Stefan Bienefeld

Stefan Bienefeld he is the head of the quality management project (Project Qm) of the German Rectors' Conference. The project offers a communication platform for all those involved in quality assurance and development in Higher Education. Prior to this, Mr. Bienefeld worked on the implementation of the reforms within the framework of the Bologna Process in German Higher Education Institutions. While studying psychology at the University of Bielefeld, he was also an active student member in various student organisations involved in particular with higher education quality assurance. Mr. Bienefeld's main areas on interests with regard to higher education are quality assurance and management processes, governance, change management, implementation of the Bologna Process and internationalisation of higher education.

In your view, what is the most probable or desirable future scenario regarding differentiation in higher education?

The most desirable scenario in terms of differentiation is that the differentiation of the HEIs leads to an increasingly visible profile of institutions. What would be desirable is that different missions and visions (i.e. world-class research vs. catering for the needs of the national/regional labour market) are accepted as equally valid and worthwhile in terms of public support. The result would be that institutions compete according to their differentiated missions.

What is part of this differentiation process is that there will most likely and inevitably be a stiffer competition for funding in the future, especially for expesive research. The profiling and definition of clearer missions of the institutions should make it easier to allocate funding accordingly. It is, however, important to stress that performance indicators in performnance based funding do not focus on research alone but also stress other areas (teaching, LLL) to allow niches for institutiuons that do not consider their primary role in research but focus for example on teaching excellence.

In your opinion, what is or should be the most important objective for higher education in the future? Why?

The most important objective is to widen access while maintaining quality. It is obvious that the number of students entering HE is bound to increase. In the German context it is a political goal of all actors to increase participation, but this is equally valid in many other countries in Europe as well as in the global context, especially in emerging economies and developing countries. This increase in participation is einevaitable to ensure economic prosperity and well-being in a wold economy that is more and more shifting towards a knowledge based economy. This expansion, which in many cases goes hand in hand with a stratification of the student body (people coming straight from school – either intereted in a research career or in getting a qualification aimed towards the labour market - vs. people with working experience vs. people with professional qualifications that have never been part of an HE process before) will put the question of quality and developing offers for these different student groups increasingly demanding. Obviously this question is very much linked to funding issues as both widenining access and maintaining and improving the quality will need additional resources if these objectives are to be oursued in a sustainable way.

What do you consider to be the main future challenge(s) for higher education systems? Why?

A. Sustainable Funding, because in times of tight budgets the need to look for additional/alternative funding sources (fees, service provision, PPPs etc.)

B. Social inclusion, because in order to enhance access there is a need to recruit new and so far underrepresented groups into higher education

B. Ensuring a good research environment in increasingly intertnaionalised network, because the further advancement of HE will need the sterngthenining of research both at the national level as well as in international networks.