently on the nature of the field of Development Studies. Nor is there at present an articulated and recognized benchmark for Development Studies². A vision on the demarcation of the field of Development Studies is, however, needed in order to be able to define specific accreditation criteria.

The objective of the Vision paper is twofold: 1) to propose a demarcation of the field of development studies and its distinctive and identifying characteristics as “object” of accreditation, and 2) to analyse how DS can fit into existing accreditation frameworks and identify in what areas specific criteria and standards for accreditation should be developed, taking account of the specific nature of DS. The development of such an “adapted” accreditation framework should enable EADI institutes to comply with the likely results of the Bologna process.

¹ Richard Jolly was unfortunately not able to comment on this summary.

The draft version of the integral draft vision paper can be obtained on request from Joost Mönks (joost@moenks.com).

² DSA in the UK is in the process of a developing a QAA benchmark statement for development studies. It is hoped that more detailed information will be available on the progress of the statement before the Bonn conference.

Bologna and accreditation

In essence, the Bologna Declaration (signed in 1999), is about creating a European Higher Education Area (EHEA), as an area of mobility of students and staff, labour-market orientated education, summarised with the term of “employability”³. It intends to do so through an array of interrelated mechanisms, notably:

- Easily readable and comparable degrees
- System based on three main cycles (BA/MA/Doctoral cycle)
- System of transferable credits (ECTS) applying to different qualifications
- Mobility of staff and students across Europe
- European cooperation in quality assurance (QA), incl. in accreditation
- European dimension in higher education (the introduction of the “European” perspective; what is particular to Europe as a continent)

In the perspective of the taskforce, DS should be in the forefront of developing the Bologna system in the interest of their European students as well as their students from overseas, and in that of those who (will) employ these students after their graduation. In that sense the taskforce considers the Bologna process, and in particular quality assurance and accreditation, not only as a “must” but also as an opportunity for development institutes that wish to ensure high quality education standards, mobility of students and international recognition.

However, there are also threats associated with accreditation of which the taskforce is aware and which need to be taken into full account in the further deployment of the project. Beyond the administrative burden and the risk of “bureaucratisation” associated with the accreditation process, these include, the risk of *over-standardisation*: One of the strengths of the DS is the large number of approaches and the room for innovation it offers. Exaggerating in the way of standardisation could endanger this strength. It is also likely that the developed specific criteria will in particular be targeted at the larger DS institutes, which may not apply to the same extent to or even exclude the smaller institutes.

On a different level the taskforce also expressed the strong desirability to involve representatives of (sister organisations of) the South in the second phase of the project, in order to ensure a global reach and validity of the project.

Key elements of the Bologna process:

A number of key concepts and project need to be mentioned here in order to appreciate the possible implications of the Bologna process on DS.

Quality assurance.

- An ongoing process of assessing, guaranteeing, maintaining and improving the quality of a higher education institution or a programme allowing an organisation to reach the standards or objectives it - or an external agency - has set.
- Under Bologna, all academic institutions are required to set up *internal* mechanisms of QA, while QA agencies (mainly national, but there are some international) exert the *external* part, through evaluation and accreditation.. The European Network for Quality Assurance (ENQA) has been tasked to provide the general, consensual European quality standards.

Accreditation

- The process by which an accreditation body evaluates the quality of a higher education institution as a whole (institutional accreditation) or a specific higher education programme (programme accreditation) in order to formally recognise it as having met a certain predetermined minimal criteria or standards.

³ Labour mobility is seen as one of the main obstacles in the creation of a true common European market. Standardised education is a step in that direction.

- The effect of accreditation will typically be the recognition of the institution's entitlement to issuing degrees, and often an entitlement also to funding from public sources.
- Accreditation is obtained after a formal procedure through an *Accrediting Organisation* (AO). As a matter of principle, these organisations need to be independent of the institutions or programmes whose qualities they assess and that they accredit. In many cases (and this tends to become the rule across Europe) these AOs need to be recognised themselves by competent (national) public bodies responsible, on behalf of governments, and belong to a European network..
- Normally reviews of programmes in accreditation processes take place on the basis of so-called “*self evaluation*” prepared by the institution responsible for delivering the programme. A visitation or peer review is then conducted by independent *experts committees* appointed by recognised accreditation organisations to assess the self-evaluation by applying the relevant criteria and procedure.

