

## zhb Higher Education Research Colloquium Series



**Guest Talk:**  
**Dr. Don Westerheijden**  
(University of Twente, the Netherlands)

### **Between Transparency and Trust: Autonomy, Accountability and Institutional Accreditation in Europe**

Does institutional accreditation reduce bureaucracy while increasing chances for quality enhancement? Will it make quality assurance acceptable to academic teachers and researchers, and to students? These questions will be discussed in my address to the colloquium.

Quality assurance has featured in higher education in Europe since the late 1980s, and was boosted by the Bologna Process. The European context has influenced quality assurance in many countries—Bologna is more than just degrees!—yet some fundamental debates endure about the balance between quality control and quality enhancement, as well as about methods of assessing quality, i.e. the balance between peer review and performance indicators on the operational level, and the balance between programme assessment and institutional accreditation at the systemic level. Arguments that feed into the debates include academic freedom and institutional autonomy: can we trust academics and universities to care for the benefit of students and society? Or does society have a right (an obligation?) to demand transparency from public institutions about their performances? These questions will be illustrated with examples from policies in European countries, to place the debate about German higher education developments in a broader context. In particular the trend towards institutional accreditation, visible in Germany and many but not all countries in Europe, will be treated from these perspectives.

**Dr. Don Westerheijden** is senior research associate at the Center for Higher Education Policy Studies (CHEPS) of the University of Twente, the Netherlands. Don studies quality assurance and accreditation in higher education in the Netherlands and Europe, its impacts, as well as university rankings. Policy evaluation is another of his research interests. He is a member of the team that develops and publishes U-Multirank, the online, multidimensional worldwide university ranking. Don is a member of the editorial board of the journals *Quality in Higher Education* and *Qualität in der Wissenschaft*, besides serving on international boards of quality assurance agencies in Portugal (A3ES) and Hong Kong (UGC-QAC), and on the Advisory Board of the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) of the Erasmus University Rotterdam.

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**Vogelpothsweg 78 (CDI Building), Room 114**

**Professorship of Higher Education**

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