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Quality as Deficit: A Critical Analysis of Bologna-imposed, Quality Assurance Dynamics in Higher Education in Spain

Partly as a result of the implementation of the Bologna process, universities in Europe are currently undergoing considerable transformations. As one of the 27 member-states (and 28 neighbouring countries) working towards the harmonisation of European educational systems, Spain has accordingly been actively engaged in “modernising” the structure, content and approaches to study in its universities. While the establishment of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) holds strong promises from a *European* point of view, this does not mean it doesn’t raise concerns when observed from less obvious perspectives. Indeed, the move towards convergence also requires participant countries to develop common criteria and ways of ensuring the *quality* of their academic degrees, training and research programmes. Starting from this premise, this paper will attempt to provide the basis for a critique that differentiates rule-bound, legalistically-imposed “quality assurance” procedures from “quality culture”, understood as the every day work-practice of academics striving to optimise students’ learning, critical attitudes and self-empowerment. Thus, after linking Raymond Williams’ definition of culture (1983) to concepts of quality, my aim is to expose - via Foucault (1977) - the extent to which Bologna-imposed, quality assurance procedures are being used to ensure *and* extend already existing relations of power rather than as a means of guaranteeing quality work in teaching and learning.