The Tuning project

- The Socrates-Erasmus project “*Tuning Structures in Europe*”, initiated in 2000 by a Dutch and a Spanish university, constitutes the operational response *by and for the universities* to the Bologna process in order to anticipate the process, and take an active part by being a proposition force. As such, its aim is to ensure, while addressing most of the Bologna declaration principles of harmonisation, to safeguard of diversity and institutional autonomy. It has concretely defined competencies (*learning outcomes*) in seven areas (Business administration, Education sciences, Geology, Mathematics, History, etc) so as to make them comparable, and hence enhance quality and mobility. The focus is put exclusively on outcomes, in opposition to inputs such as the teaching staff. Two types of competencies are targeted: *generic competencies* (which are subject independent) and *subject-related competencies* (skills and knowledge). Competencies are then described as “*point of references*”, not as straightjacket, for the construction of curricula. The project has involved a new area in 2003, the “European Studies”, to provide with a methodology of interdisciplinary Tuning. The result of this project are expected to be issued by the end of September this year.

Defining Development studies as “object” of accreditation

Thus, accreditation is a punctual procedure performed by an Accrediting Organisation as a tool for the external quality assurance imposed by the Bologna process. The main concern is that the (predominantly mono-disciplinary) accreditation frameworks and criteria used are not (fully) adapted to the specific (interdisciplinary) nature of DS. As a result EADI institutes may face difficulty and frustration in the accreditation process.

In order to see to what extent DS fits into the existing accreditation frameworks and in order to be able to identify what adaptations would be desirable, we first need to answer the question of what precisely defines DS, as “object of accreditation”. This vision paper proposes a possible minimum operational definition and demarcation of DS, in order to be able to identify specific criteria that should be considered in the accreditation framework for DS.

The taskforce proposes the following main elements as working basis for the identification of specific criteria for the accreditation of development studies:

Definition and goals of development studies

- o Development Studies (also known as ‘international development studies’) is a multi- and interdisciplinary field of study (i.e not a *discipline*) that seeks to understand social, economic, political and cultural aspects of societal change, particularly in developing countries.
- o Development Studies is characterized also by normative and policy concerns. It aims at contributing to possible solutions to societal problems that development or its absence may produce.
- o In pursuit of these objectives, Development Studies is context sensitive. It examines societal change within a historical, comparative and global perspective. It aims to take into account the

specificity of different societies in terms of history, ecology, culture, etc. and how these differences both can and often should translate into varied 'local' responses to regional or global processes, and varied strategies of development and methods

- Development studies is a changing and evolving field of study, at present covering topics and concerns such as poverty, environmental and socio-political sustainability; women's empowerment and gender equity, globalization, sustainable development and human development.
- The range of topics it covers is, however, by no means fixed as witnessed by the evolution of the focus of the field of study over the last decades, and the emergence of new topics such as development issues and poverty in the industrialized countries.
- Though there have been dominant concerns in DS, there has never been a simple consensus on solutions, nor should there be, nor should teaching suggest this is desirable. There is too much uncertainties in the topics it covers and too much diversity in situations and objectives around the world to make this possible.

Teaching development studies

- As a case-oriented, issue-oriented and policy-oriented field, development studies draws on various disciplines but the manner in which this is done varies. In most cases, programmes and courses are inter- and/or multi-disciplinary and relate a number of general disciplines to the particular (and diverse) context of the topics and concerns. In some other cases, deepening the grasp of a single discipline is prioritized but accompanied by steps to enhance the ability to use and integrate concepts from other disciplines.
- Which disciplines receive priority attention and in which proportions will depend on the particular societal and policy issues considered, and hence on the particular specialization followed within development studies. Anthropology, cultural studies, agriculture, ecology, economics, history, geography, management/planning/administration, politics and sociology are each important.
- Education in development studies therefore needs to (a) deepen, contextualize and broaden disciplinary understandings, by reference across disciplines and by giving historical, intellectual and comparative context; and (b) investigate societal problems in a way that both provides students with relevant analytical tools and theories, and provides them with a wide range of examples, cases and histories which show that those analytical tools and concepts may be of limited use or misleading unless applied together with other tools and concepts. It needs to (c) give students a coherent specialization focus and yet (d) flexibly accommodate their particular needs and interests given their academic and work background and career path. In this, the career paths for which DS may prove necessary or useful as specifically taken into account. And it needs (e) to build-in ways for students to reflect on their own experience and to learn from each other's diverse experiences and backgrounds.
- Methodological enrichment, including from cultural studies, ethics, gender studies, history and the humanities, participatory and action research is emerging; with increasing attention to general skills and tools such as in problem analysis, objectives analysis, concept mapping, participatory methods and evaluation, and broad based assessment methodologies. A gradual shift from ad hoc case study work towards more comparative and integrative approaches is occurring;
- Education in development studies in the North is based on genuine partnership with sister organisations in the South. Enhanced complementarity, building on the respective comparative advantages, and increasing North-South multi-locational delivery of teaching programmes pave the way for a movement from northern supply-driven DS education to more demand driven cooperation in education between the North and the South.

Learning Objectives (outcomes)

- To deal with the complexities of development processes and issues, graduates in DS should be able to carry out analyses in a broad perspective, using conceptual frameworks sensitive to relevant socio-economic and politico-ethical aspects. They must recognize the need to bring in features, concepts and tools from relevant ranges of disciplines and to relate these elements with scientific rigour.

- Graduates must be able to select and apply relevant tools for collecting, interpreting and assessing (qualitative and quantitative) information on development processes and their impacts, including knowledge and know-how from a variety of relevant sources. They must be able to operate intelligently in situations of incomplete data and information.
- They must be able to communicate the results of their analyses (and their ways of arriving at these results) to a variety of audiences ranging from professional (research-oriented as well as policy-oriented) to non-professional (stakeholders, other users).

Review and comparison of national practices in accreditation and the integration of the DS dimension

The above list is not exhaustive and represents a particular view. It needs to be considered in the frame of its purpose, which is to capture some of the structural aspects that need to be reflected in the accreditation framework that takes account of the specific nature of DS.

Moving one step further then, the vision paper reviews the accreditation processes in three countries, Switzerland, The Netherlands and UK⁴ with a focus on the following questions:

- What are the main criteria to be evaluated for an accreditation?
- What is the procedure for evaluating these criteria?
- Where and how could DS specific criteria be fitted in or specified, tailor-made and/or added in these existing framework as defined in the vision paper ?

To comply with the ToR of the Task force the comparison has focused on the accreditation of programs/course, and not of entire institution.

1) This comparison on the criteria shows that :

- The criteria applied in Switzerland, the Netherlands and the UK are very similar. Broadly they all specify criteria and related sub-criteria for 1) the definition of aims and objectives, 2) internal quality assurance 3) curriculum and teaching methods, 4) results 5) teaching staff and 6) Learning resources.
- The systems all appear as flexible enough to integrate specific sub-criteria as they relate to DS. For instance under the criteria of *Aims and Objective* it could be considered to ingrate sub-criteria to capture the inter and multi-disciplinary dimension, the blend of empirical and theoretical approaches, the normative concerns, the need for policy-orientation and finally partnerships with sister organisations in the South as some of the specific characteristics of DS.

2) The comparison on the procedures shows that:

- The three countries work similarly as well, with a phase of self-evaluation, an external evaluation and a final decision on accreditation.
- The differences relate in particular to the possibility which is provided in Switzerland to use a third party evaluation instead of the evaluation through the national accreditation body in the accreditation process. This element is of course interesting for EADI.
- Other differences relate to the organisation of peer-reviews which tend to be more institutionalised in the Netherlands and more ad hoc in Switzerland. The UK system shows slightly less convergence, but the overall philosophy remains similar, with a phase of self-evaluation and the use of external experts for peer-reviewing.

Accreditation follows similar criteria as well as procedures in the selected countries, which should allow for the potential harmonised integration and deployment of DS criteria in all those systems.

⁴ The choice of these countries is consciously limited and reflect the countries of the members of the task force.

Assessment of EADI's possible role and proposed next steps

Where does this lead us to, what are potential next steps and what is the possible role of EADI in the quality assurance and accreditation process of DS?

Given the complex European context, the possible role of EADI in the accreditation process can be multiple and more or less ambitious. Two main options present themselves:

1. The first one is less ambitious but appears as realistic in a reasonably short term. An important phase of the accreditation process is the experts' phase or peer review, when external expert come to visit an institutions, test the self-evaluation and draft the report to the accreditation agency. Much is left to their appreciation⁵. This opens a window of opportunity for EADI at a European level and bring a real added value compared to current, national frameworks for accreditation. A framework, or more concretely a "*Guide for the evaluation of DS*", with which all EADI members could agree to comply with during the experts' missions could guarantee the DS specificities are taken into account. A second element of this less ambitious strategy could be for EADI to assist the peer reviewing process by offering an inventory of experts on development issues ready to be involved in quality assurance and accreditation processes.
2. The second, more ambitious option would be to empower the EADI to become (inter alia) an accreditation agency for DS programmes (as opposed to institutions) or to have EADI set up such an agency. Accreditation is by no means reserved to national accreditation bodies. Indeed the taskforce has identified another field (public administration) where accreditation is effectively, at programme level, carried out by a European association as described in the box below. EADI could potentially evolve in a similar direction:

Accreditation by the European Association for Public Administration Accreditation

The Public Administration Institute from Switzerland (IDHEAP) has been accredited at both the national and the European level. The first accreditation by the Swiss Accreditation body has been awarded at the organisational level according to the national rules, whilst the second accreditation of the Master programme has been awarded by the European Association for Public Administration Accreditation EAPAA, an organisation of providers of tertiary education in the multidisciplinary field of Public Administration. It operates on the basis of a membership fee and has a secretariat. EAPAA organises accreditation processes for providers of HE in the domain of Public Administration in countries that are members of the Council of Europe. For that purpose it establishes Review Committees consisting of at least three members who are not employed in the country of the programme to be reviewed. It uses members of the association to form these Review Committees. It uses national evaluation systems and frameworks as basis, but has developed its own set of criteria including a specific criteria relating to multidisciplinary.

For both options, the first steps to be undertaken could be the following a) and b), whereas c) would be the step needed for option 2 only.

- a) Based on the refined vision paper an EADI Task Force could further develop accreditation criteria for DS and consequently the standards that we expect from a DS programme in two complementary ways: (1) adapt some of the common criteria that are included in the CH, NL and UK and add new relating to the core reference points for the curriculum and such criteria as they relate to interdisciplinary, context sensitivity, or the policy orientation, to take account of the specific nature of DS; (2) have the revised accreditation framework (developed into a "*Guide for the evaluation of DS*") validated by EADI institutions and considered as the relevant framework to apply.

⁵ In fact, an important lesson to draw is that most criteria as they exist concern more the form than the content: e.g. the criteria require that a definition of objectives exists, it does not control if the said definition is appropriate or not. This opens the door to relatively free adaptations by experts during their visits: an experts group for, say, engineering will not interpret the criteria in the same way as an expert in DS.

- b) Alternatively, and as an input to EADI's decision making, EADI could develop a “mini DS Tuning” project , with the ongoing Tuning project on European Studies as reference. This Tuning project would define the generic competencies and subject-related competencies as “points of reference” for a DS MA.
- c) Consequently (this is option 2), EADI, having taken the leadership in these previous steps, could be empowered as the accreditation agency for MA programmes of DS in Europe (similar to the EAPAA example) or decide to set a separate one up.

On the organisational level the taskforce proposes to create a second phase taskforce open to all EADI member institutions committed to actively supporting the initiative. The taskforce will be headed by a chairman (possibly a member of the Executive Committee of EADI) and will be assisted by an executive secretary. The taskforce should report to the Executive Committee of EADI. In order to maintain momentum and to advance well it is proposed that the Chairman, supported by the secretary, will prepare the working documents, which at critical stages will be discussed in a limited number of Taskforce meetings.

The taskforce could use the following action plan, based on a two-stage approach, and timeframe in its work planning:

Stage 1:

<i>Action</i>	<i>Timeframe 2005</i>
Development of budget proposal and fund raising	October
Set up Taskforce and nominate chairman – define ToR for taskforce	October/November
Review and consolidate Vision Paper and action plan after Bonn	October/November
Prepare ToR “Tuning project” for DS (<i>optional</i>)	November/December
Prepare outline and ToR for the “Guide for the evaluation of DS”	November/December
Taskforce meeting to discuss and validate concept documents	December
Reporting to EADI Committee followed by a EADI consultation round	January-february 2006

Stage 2 would be concerned, after a decision making and consultation phase with other EADI members on the results of stage 1, with the implementation of the agreed ToRs.

Geneva, September 2005
